CONTEMPORARY HISPANIC CRIME FICTION

A Transatlantic Discourse on Urban Violence

GLEN S. CLOSE
Contemporary Hispanic Crime Fiction
Previous Publications

Books


Journal Articles


Contemporary Hispanic Crime Fiction

A Transatlantic Discourse on Urban Violence

Glen S. Close

palgrave macmillan
To Valerie and John
# Contents

- Acknowledgments ix
- Preface: A Note on Translations xi
- 1 The Transatlantic Genesis of the *Novela Negra* 1
- 2 Mexico City 25
- 3 Bogota 57
- 4 Buenos Aires 93
- 5 Barcelona 141
- Notes 181
- Works Cited 209
- Index 223
The writing of this book was facilitated by several grants from the Graduate School Research Committee of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and I thank the Graduate School and the Committee members for their generosity. I am also sincerely grateful to my colleagues in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese for providing me with such a supportive and amenable environment in which to teach and write. In devising and completing this project, I’ve benefited especially from the collaboration of Guillermina De Ferrari, Kathryn Sanchez, and Ksenija Bilbija.

Portions of Chapters 1 and 2 of this book originally appeared in *Iberoamericana* 6.21 and *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 17.1 respectively, and I reproduce them here with the kind permission of the editors there. I am also indebted, as the reader will quickly appreciate, to many scholars whose work I cite in the pages that follow. I especially thank those critics and researchers of crime fiction on whose information and insights I have relied time and again. Jorge Lafforgue and Jorge B. Rivera, Patricia Hart, Amelia Simpson, José F. Colmeiro, Joan Ramon Resina, Ilan Stavans, Hubert Pöppel, Renée Craig-Odders, and Persephone Braham are among my most obvious creditors.

I owe a more longstanding debt to the professors who taught me as much as I could learn about what is and is not done with literature, and for their enduring inspiration, I thank Josefina Ludmer, Roberto González Echevarría, Diana Sorensen, and Carlos Alonso. My deepest gratitude is to my parents Valerie and John, who took me to the library to get all the *Three Investigators* novels and without whose many sacrifices I would never have met those professors. Finally, this book would be much poorer were it not for the hours of love and labor Courtney Lanz contributed to it.
PREFACE: A NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

In what follows, I quote from published English-language translations whenever available, but otherwise translations from Spanish-language sources are my own. Occasionally I will modify the text of a published translation by inserting bracketed material present in the original Spanish but omitted or inconveniently altered in the English version. In my bibliography, I provide references for both Spanish-language editions and cited English-language translations. In my text, I refer to novels primarily by their original Spanish titles, providing translations in parentheses. When the titles given in parentheses are italicized or in quotation marks, in accordance with MLA format, this indicates a reference to a published translation. When a translation of a title appears in parentheses without italics or quotation marks, it indicates that the title translation is my own and that all citations from that text will refer to the original Spanish edition.
In his opening statement at a conference at Brown University in 1999, Julio Ortega spoke of his multidisciplinary Trans-Atlantic Project as an attempt to attend more carefully to cultural processes involved in a backward and forward triangulation of interactions between Spain, the United States, and Latin America during the modern age. In the field of contemporary Hispanic literary studies, there would seem to be few areas of production so starkly determined by such triangulation as the crime fiction known in Spanish as novela negra, the contemporary, transnational genre descended from early twentieth-century U.S. hard-boiled writing. While the prestige of U.S. hard-boiled classics writers is evident in a multitude of explicit and implicit homages contained in the novela negra corpus, the dissemination of detective formulas was by no means a direct or unilinear transfer, but rather a complex process of irregular filtration through imports, translations, editions, pastiches, and imitations over the course of the twentieth century. The primary poles of the triangulation that I describe here will correspond to those proposed by Ortega, but I will also follow his example by extending attention to other areas of Europe whose implication in this specific transatlantic interaction is appreciable. Indeed, the very prevalence of the term novela negra (literally black novel) is testimony to the multiple deviations involved in the constitution of the genre, reflecting as it does the decision of Parisian publisher Gallimard to identify its own influential series of translations of U.S. hard-boiled novels, the Série Noire, by means of black covers beginning in 1945. What follows is neither a reading of the international corpus of the
novela negra nor a historical explanation of its definitive emergence during the 1970s, but rather a mapping of a series of transatlantic transfers, motifs, and crossings that reflect broad shifts in cultural hegemony and bring detective fiction and, ultimately, the novela negra into currency in Hispanic literature.³

Preliminary Triangulation

According to conventional literary history, which I see no reason to dispute, the detective genre emerges in its definitive form in April of 1841 with Edgar Allan Poe’s publication of The Murders in the Rue Morgue. In this foundational text, we may discern the initial vibration giving rise to a complex transatlantic dynamic that continues to define the development and propagation of the genre. The Boston-born, British-educated, and then Philadelphia resident Poe chose to situate his three most canonically detective or ratiocinative tales not in any of the American cities known to him, but rather in Paris, the metropolis characterized by Walter Benjamin as the capital of the nineteenth century and by David Harvey as the capital of modernity itself. Among the transatlantic articulations sustained by Poe’s texts, we might distinguish two of particular interest: first, Poe’s explicitly acknowledged debt to the published memoirs of the Parisian detective pioneer Eugène François Vidocq⁴ and second, in the opposite direction, the enthusiastic reception and even plagiarism of Poe’s stories by Parisian writers of the 1840s and 1850s (Colmeiro La novela 90 n.2). Poe’s narrative was disseminated in French translations, foremost among them being those done by Charles Baudelaire and collected in the 1856 volume Histoires extraordinaires, but Poe’s compatriots were not swift in adopting the detective model, and the earliest recognized manifestations of the serial detective novel occur in Europe in the works of Émile Gaboriau, beginning in 1863, and Arthur Conan Doyle, beginning in 1887.

The exact moment of Spain’s entry into the emerging transatlantic exchange of detective fiction continues to be debated by scholars, but most published studies of the genre agree on the persistent difficulty of distinguishing an autochthonous tradition of Spanish detective fiction conceptually distinct from foreign narrative models.⁵ Although Ricardo Landeira has argued for the existence of a corpus of Spanish detective writing in the nineteenth century, the heterogeneous nature of the texts he includes (a romance by the Duque de Rivas and newspaper chronicles by Benito Pérez Galdós, for example) requires a rather looser definition of the detective genre than that employed by other critics. A more restrictive
view would acknowledge texts such as Pedro Antonio de Alarcón’s *El clavo* (*The Nail*, 1853) as direct but isolated precursors to the genre-conscious detective fiction appearing in Spain only early in the twentieth century. In explaining the derivation of Alarcón’s short novel, Landeira recognizes its apparent debt to a similar 1843 story by French writer Hyppolyte Lucas, a connection observed by previous readers, such as Countess Emilia Pardo Bazán, yet he also affirms Alarcón’s familiarity with Poe’s prototype at the time of *El clavo*’s composition. In contrast, José F. Colmeiro, author of one of the finest studies of Spanish detective fiction yet published, is skeptical with regard to Poe’s relevance to *El clavo* since, by Colmeiro’s account, Poe was scarcely known in Spain before the circulation of Baudelaire’s 1856 volume and Poe’s first publication in Spanish translation in 1858. Despite the enthusiastic reception of Poe’s stories, with eighteen editions of his stories published in Spain between 1858 and 1900, Colmeiro maintains that Poe’s specific model of the detective story was not exploited by Spanish writers until after this period (*La novela* 96). Joan Ramon Resina, author of the other most comprehensive study of the Spanish crime novel, likewise rejects the classification of *El clavo* as detective fiction, assigning it instead to the nineteenth-century true crime genre of the *causa célebre* (*El cadáver* 24).

In a transatlantic history of detective fiction, the broadest movement defining the early classical period is undoubtedly the assimilation of Poe’s innovation by French and British writers and the elaboration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century of an internationally integrated literary market for specialized detective fiction, a market in which Spain and Spanish America initially occupy a decidedly marginal position. Julian Symons plots the vertices of this earliest triangular interaction when he states that, after Poe, it was above all Wilkie Collins and Émile Gaboriau, writing in the 1860s, who set the pattern in which detectives were made during the genre’s classical period extending approximately through World War II (55). In these decades the Frenchman Gaboriau read the American Poe; the American Anna Katharine Green read Poe and Gaboriau; the Englishman Collins read Poe, Gaboriau, and Green; the Scotsman Doyle read Poe, Gaboriau, Collins, and Green; and so on. And while Victorian London and the English countryside may provide the most stereotypical settings for the Golden Age detective novel, it should be remembered that a number of the most internationally successful English-language detective writers in this period such as Green, Mary Roberts Rinehart, S. S. Van Dine (Willard Huntington Wright), Ellery Queen (Frederic Dannay and Manfred B. Lee), John Dickson Carr, and Rex Stout were American. Fairly or not, however, the impression
remains that these writers deferred in their writing to a hegemonic British
cultural model, as Symons attests:

Almost from the beginning the American crime story was deeply in debt to
its British counterpart. (Poe was an exception.) Writers like Van Dine, and
Queen in the first stage of his career, put an American gloss on what was
essentially a British central figure, and there was nothing peculiarly native
about the Rinehart formula. . . . A truly American crime story, making full
use of the manners, habits and language of the United States, and break-
ing completely with European tradition, appeared in the twenties. (123)

Genre history also provides at least one very early case of transpacific as
well as transatlantic circulation of narrative models and products: a year
before the first appearance of Sherlock Holmes, New Zealander Fergus
Hume adapted Gaboriau’s model in his calculatedly formulaic and com-
mercial Mystery of a Hansom Cab, and the novel, set and initially pub-
lished in Melbourne, went on to sell hundreds of thousands of copies in
British and American editions and became, according to Resina, the most
popular mystery novel of the nineteenth century ( New Zealand 313; Resina El cadáver 190).

The acceleration of communication, commerce, and cultural exchange
during the latter nineteenth century thus allowed a Parisian narrative
product to be re-elaborated in Melbourne and to be republished the fol-
lowing year in London and the year after that in New York and Chicago.
The integration of this emerging transatlantic market also allows for the
publication in London and New York of the English translation of an
innovative French novel, such as Gaston Leroux’s Le Mystère de la cham-
ber jaune (The Mystery of the Yellow Room, 1907), the year after its initial
publication in Paris. While transmission of foreign detective fiction to
Spain was not immediate in the nineteenth century, Salvador Vázquez de
Parga characterizes Spain in general as highly receptive to the translation
of foreign works from France, Great Britain, and the United States (La
novela policiaca 23). Spanish translations of Gaboriau’s Lecoq novels were
published serially soon after their appearance in French before becoming
available in book form beginning in 1890. After Doyle began to enjoy
unprecedented success with the 1891 publication of six Holmes stories in
London’s The Strand Magazine, a decade passed before the detective’s
first appearance in Spain in another magazine, La Patria de Cervantes, in
1901 (Vázquez de Parga La novela policiaca 24). The appearance of trans-
lations of the Holmes stories in book form beginning in 1906 marks the
beginning of what Colmeiro terms a Holmesian fervor among Spanish
readers. Despite the sporadic availability of some foreign detective texts before this, it seems fair to assess the import boom of these years as marking the initial phase of Spain’s definitive integration into the international market in detective fiction.

**Spanish Intervention**

In the years immediately preceding the First World War, as translations of English- and French-language detective fiction came into broad circulation, Spanish writers began to experiment with the genre in works such as Joaquín Belda’s *¿Quién disparó . . . ? Husmeos y pesquisas de Gapy Bermúdez* (Who Fired? Snoopings and Investigations of Gapy Bermúdez, 1909) and Emilia Pardo Bazán’s *La gota de sangre* (The Drop of Blood, 1911). Whether broadly farcical, like Belda’s, or subtly ironic, like Pardo Bazán’s, these inaugural works acknowledge the exotic nature of the detective formula they exploit. Given her acute attention to foreign literary trends, Pardo Bazán’s prominence as one of the first practitioners and critical commentators on detective literature in Spain comes as no surprise, yet she was not entirely isolated in her engagement with the genre in these years. In the same year in which the Countess published her only complete detective novel, José Francés began serial publication of the novel that would later appear in book form as *El misterio de Kursaal* (The Kursaal Mystery) in 1916. As one of the earliest Spanish translators of the Holmes stories (*Policia fina* 1909), Francés represents a convergence of practices of translation and writing that will determine the reproduction of the genre in Spain, lending credence to Vázquez de Parga’s assertion that the earliest detective novels written in Spain were no more than transpositions of English detective fiction (*La novela policiaca* 39).6

Especially in its most popular variants, the formulaic and serial nature of detective fiction lends itself to slippage between authentic translation, pseudo-translation, and imitation, as illustrated by the arrival in Spain, also in 1911, of the American Nick Carter detective-adventure series. Published principally in New York between 1886 and 1936, the more than seven hundred installments of the Nick Carter series were the work of perhaps forty syndicate authors employed anonymously under the industrial principles of literary commodity manufacture (Carter 57, Syndicate 442). Barcelona publisher Sopena issued translations of sixty-three Nick Carter stories in 1911 alone, and within five years Manuel A. Bedoya, a Peruvian-born author working in Madrid, was imitating the American detective-adventure formula in a series of novels centered on a cosmopolitan U.S. detective, Mack-Bull, whose arch-adversary
is the German detective Nik-Arter. In 1933 Editorial Molino, the predominant Barcelona publisher of popular material in the 1930s, began a new series of translations of U.S. pulp material featuring Buffalo Bill and Nick Carter without crediting original authors, but rather only their translators, on the covers. The following year Molino went even further, abandoning translations altogether and promoting their translators to novelists, charging them with producing original installments employing established American characters and formulas (Martínez de la Hidalga 33, Vázquez de Parga La novela policiaca 76). By 1942, when publishing company Ediciones Clíper launched a series of mystery adventure tales named for pulp king Edgar Wallace, it consisted entirely of pseudo-translations set in foreign locales and written by Spanish writers employing Anglo pseudonyms (Colmeiro, La novela 138).

Such initiatives of what might elegantly be termed literary import substitution had been attempted previously in response to apparently infinite demand for Holmes stories. Well known is the case of the Holmes pastiche initially titled Detectiv Sherlock Holmes und seine weltberühmten abenteuer [Sherlock Holmes’ Most Famous Cases], published in Berlin by Verlagshaus für Volkliteratur und Kunst in 230 installments between 1907 and 1911, and initially attributed to the unwitting Doyle. This apocryphal series received almost immediate translation into French and soon into Spanish, appearing in Barcelona as the Memorias íntimas de Sherlock Holmes (Intimate Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes), and a number of other Spanish writers joined Belda and Francés in their gleeful appropriation of the English model during the second and third decades of the century. At least one, Enrique Jardiel Poncela, went so far as to deploy the character of Holmes directly in his 1928 parody Las siete novísimas aventuras de Sherlock Holmes (The Seven Extremely New Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, Vázquez de Parga La novela policiaca 69 70, Colmeiro La novela 128 29). As publishers in Madrid and Barcelona introduced specialized series of detective fiction in translation during the 1920s and ’30s, the genre gained considerable visibility in the pre-Civil War literary market, though local production remained relatively tentative. Imported characters prospered on the stage as well, as a number of Spanish writers introduced successful detective dramas, featuring such borrowed characters as Holmes and E. W. Hornung’s Raffles, beginning in the first decade of the century (Colmeiro La novela 102 3 n.19).
The extent to which detective fiction continued to be perceived in Spain as exotic throughout the 1930s and 1940s is evident not only in the continuing predominance of translations, pseudotranslations, and parodies, but also in the insistence on foreign characters and settings by a significant number of those Spanish novelists who did embrace the genre. British settings and protagonists, particularly those associated with Scotland Yard, were favored in the works of writers such as César August Jordana, Wenceslao Fernández Flórez, Mercedes Ballesteros, and Luis Conde Vélez (a translator for Bruguera), while American settings and investigators predominated in works by Bedoya, Felipe Pérez Capo, Ángel Marsá Becal, F. P. Duke, José Mallorqui Figuerola, Luis and Guillermo Gossé Cleyman, Agustín Elías, H. C. Granch, and Juan José Mira. Drawing on his vast professional experience as an editor and writer for Bruguera, Francisco González Ledesma, now one of Spain’s most prominent novela negra writers, has explained this tendency with reference to Franquist censorship and the mindset of Spanish readers during the heyday of the popular novel in the 1940s and ’50s:

The man on the street would never have accepted inspectors named Gómez nor criminals named Rodríguez, nor familiar streets that didn’t inspire dreams and a desire to travel. Back then everything good took place outside Spain, and the only bona fide policemen were those of Scotland Yard and the FBI, especially the latter. . . . For these most important reasons no one wrote detective novels set in Spanish cities and much less with a critical perspective, in other words, what we today call novela negra. The stories transpired in England, the U.S. and in rare instances France. In such officially corrupt places it was possible to situate big gangs, policemen on the take, venal politicians, and even an occasional young lady showing her garter belt, though this intimate garment could never be explicitly mentioned. (La prehistoria de la novela negra 12)

Abundant, narrowly formulaic, truculent, and extranjering or foreignizing, the popular Spanish detective novel of the mid-twentieth century was as vital as a commercial and cultural phenomenon as it was devoid of conventional literary merit.7

If the erudite aristocrat Pardo Bazán made the first substantial literary contribution to the genre in the first half of the twentieth century, a writer who might better exemplify the praxis of the Spanish detective novel during the period of its broad popular assimilation is the professional pulp writer Guillermo López Hipkiss (1902–57). While the volume
of López Hipkiss’s production reflects the industrial economics of popular literature at the time, its breadth reflects, above all, the transatlantic interaction alluded to previously. After beginning a prolific career as a translator for Barcelona publishers in the late 1920s, the English-educated López Hipkiss was promoted by the leading popular publisher Editorial Molino in the 1930s to writing dozens of novels featuring established U.S. characters, including twenty in the Nick Carter series alone (1933–36). In the mid-1940s, after a number of years away from the publishing business due to the disruption of the Civil War, López Hipkiss returned to the popular novel and created a series marketed by Editorial Bruguera and based on the English and Irish detective characters named Perry Baxton, Edward Cromwell (both of Scotland Yard), Ronald Patton, and Patrick O’Hara. Ultimately, however, López Hipkiss found his greatest success with a character called El Encapuchado, whose adventures he narrated in eighty installments published by Editorial Clíper between 1946 and 1953.

This series, characterized by Vázquez de Parga as the most important fixed-character detective series in this period (La novela policiaca 133) differed from López Hipkiss’s previous ventures in at least one important respect: its base scenario was not London but rather Baltimore (perhaps coincidentally, the city most identified with Poe), and its protagonist was an American millionaire who employed his abundant leisure time in investigation. Possibly inspired, as Francisco Tadeo Juan suggests (99), by another hooded crime-fighting character, appearing in the popular American movie serial The Mysterious Dr. Satan (Republic Studios, 1940). López Hipkiss’s lucrative series attests not only to the dawning hegemony of American popular culture in the post World War II period but also to the increasing fluidity of the transference of ideas between popular media at this time, as the hooded hero migrated from Hollywood film to Spanish popular novel and then again into a comic book series derived from López Hipkiss’s character the year after his novelistic debut (Tadeo Juan 99). López Hipkiss’s work as a manufacturer of a transatlantic detective imaginary may be seen, again, as directly continuous with his work in literary translation and, later, in the dubbing of Hollywood films for the Spanish market.

With the shift in dominant cultural models, and perhaps primarily due to the diffusion of the American cinema of gangsters and film noir, the American metropolis looms ever larger in the literary imagination during these years. The U.S. was very far away, explains Vázquez de Parga, and few Spaniards had enjoyed the privilege of visiting it, so anything could happen there (La novela policiaca 58). American detective
characters are present in the Spanish tradition at least since the debut of Bedoya’s Mack-Bull in 1914, but the relative waning of the British model is evident in López Hipkiss’s turn from British scenarios to create first his Baltimore playboy protagonist, then, in 1950, a hard-boiled New York investigative journalist named Bob Lester (1950), and finally, in the same year and in a gesture emblematic of broader shifts in the history of the genre, a sixteen-novel series centered on an eccentric English detective residing in Los Angeles (Vázquez de Parga La novela policiaca 134). During the 1940s, the American dramas introduced by writers such as those previously mentioned featured not only private detectives but also a secret agent of the New York police force (Graesman), a Harvard physics professor (Granch), and a Spanish newspaper correspondent (Mira), all dedicated to combating the fabled criminal underworld of New York.

The allure of all things American was also evident in the publications of José Mallorquí Figuerola (1913–72), perhaps the only pulp writer more influential than López Hipkiss during this period and likewise employed as a translator and serial novelist by the large Barcelona publishers. Although Mallorquí contributed far fewer detective novels than Westerns, he is the first Spanish author published in Editorial Molino’s longevo detective and adventure collection Biblioteca Oro (1940–56), often cited as the most influential in the international reception of the detective genre in Spanish. Under two pseudonyms, Mallorquí contributed four novels to Biblioteca Oro between 1942 and 1944, one pair centered on a private detective from Barcelona (1942 and 1943) and another (1943 and 1944) featured a New York detective couple evidently modeled on the Nick and Nora Charles characters introduced by Dashiell Hammett in The Thin Man (1934) and widely popularized by a series of Hollywood adaptations that began the same year (Colmeiro La novela 137, Valles Calatrava 100). During this same period, Mallorquí and Molino launched a separate series of ten novels (1943–46) centering on the investigative adventures of New York millionaire Duke Straley. These contributions, along with the launching of prolific series titled Aventuras del F.B.I. (Editorial Rollán, Madrid), C.I.A. (Editorial Dólar, Madrid), and Servicio Secreto (Editorial Bruguera, Barcelona) at mid-century, attest to the growing fascination with American popular myths of crime and law enforcement.

As previously illustrated, the development of the detective genre, both in Spain and internationally, has been profoundly determined by an ongoing transatlantic exchange of narrative topics, styles and conventions, with London, Paris, and New York constituting perhaps the dominant poles in an international detective imaginary during the heyday of
the classical problem-novel. Although translations of foreign, especially English and French, detective fiction were popular in Spain from the first decade of the twentieth century, domestic production in the genre remained very scarce in proportion to translations during the pre-Civil War period. In his detailed census of Spanish detective fiction published through 1990, José R. Valles Calatrava unearthed no more than one original detective novel published in Spain in any given year before 1939, and it is not until the 1943–45 period that domestic production increased significantly, peaking at twenty-eight novels in 1944 (226–27). The popular mystery novel originated in Spain as a direct derivation of the U.S. pulp series, and it proliferated in the 1940s when World War II created difficulties for publishers who had previously depended on imported narrative material. These publishers then turned to writers such as López Hipkiss and Mallorquí, former translators, as we have seen, who often published under Anglo-sounding pseudonyms and who favored foreign settings and non-Spanish characters in their fiction. In his periodization of the history of the genre in Spain, Vázquez de Parga labels this the era of abundance (La novela policiaca 89). Fernando Martínez de la Hidalga identifies the same decade as the golden age of the Spanish popular novel and the detective genre as one of its staples. Of the various specialists who have assessed this production, however, none have disagreed as to its derivative nature and scant literary interest (Colmeiro, La novela 136, Hart 25, Vázquez Montalbán 50, Vázquez de Parga La novela policiaca 57), and we might well borrow a phrase from Resina (El cadáver 45) and designate this the period of translation or simulation of translation.

The Buenos Aires Connection

While British and American mythologies may be said to have competed in the Spanish detective imaginary at mid-century, as exemplified by titles such as Alf Manz’s F.B.I. contra Scotland Yard (F.B.I. vs. Scotland Yard, Aventuras del F.B.I. #6, 1950), a decisive transatlantic hegemony would eventually be established by the innovation that Julian Symons terms The American Revolution: the advent of a hard-boiled narrative model gestated during the 1920s in the pulp magazine Black Mask and achieving maturity in the novels of Dashiell Hammett, beginning with Red Harvest. Although perhaps no more indirect than the importation of Sherlock Holmes by way of Germany, the reception and propagation of the hard-boiled model in Spain involves an additional transatlantic dimension hitherto unacknowledged: the interaction between Spanish and Spanish American publishers and producers. During the first half of
the twentieth century, Spanish America generally occupied a remote margin in the Spanish detective imaginary, one only fleetingly insinuated in the occasional exoticism of titles such as José Mallorquí Figuerola’s *El ídolo azteca* (The Aztec Idol, 1942), Vicente Arias Archidona’s *El caso del criado guaraní* (The Case of the Guaraní Servant, 1943), and Adolfo Ober’s *La cadena del inca* (The Inca’s Chain, 1945).

A more concrete economic link is constituted by the exportation of popular novels by Spanish publishers to Spanish American markets and by certain reverse flows of Spanish American publications to Spain, especially following the Civil War. Particularly interesting in this regard are both the exile of publisher Pablo Molino during the Civil War and the transfer of his operations to Buenos Aires. Editorial Molino was, again, one of the foremost producers, along with Clíper and Bruguera, of popular literature in Spain during this period, and Molino took into exile with him collections such as *Hombres Audaces* and *Biblioteca Oro*, two primary sources of English and American detective fiction in Spain and Spanish America. Molino continued to produce the collections in Buenos Aires before returning to Barcelona in 1940 and reinstalling them there, retaining the Editorial Molino Argentina as a parallel enterprise. Thereafter, some titles were issued in both Barcelona and Buenos Aires while others were issued in Argentina and sold in Spain (Martínez de la Hidalga 29 31).

Until this period, the general contour of the development of the detective genre in Argentina was not unlike that already seen in Spain, with a limited number of Argentine writers producing isolated pieces of detective fiction from the final decades of the nineteenth century to first decades of the twentieth century, the period in which foreign genre classics were arriving in translation. Throughout the 1930s, Argentine publishers led by Editorial Tor popularized the mystery-adventure pulp narrative of British and American writers, such as Edgar Wallace, and the arrival of *Biblioteca Oro* and *Hombres Audaces* reinforced an already active trade in genre translations. An important difference with regard to Spain emerges during the 1940s, however, when a compact group of distinguished writers associated with the journal *Sur* took a lively interest in the classical detective formula and produced a number of works unrivaled by any of the contemporary Spanish production. The year 1942 marks perhaps the apex of this period, with the publication by Jorge Luis Borges of *La muerte y la brújula* (Death and the Compass) in *Sur* and, under the pseudonym H. Bustos Domecq, of *Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi* (Six Problems for Don Isidro Parodi), a collection of stories written in collaboration with Adolfo Bioy Casares. Borges and Bioy Casares also
collaborated on *El Séptimo Círculo*, a series of translations of principally British detective novels published by Emecé beginning in 1945, and this was one of several Argentine series that would circulate in the Spanish market during coming decades. This success led to an agreement with Madrid’s Alianza Editorial to republish highlights from the series as *Selecciones del Séptimo Círculo* beginning in 1973. The original Argentine series endured until 1983, publishing a total of 366 titles.

In opposition to the mass-market tendency represented by *Colección Misterio*, Borges and Bioy Casares promoted a conservative and literarily refined vision of the detective novel in their essays, reviews, stories, and anthologies of the 1940s, and their early selections for the Emecé series likewise prioritized the restrained elegance of the English Golden Age style of the interwar period. As Jorge Lafforgue and Jorge B. Rivera recall,

*El Séptimo Círculo* already differentiated from previous collections by its obviously literate name would rake through new releases by the best known publishers in London and New York and through the recommendations of the *Times Literary Supplement*, and it would restrict itself to the norms of the puzzle novel, those of detective fiction understood as the culmination of an ingenious, even exquisitely subtle, literature of escape. (17)

Whereas Borges and Bioy Casares barely acknowledged U.S. hard-boiled writers during their tenure as editors of this long-running series, successors were less squeamish, and *El Séptimo Círculo* subsequently became one of a number of Argentine series instrumental in the international diffusion of the hard-boiled corpus. Editorial Molino Argentina, for its part, was apparently the first to publish a Raymond Chandler novel in Spanish translation, issuing *Farewell, My Lovely* as *Detective por correspondencia* in 1943, but other Buenos Aires publishing houses were not far behind.

In Spanish America, the dissemination of the classical and hard-boiled canons in translation was necessarily intercontinental and transatlantic, and in the 1940s and ’50s, weaker national literary markets depended heavily on imported editions from metropolitan publishers, such as those already mentioned. In the first monographic study of the Mexican detective novel, Ilan Stavans identified two primary channels for the transmission of the detective formula to Mexico: first, foreign cinematic adaptations of detective literature and, second, various pocket collections, which, in the forties and fifties, were wretched translations from Buenos Aires (65). Stavans cites the Argentine series published by Molino, Malinca, Hachette, Emecé, and Acme as the earliest distributed in Mexico, prompting local publishers to provide their own approximations.
In his very enthusiastic appraisal of the ultimate impact of U.S. hard-boiled narrative on contemporary Spanish American writers, Argentine novelist Mempo Giardinelli (El género negro 228) identifies four publishers as particularly influential in this regional process: from Buenos Aires, Editorial Malinca (with the collections Cobalto, Débora, Pandora and Linterna) and Editorial Acme (Rastros and Teseo), and, from Mexico City, Editorial Novaro (Policiaca y de misterio) and Editorial Diana (Jaguar and Caimán).

Finally, the case of a country such as Colombia illustrates how the dominance of Spanish, Argentine, and Mexican publishers during this period gave rise to another instance of triangulation. In his pioneering study of detective fiction in Colombia, Hubert Pöppel establishes that a translation of Doyle’s A Study in Scarlet was published in Bogota as early as 1901, the same year as Holmes’s first appearance in Spain, but that in following decades Colombian publishers did not sustain the initiative. Pöppel describes the contents of one prominent private library of detective fiction accumulated in Medellin during the 1930s and ’40s as including French novels and French translations of English-language novels as well as Spanish-language translations of English and French novels from collections published in Mexico City and Buenos Aires, especially Borges’s El Séptimo Círculo (52). In summarizing the process of transmission and reception in Colombia, Pöppel again emphasizes the central role of imported editions:

Before the 1930s there was no broad reception of the genre in Colombia. The adventures of Sherlock Holmes were an exception, for in addition to the 1901 edition, translations of Arthur Conan Doyle arrived from Chicago and Spain from the beginning of the twentieth century. The works of Edgar Wallace . . . arrived in Spanish versions during the 1920s and 1930s from Madrid, Barcelona and Buenos Aires. Chesterton and his Father Brown, invented in 1911, made themselves known in Castilian beginning in the 1920s and 1930s also in editions from Madrid and Buenos Aires. Agatha Christie (detective novels beginning in 1920) and Simenon (Maigret appearing in 1929) had to wait until the 1930s and 1940s for versions of their novels to arrive from Barcelona and Buenos Aires. The reception of Dashiell Hammett (Red Harvest, 1929) and Raymond Chandler (The Big Sleep, 1939) began in the 1940s, with translations originating in Buenos Aires and Spain. (52 53)

The specific sources Pöppel cites as the most influential in the dissemination of detective fiction in Colombia at midcentury are, not surprisingly, El Séptimo Círculo (Buenos Aires) and Biblioteca Oro (Barcelona-Buenos
Aires), as well *Caimán* (Mexico City) and *Selecciones policíacas FBI* (Madrid). It is through these flows that a common matrix of detective discourse is constituted in the Hispanic literary imagination.

**The Integration of the Novela Negra**

Particularly during the period of the international ascendancy of the hard-boiled novel during the 1950s and ’60s, Mexican and Argentine publishers provided the initiative for its introduction not only throughout Spanish America, but also, to a significant extent, in Spain as well. Spanish American translations and editions of Chandler, for example, arrived in Spain years before the first Spanish editions appeared, and Vázquez de Parga suggests that this indirect reception implied concrete benefits for Spanish readers during the Franco era:

[I]t was not the case, as is now claimed, that translations of Chandler were mutilated by censorship. This may have been true in some specific case, but not in others, for we mustn’t forget that most of the Castilian versions of Chandler, MacDonald, Cain, Goodis, Fredric Brown and the other U.S. genre writers were produced in Argentina and in Mexico, beyond the reach of Franco’s censors. (*La novela policiaca* 201)

In a 1983 interview Jaume Fuster, a prominent proponent of the hard-boiled novel in Catalan during the 1970s, gives one personal account of the impact of these imports.

During those years [the 1940s] I read a good deal and finally came across a collection that I liked a lot, the Argentine collection edited by Bioy Casares and Borges. It was wonderful! It was very hard for me to read because it was written in an Argentine dialect that I often didn’t understand. In the Argentine texts I discovered the great authors of the *novela negra*  Hammett, Chandler, etc. (quoted in Hart 80)

In fact, as I have already indicated, Chandler did not appear in *El Séptimo Círculo* until 1961, six years after the Borges and Bioy Casares began relinquishing editorship (Lafforgue and Rivera 130), but Fuster is substantially correct in recalling the precedence of the Argentine editions. In conjunction with the appearance of hard-boiled translations in Spanish series during the 1950s, the importation of collections, such as the Argentine *Rastros* and the Mexican *Caimán*, seeded the gestation of the *novela negra*. 
An understanding of the historical trajectory of Hispanic hard-boiled crime fiction is thus incomplete without an accounting of the international and transatlantic circulation of texts, translations, writers, and even publishing houses not only between the United States and Europe but also specifically between Spanish America and Spain. The U.S. hard-boiled model, initially denigrated as violent and pornographic by authorities such as Borges, languished for decades in the realm of subliterature before giving rise to an internationally integrated *novela negra* movement in Spain and Spanish America. In Argentina during the 1950s, certain left-leaning writers and critics associated with the journal *Contorno* began to vindicate the hard-boiled classics, but throughout the 1960s, actual hard-boiled writing there remained largely the province of pulp writers such as Eduardo Goligorsky who toiled to produce dozens of knock-offs of the Hammett-Chandler-Spillane formula for popular publishers such as Editorial Malinca and Acme Agency (Lafforgue and Rivera 23–24). Much in the manner of López Hipkiss and Mallorquí in Barcelona, Goligorsky began his career as a translator of syndicated foreign series and later produced abundant translations of English-language detective fiction alongside original works designed to be indistinguishable from imports and published under Anglo pseudonyms.

A final phase in the transatlantic constitution of Hispanic hard-boiled literature, however, is marked by the appearance of a new series of translations and original works appearing primarily in Buenos Aires and Barcelona during the 1960s and early ’70s. Translations of U.S. hard-boiled classics were increasingly available in Argentina during these years, and in 1969 the advent of the distinguished *Serie Negra* collection, edited by Ricardo Piglia and published by Editorial Tiempo Contemporáneo, marked a high point in its visibility and prestige. Several years later, the imitative popular hard-boiled fiction of writers such as Goligorsky would be decisively superceded by a new, more nationally grounded and literarily ambitious variant introduced by Oswaldo Soriano, Juan Carlos Martelli, and Juan Carlos Martini. In Spain, the chronology is only slightly different: the full flourishing of the *novela negra* dates from the late 1970s, but we also find isolated and unusually early incursions into the subgenre by prolific Catalan novelist Manuel de Pedrolo beginning in 1952. In novels such as *Es vessa una sang fàcil* ([Cheap Blood](#)), first published in 1953 but composed the previous year), *L’inspector fa tard* ([The Inspector Arrives Late](#)), 1960), *Joc Brut* ([Foul Play](#)), 1965) and *Mossegar-se la cua* ([Biting One’s Own Tail](#)), 1968) Pedrolo established Barcelona as a scenario for hard-boiled narratives of criminal intrigue, but
he was perhaps equally influential as a translator for and director of *La Cua de Palla*, a series published by Edicions 62 between 1963 and 1970 and featuring excellent Catalan renditions of U.S. hard-boiled classics. It is this collection, for example, that Andreu Martín, who is currently perhaps the most prolific Spanish contributor to the *novela negra* genre, credits as a primary factor in his literary formation.\(^{11}\)

The ongoing introduction of translations of hard-boiled classics during the 1970s in series published by firms such as Enlace and Bruguera coincided with the definitive emergence of a local *novela negra* in both Catalan and Castilian. The aforementioned Fuster, the first Catalan writer to take up Pedrolo’s initiative, published *De mica en mica s’omple la pica* (*El procedimiento* in Castilian [Crumb by Crumb]) in 1972, while Manuel Vázquez Montalbán commenced Spain’s longest and best-known *novela negra* series with *Tatuaje* [*Tattoo*] in 1974, after having introduced the character who would become his detective protagonist in a non-genre novel two years earlier. To begin to explain the nearly synchronous assertion of the *novela negra* genre in Spain and Argentina and shortly thereafter in Mexico, we should consider not only the accelerating transatlantic filtration of popular mystery-adventure novels and hard-boiled translations in previous decades, but also the increasing cultural hegemony of U.S. cinema and the recirculation of the American detective myth through television. In this respect, it is illustrative to juxtapose novels, such as Soriano’s *Triste, solitario y final* (*Sad, Lonely and Final*, 1973), with its fantastic pilgrimage to Hollywood and its resurrection of Philip Marlowe, Fuster’s *Tarda, sessió continua, 3,45* (*Continuous Showings, Tarde, sesión continua* in Castilian 1976), with its explicit homage to the hard-boiled Humphrey Bogart, and Paco Ignacio Taibo II’s *Días de combate* (*Days of Combat*, 1976), in which the protagonist who would become Mexico’s most durable hard-boiled hero mimics Bogart’s mannerisms as he attempts to reinvent himself as a private detective, a role assumed after watching the 1971 quasi-detective comedy film *They Might Be Giants*. In Buenos Aires, Juan Sasturain’s detective protagonist Etchenique emerges on the first page of *Manual de perdedores* (*Loser’s Manual*, 1985) from an immersion in detective lore at a three-day retrospective of Hollywood *noir* films.\(^{12}\)

According to the previously cited bibliographic survey by Valles Calatrava, the publication of detective novels in Spain spiked sharply in 1979, inaugurating the so-called boom of the *novela negra*. As many critics have by now observed, this new Spanish *novela negra* was deeply conditioned by the cultural and sociopolitical disruption of the country’s democratic transition, yet it also coincided with the expansion of the
genre in Mexico and Argentina, and a number of important personal and institutional links facilitated a transatlantic articulation of this production. The Argentine Martini, resident in Barcelona between 1975 and 1984, served as director of Bruguera’s prominent Serie Novela Negra beginning in 1977, while self-described asturmexicano Taibo presided over Etiqueta Negra, published by Madrid’s Ediciones Júcar, beginning in 1986. The proliferation and international consolidation of the novela negra during the 1980s is evident not only in such transnational editorial collaborations but also in the establishment of professional institutions, such as the Asociación Internacional de Escritores Policiales, co-founded by Taibo in Havana in 1986, and the ongoing Semana Negra festival held annually since 1988 in Gijón, Asturias under Taibo’s tutelage.

**Recent Crossings**

As a literary phenomenon, the contemporary novela negra is ultimately a transatlantic one in a number of fundamental respects. As I have indicated here, detective fiction itself may be said to depend to a significant extent on European reception and development of Poe’s innovation, and the novela negra derives initially from the narrative practices of the U.S. hard-boiled school founded in *Black Mask*. Though complex, the transmission of the detective genre and particularly the hard-boiled variant to Spain has been filtered through multiple and often indirect channels of translations, editions, and adaptations. While the volume of exportation by the Spanish publishing industry to Spanish America, both during the heyday of the Spanish popular novel and in the present era of multinational consolidation, has certainly outweighed reverse flows, Spanish American publishers, translators, and novelists have contributed appreciably to the introduction and consolidation of hard-boiled narrative in Spain.

Another transatlantic dimension inherent in the genre is suggested by Poe’s preference for Parisian scenarios and Doyle’s narrative excursion among the Mormons of Utah in *A Study in Scarlet*. Though the detective genre seems, at a certain remove, a genre strongly grounded in the inspection of a bounded local environment, examples of foreign and transatlantic settings are not scarce and even predominate during certain periods. For most of the twentieth century, following the initial popularization of the genre in Spain and at least parts of Spanish America, Britain, and the United States were default settings for much of the detective literature published in Spanish. Aside from the abundance of popular Spanish and Argentine novels set in the likes of London and New
York, we find in all periods narratives of crimes and investigations taking place at great fictional distance. In this respect, a figure such as Manuel A. Bedoya may seem less an obscure footnote than a early representative of the genre’s inveterate mobility: a Peruvian expatriate finds success with a series published in Madrid, exported to the Americas, and featuring a U.S. detective who operates as freely in London as in Paraguay.

In *Adiós, Madrid* (1993), Taibo sent his Mexican private investigator, one of the most durable protagonists in the Spanish American crime fiction, to the Spanish capital to recover a stolen breastplate that belonged to Montezuma. This is the first transatlantic excursion by the detective Belascoarán Shayne, whose name marks him not only as the son of a Basque father and an Irish mother, but also as a literary descendant of Brett Halliday’s classic Miami-based private eye Mike Shayne. In *Quinteto de Buenos Aires* (*The Buenos Aires Quintet*, 1997), Vázquez Montalbán sent his own delegate Pepe Carvalho, son of Galician immigrants to Barcelona and the most durable private detective in Spanish fiction, to the Argentine capital to investigate the disappearance of the son of a Spanish immigrant returned to Spain in the wake of the dictatorship. In the backstory of these inverse crossings, Taibo and Vázquez Montalbán thus inscribe several of the major historical links binding Spain to its former colonies in the twentieth century: the exile of Republicans and other political refugees of the Spanish Civil War, the economic displacement of the postwar period, and the reversal of transatlantic immigrant flows as the result of dictatorships, civil wars, and economic crises in Spanish America.

Beyond their narrative content, furthermore, both of these texts also exemplify the characteristic mobility of the hard-boiled formula across national boundaries and between media: Taibo initially produced *Adiós, Madrid* as a script for Televisión Española, while Vázquez Montalbán’s novel results from the reworking of stories conceived for an abandoned pilot project for Argentine television. A final and more profound transatlantic articulation results from the transnational consolidation of the publishing industry during the neoliberal era: although the first edition of *Adiós, Madrid* appeared in Mexico under the Promexa imprint of the proudly named Editorial Patria, the most current editions of both Taibo’s and Vázquez Montalbán’s novels appear under the Booket imprint of Planeta, the Barcelona-based publishing conglomerate that is now the largest in the Spanish-speaking world, forming subsidiaries, much like the *novela negra* itself, in Buenos Aires, Montevideo, Santiago, Quito, Bogota, Caracas, Mexico City, and New York. But while the imaginary province of the *novela negra* has expanded in recent years to
include cities such as La Paz, Lima, Medellin, and Monterrey, neoliberal economic policies have reaffirmed the industrial hegemony of the metropolis, so that the fast track to international distribution and recognition for the genre’s Spanish American practitioners still runs through Barcelona. In its geographical distribution, in its communities of producers, and in its intertextual imaginary, the contemporary novela negra thus remains a fundamentally transatlantic and increasingly multinational enterprise but one whose industrial configuration reflects the renewed subordination of Spanish America in the current global economic order.

**The Cartography of Violence**

While the commercial vitality of the novela negra has long exceeded its literary prestige, Gustavo Pellón provides one indication of its increasing relevance in the cultural milieu of the neoliberal period when he ranks it in *The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature* (1996) as one of the three most distinct narrative tendencies of the post-boom (282). In the chapters that follow, I undertake a selective overview of this new literary province, addressing two of the most overarching concerns of the transnational novela negra. First, I explore its project of a cognitive mapping of the contemporary metropolis in an era in which large-scale migration from the countryside and the uncontrolled growth of cities, especially in Spanish America, has threatened the very intelligibility of the urban environment, fragmenting and distending the cityscape and subsuming or displacing traditional points of reference and centers of orientation. As elaborated by Fredric Jameson, extrapolating from the work of urbanologist Kevin Lynch, cognitive mapping refers to a series of aesthetic practices, theoretical projects, and even political activities that produce the sense of orientation that a map provides. A cognitive map is a necessarily partial and incomplete rendering of the multidimensional and constantly changing totality that serves as a kid of navigational aid, without ever achieving direct representation of an ultimately unmappable totality (Hardt and Weeks 22–23). Second, I trace the novela negra’s profound inscription of what sociologists have termed the new urban violence of the neoliberal era, proposing that the intensification of criminal violence in Spanish American cities has dictated a divergence between Spanish American and Spanish crime fiction. As traditional detective and even police procedural formulas persist and thrive in Spain, Spanish American crime fiction turns increasingly away from the detective subject and toward that of the criminal.
When we consider the derivation of the *novela negra* from the classical detective story, the generic vocation for urban mapping appears fundamental. As I shall detail in Chapter 2, English novelist G. K. Chesterton long ago recognized and celebrated the ratiocinative detective story as an epic of the modern metropolis, offering a police hero adapted to the metropolitan environment of not only infinite mystery and danger but also ubiquitous signs and endless interpretative possibilities. From another political perspective, Walter Benjamin commented during the 1930s on Poe’s original detective stories as a response to the unknowability of the metropolis and the dissolution of individual identity in metropolitan society: The original social content of the detective story focused on the obliteration of the individual’s traces in the big-city crowd (23). Benjamin interprets the detective’s logical labor of identification as a response to the problem of the invisibility of the criminal when concealed within the urban masses, and he situates Poe’s Dupin as successor to another reader of the urban spectacle, the flâneur:

> No matter what trace the flâneur may follow, every one of them will lead him to a crime. This is an indication of how the detective story, regardless of its sober calculations, also participates in the phantasmagoria of Parisian life. It does not yet glorify the criminal, though it does glorify his adversaries and, above all, the hunting grounds where they pursue him. (22)

Benjamin also relates the detective’s labor to modern administrative initiatives for the ordering and registration of urban space and the identification, emplacement, and disciplining of subjects. In the words of Dana Brand, who develops Benjamin’s observations, the flâneur and the detective are figures devised to enable epistemological and imaginative mastery of the urban crowd and of the urban illegibility linked in Poe’s fiction to the notion of deep crime (220, 224). Both define a panoramic viewpoint affording control over an urban text that otherwise appears threateningly opaque (237).

Also following Benjamin, Cole Swensen has written what I consider to be one of the most lucid summaries of the classical detective’s activity in the unknowable metropolis:

> The fact that the city embodies unanswered questions and unknowable qualities is essential to its nature and is the initial foothold upon which the detective genre anchors itself. Urban spaces are marked by abundance, diversity, and movement in such unpredictable occurrences that the overall effect is one of chaos, mutability and incomprehensibility. . . . A cultural construct that can interact with [the] code [of the city] is needed to
intervene between the situation and the subject to render this kind of chaos and disorientation comprehensible. The detective novel is one such construct. . . . [The detective] searches for the city, or a way of reading it that will allow him access to it. . . . The detective is looking for another, new sense [beyond the five bodily senses] through which to perceive, on a continuous basis, the city as an understandable unit. . . . What is [the detective], as a narrative element, doing? He is mapping. He walks the city, and this walk becomes, either literally or figuratively, a chase. . . . This chase is also a tracing and, ultimately, an unraveling: the mystery becomes coherent and the labyrinth of the city becomes linear. . . . Walking through the city streets [is] a way of reading them. (31, 32, 35 36)

As disorienting and unintelligible as mid-nineteenth century Paris or late-nineteenth century London were, especially for new immigrants, the demographic explosion and geographic sprawl of the Latin American metropolis in the second half of the twentieth century has surely produced far more intense crises of orientation and intelligibility, and I believe that the recent flourishing of the novela negra in Latin America is a fairly direct literary response to these crises.

More than thirty years ago, Argentine historian José Luis Romero proposed the designation ciudades masificadas (massified cities) to describe the urban societies produced in Latin America by rapid demographic expansion and insufficient economic and infrastructural development between approximately 1930 and 1970. In Romero’s view, it was the economic crisis of 1930 that set off a period of mass migration to Latin American cities, an onslaught of the countryside on the city, that would transform Latin America into the world’s most urbanized region by century’s end. Romero identified these mid-century immigrants with founding an urban mass society and with transforming the physiognomy of the urban habitat, as the cities least able to cope with the influx ceased to be cities, strictly speaking, and transformed into a juxtaposition of unconnected and anomic ghettos. Anomie became a shared characteristic (388). While dispersion of social classes was not new in Latin American cities, observed Romero, the accumulation of massive working and sub-working class populations on the urban margins intensified traditional stratifications and produced what Romero termed polarized or split urban societies (428). In almost all contemporary Latin American metropolises, concluded Romero, two largely distinct societies coexisted at odds with each other and on a divided topography: The metropolis proper is the normalized society and the rancheríos (slums, settlements or shantytowns) constitute the anomic society, although both areas are ultimately integrated and could not exist without each other (438). These
dynamics of division, fragmentation, disintegration, and sprawl lie at the heart of much of the urban crime fiction I will examine in this book.

In the design of this book, I have striven to strike a balance between the competing imperatives of transnationalism and of local specificity. As Persephone Braham concluded in the epilogue to her 2004 study *Crimes Against the State, Crimes Against Persons*:

> In the future, it will be impossible to limit studies of detective fiction in Spanish to one country, as has habitually been done in the past. In all likelihood it will be much more useful to speak simply of the detective novel in Spanish rather than the Cuban, the Mexican, or the Spanish detective novel. Migration, expanded means of communication, and the growing interest in the phenomena of boundaries and crossings ... have already begun to blur the boundaries between Mexican and North American, Spanish and Cuban detective fiction. (108)

In accordance with this observation, but also in order to minimize the risk of dispersal to which a study of this scope is plainly prone, I have elected to focus my attention on only four cities and on a set of major producers in the field of the contemporary *novela negra*, a number of whom I have already mentioned as protagonists in the contemporary transatlantic exchange (Taibo II, Parra, Gamboa, Mendoza, Sasturain, Giardinelli, Vázquez Montalbán, and González Ledesma). While a number of other cities have appeared as important crime-writing locales in recent decades, for example Havana through the works of Leonardo Padura Fuentes or Santiago through those of Ramón Díaz Eterovic, I have selected Mexico City, Bogota, Buenos Aires, and Barcelona as the four points that allow me to plot most clearly my overall understanding of the contemporary crime fiction of the Spanish-speaking world and to account for both the international flourishing of the *novela negra* during the 1970s and a notable divergence between Spanish American and Spanish production in recent years.

It is my contention that in Spanish America the private-eye paradigm still propagated by several of the original and most prolific practitioners of the *neopoliciaco*, including Taibo and Díaz Eterovic, began to be eclipsed during the 1980s. This is the period that has come to be known as Latin America’s lost decade due to the onset of debt crises, economic stagnation, and the triumph of neoliberal economic policies dictating fiscal austerity and associated with massive social dislocation, and a subsequent explosion in crime rates in Mexico City, Bogota, and elsewhere. My account of the most recent phase of the American production, largely
in contrast with that of Spain, thus centers on the turn toward a dirtier and more lawless urban social realism reflecting the dramatic rise in criminality now recognized by social scientists as one of the most striking developments in Latin America over the last twenty years (Bergman 213). In each of the subsequent chapters, I make reference not only to novels but also to nonliterary research relating to the primary concerns of this study, which are with the imagination of urban violence and the mapping of the metropolis. A survey and examination of the contemporary novela negra thus promises to provide a telling index of the evolving relationship between literary narrative in Spanish and the new cultural configurations shaped by the global historical transformations of the last thirty years.
CHAPTER 2

MEXICO CITY

Urban Detection

It is no secret to students of detective fiction that throughout most of the genre’s history, the detective has been primarily an urban creature. The nineteenth-century sleuths of Edgar Allan Poe, Émile Gaboriau, Arthur Conan Doyle, and their disciples were usually Parisians and Londoners, and it is generally understood that their success as cultural heroes had as much to do with the shocks of accelerated urbanization as it did with the timeless fascination of death and murder. As social historians of the genre have posited, the detective hero arose precisely as a negotiator of middle-class anxieties generated by the pressures of cramped social coexistence in the unevenly policed mid-nineteenth-century industrial metropolis. Especially as conventions of the genre became formalized from 1890 onward, detective fiction offered its broad, primarily middle-class readership a reassuring ritual in which the forces of deep crime that stirred in urban mass society were conjured and contained by the agents of bourgeois rationalism. And even as English writers were relocating the scene of detection to tranquil villages and isolated manor houses during the secure interwar years, U.S. writers began to refashion the genre as a vehicle for the negotiation of their own local urban experience.

Unlike the villager, the inhabitant of the modern industrial metropolis struggles to comprehend her or his place in a vast and dynamic social environment that extends far beyond the limits of immediate perception and that no individual can fully and directly know. In A Defence of Detective Stories, an essay well known to critics of detective fiction (Braham 10–11; Resina 11, 13, 146), G. K. Chesterton observed over a century ago that the city is at once a permanent enigma and a potentially decipherable text whose every element is constructed by human hands and is thus intelligible as a sign. In this 1902 text, Chesterton celebrated
the detective story as the earliest and only form of popular literature in which is expressed some sense of the poetry of modern life, and he credited it with discovering in the city a poetic magic previously associated with the natural world:

Of [the] realization of the great city itself as something wild and obvious the detective story is certainly the Iliad. No one can have failed to notice that in these stories the hero or the investigator crosses London with something of the loneliness and liberty of a prince in a tale of elfland, that in the course of that incalculable journey the casual omnibus assumes the primal colours of a fairy ship. The lights of the city begin to glow like innumerable goblin eyes, since they are the guardians of some secret, however crude, which the writer knows and the reader does not. Every twist of the road is like a finger pointing to it; every fantastic skyline of chimneypots seems wildly and derisively signalling the meaning of the mystery. (4)

Chesteron considered it socially good that the reader, along with Sherlock Holmes, be encouraged to understand the city as composed of an infinitude of messages and to fall into the habit of looking imaginatively at ten men in the street even if it is only on the chance that the eleventh might be a notorious thief. The labor of interpretation is deemed good because it serves to assert [the] romance of detail in civilization and also the romance of the police force, promoting appreciation for the whole noiseless and unnoticeable police management by which the armed camp of civilization is maintained (6).

Chesteron’s essay well articulates the conservative premises that have informed the detective genre throughout much of its history, and its account of the mysterious allure of the cityscape in detective fiction is unsurpassed. In his loneliness and liberty, the peripatetic investigator embodies the modern urban subject unburdened of traditional social and cultural constraints and released into a menacing world of proliferating signs and, as Benjamin emphasizes, indistinct social identities. The classical detective character resolves urban chaos by deploying an apparently infallible deductive logic, and it is the resulting illusion of logical resolution, security, and closure that succeeds culturally, according to various critics, by momentarily relieving the anxieties of individual readers whose very subjective identities are compromised by the dynamics of modern urban existence. The city is the realm of the new, the secret, and the inapprehensible. It is also the realm of the crowd that threatens to subsume all individuality. The great fictional detectives are exaggerated individuals; they are eccentric geniuses who faithfully bear the standard of bourgeois rationalism as all that is solid melts about them into air.
If the twentieth-century Latin American metropolis presents, as José Luis Romero suggested, a particular intensification of the modern dynamics of massification and dispersion that the nineteenth-century detective was devised to counteract, the gigantic dimensions and dispersive social dynamics of late twentieth-century Mexico City may be said to epitomize the crisis described by Romero. As the population of the Mexico City metropolitan area grew, according to José Luis Lezama, from just under five and a half million in 1960 to nearly fourteen million in 1980 (374), crises of urban orientation and intelligibility attained an urgency rarely seen elsewhere. In *Imaginarios Urbanos*, a study informed by Kevin Lynch’s notions of imageability and concerned with the coping strategies devised by contemporary inhabitants of the Mexican megalopolis, urban anthropologist Néstor García Canclini has investigated the manifold cultural discourses through which Mexican citizens construct an imaginary cityscape and confer meaning an urban environment that refuses totalization through direct perception. There he wrote of an imaginary city coexistent with the material one:

Cities are constructed of houses and parks, streets, highways and traffic signals. But they are also configured of images. These may be the images of the blueprints which invent and order them. But the sense of urban life is also imagined by novels, by songs and movies, by press accounts, by radio and television. The city becomes dense when loaded with heterogeneous fantasies. The city programmed to function, designed on a grid, overflows and multiplies itself in individual and collective fictions. (109)

While García Canclini does not specifically mention detective fiction among the heterogeneous fantasies proliferating in the megalopolis, in what follows I will begin to explore the ways in which the crime fiction of the *neopolicia*co has sought to configure an ideologically coherent image of late twentieth-century Mexico City, though from a political position far removed from the police heroics of Chesterton.

**The Mexican Tradition**

As I have established in Chapter 1, the conservative or integrative conception of the detective genre enabled it to triumph commercially in an era characterized by the vertiginous disintegration of the known. In the century following the publication of Poe’s first tale of ratiocination in 1841, the production and commercialization of detective fiction in Western Europe and the United States attained truly industrial proportions. As the genre spread and diversified, fictional detectives were
installed in outposts as remote as Stockholm and Santiago, and everywhere writers strove to endow their tales with recognizably local characteristics while respecting the fundamental narrative formula. Since the history of the reception and production of detective fiction in Spanish America has been recounted in several thorough studies, and since I have surveyed its genesis through transatlantic exchange in Chapter 1, it will suffice to recall here that foreign detective fiction was widely consumed there for nearly a century, and that at least Argentina, Chile, Cuba, and Mexico have long, if sporadic, records of domestic production.

According to historians of the genre, detective protagonists in the classical mode have operated in Mexico at least since the 1920s. Yet during the first half century of that tradition, few writers can be said to have comfortably reconciled the parameters of detective fiction with the cultural realities of post-revolutionary Mexico. Often in this period the most successful Mexican detective writers are also the most parodic and the most frank in their acknowledgement of the awkwardness of their appropriation. This the case with Antonio Helú (1900–63) and José Martínez de la Vega (1908–54), who rejected the proper proceduralism of the English school and aligned themselves with French writers, such as Maurice Leblanc, whose investigating protagonists fell less squarely on the side of law and order than did their English counterparts. Almost all critics of Mexican detective fiction have commented on the difficulties inherent in the remote imitation of a foreign literary model founded on European bourgeois notions of justice and rationality. In a pithy 1973 article, Carlos Monsiváis explained what he perceived as the absence of a coherent detective literature in Latin America as follows:

[A] police force unanimously judged corrupt retains no credibility: if this literature were to aspire to realism, the accused character would almost never be the real criminal and, unless he were poor, would never receive punishment. Furthermore, a) crimes committed among the poor don’t interest the genre. The preferred environment of this literature tends to be that of the great bourgeoisie, mansions where evil reigns, jealousy between magnates, blackmail at poolside; b) crime, moreover, does not possess an expropriable connotation: what’s unusual is not that a Latin American might be the victim of a crime, but that he might escape being the victim of one. (2 3)

Monsiváis’s article is memorable for its sound diagnosis of the ailments of the imported genre and also for its conclusion that in Mexico there does not exist nor does it appear probable that there will exist a detective novel or a literature of conspiracy and espionage (11). Scarcely three years
later, the local hard-boiled variant called the *neopoliciaco mexicano* would arrive to challenge this assessment.

So sensitive a critic is Monsiváis, however, that even while denying the viability of an authentically Mexican detective novel, he managed to articulate the conditions of its subsequent invention. A national detective literature does not exist, he maintained, because in Mexico there is no confidence in the rule of law, because a magical mentality prevails over Cartesian rationalism, and because Mexicans are already accustomed to consume crime imaginatively through the conventions of their own sensationalistic popular discourse, the *nota roja*. It is this form of tabloid crime journalism, scandalous, difamatory, morbid, revelling in clichés and unheard of brutality (11), which provides, for Monsiváis, the true measure of Mexicans’ faith in their formal democracy. The *nota roja* assumes a cynical attitude toward the constant spectacle of violent criminality, reporting it in harrowingly graphic detail and with a distinctively black humor. The impunity of the corrupt and powerful is a given. Most interestingly, Monsiváis asserted the triviality and obsolescence of detective justice in the era of unrestrained state criminality, citing as examples the U.S. war in Vietnam and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, along with the Mexican government’s massacre of demonstrators at Tlatelolco in 1968 and a lethal assault on students by government thugs in 1971. What Monsiváis did not manage to foresee in 1973 was the advent of a detective literature that would incorporate this culture of skepticism, assimilate the *nota roja*, and address the issue of state-generated violence by reclaiming for the private detective the critical role that Monsiváis declared anachronistic.

**Urban Mapping and the Neopoliciaco**

Today Paco Ignacio Taibo II is known to many readers as the founder and leading proponent of the mode of Mexican detective fiction designated as *neopoliciaco*. Among the innumerable fictional images of Mexico City that have been created in the last three decades and which may be said, following García Canclini, to configure the contemporary cityscape, Taibo’s plotting stands out as a sustained and coherent literary project. Since the notion of plotting is instrumental both to my transatlantic history and to my readings of specific *novela negra* series, I would like to dwell momentarily here on its polysemic value. On the authority of The *Oxford Universal Dictionary on Historical Principals*, to plot is in the first place *To make a plan, map or diagram of (an existing object [or space]). It is likewise to represent by a plan or diagram (the course of any action*
or process). A final sense of this term, and the one most commonly associated with detective fiction, is that of To scheme, lay plans, contrive, conspire (Onions). Throughout its history, the detective novel has been understood as a genre that privileges narrative plotting over virtually all other considerations, while the original function of the detective has been defined as one of urban mapping. Beginning with the publication of his first novel in 1976, Taibo adopts the conventions of a certain detective fiction in order, precisely, to plot the city that was only then being recognized as what we now call the megalopolis: an urban concentration exploding the bounds of rational measure and historical precedent.

Although the term neopoliciaaco seems somewhat misleading in light of the antagonistic role generally accorded the police in such fiction, it is understood to refer to a strain of the novela negra as previously defined. Following its origin in the 1920s and 1930s, the U.S. hard-boiled formula eclipsed previous detective styles in popularity around the time of World War II, and its commercial impact was soon felt in foreign markets as well, as indicated in Chapter 1. This new and less precious mode of detective fiction was distinguished not only by its abandonment of logical puzzles and its distinctively blunt language but also by its definitive location in urban American environments. In a 1970 article on Raymond Chandler, Frederic Jameson discussed the specific importance of his urban locales and proposed that Chandler’s Los Angeles was a literary microcosm that forecast the development of social life in the United States as a whole. Chandler’s Los Angeles is, in Jameson’s words, a new, centerless city in which the various classes have lost touch with each other because each is isolated in [its] own geographical compartment (127). Jameson saw Chandler’s peripatetic detective protagonist as the modern equivalent of the picaro, a figure who can be superimposed on the society as a whole, whose routine and life pattern serve somehow to tie its separate and isolated parts together, thus affording an approximation of the sweeping social knowledge so confidently proffered in the centralized, panoptical nineteenth-century realist novel (127). The availability of this specifically Hispanic precedent for the hard-boiled detective would not fail to attract the attention of later Spanish-language writers.

What Chandler and other hard-boiled writers understood is that any knowledge afforded by fiction will be necessarily oblique and partial, both in its incompleteness and its tendentious subjectivity. What they capture best, according to Jameson, are two extremes of American life: the impersonal and seedy urban margins belonging to the mass, collective side of our society and, at the opposite pole, those sanctuaries of wealth and power, invisible and thus infinitely fascinating to the public.
It is this exercise in the articulation of atomistic urban localities that is taken up by Taibo and other Mexican writers from their U.S. counterparts and adapted to the even more daunting and unmanageable contemporary Mexican cityscapes. Failing again to anticipate this appropriation, Monsiváis did echo Jameson in identifying the features of hard-boiled narrative that would prove most useful to Taibo and his colleagues. In the work of Chandler and others, Monsiváis wrote, 

[T]he detective turns out to be one of the most apt keys to the interpretation of the environment, and the city can by no means be considered plot decoration or a scenographic complement. The city is perhaps the fundamental character... it is the character and it is the enemy (the model being Los Angeles). The detective traverses it and in multiple ways exhibits its brilliant surfaces and its hiding places, its death chambers and its deserted avenues. (6)

Hard-boiled private eyes have succeeded where classical detectives failed in Mexico, not as heroic defenders of bourgeois civilization (as Chesterton would have it) but as ground-level interpreters of a city harboring few illusions of disinterested justice. As Persephone Braham has noted (82), Taibo’s detective inspects the city from below in an investigative practice very reminiscent of Michel de Certeau’s notion of walking as an appropriation of urban space and as a form of resistance to totalizing urbanism.6

It is worth noting that, in enumerating the characteristics of the *neopoliciaico*, Taibo accords priority to the urban component. It is defined, in his words, by an obsession with cities; a recurring thematic incidence of problems of the state as a generator of crime, corruption and political arbitrariness (quoted in Balibrea-Enríquez 50). Elsewhere Taibo explained the genesis of the genre as follows: My incursion in the detective novel is due to the city I in which I happened to live, a city that in the 1970s was in full-blown decomposition, with the beginning of the lumpenization of the state, an apparatus whereby crime became a state monopoly (quoted in Blanco). In his various series of detective novels, with frequent topographical references to precise landmarks, streets, and neighborhoods, Taibo plots points on an urban field that no individual imagination can comprehensively grasp. At the same time, he presents an understanding of power in Mexico as a plot against democracy, and involves us in a counterplot against policemen and politicians run wildly amuck. His detectives are pedestrian guides who show us the city as they
plod and plot the infinite streets in hopes of reclaiming them for common citizens.

I use the pronoun us here to reflect Taibo’s insistent interpolation of the reader into a collective subjectivity designated by the pronoun nosotros and invariably opposed to that of ellos, to whom he sometimes also refers less charitably as los hijos de la chingada, a deeply Mexican phrase translating loosely as those sons of bitches but bearing strong connotations of treachery. In one of his bolder gestures of generic innovation, Taibo grafts a libertarian socialist ideology onto the heroic narrative framework of the hard-boiled novel, challenging the individualistic and nihilistic orientation of much of contemporary U.S. hard-boiled fiction by introducing socialist concepts of social class and solidarity in his staging of justice.7 Taibo’s protagonists are private investigators in the tradition of Sam Spade and Phillip Marlowe, but their concerns are far from private and their effectiveness depends almost entirely on the collaboration of the friends, acquaintances, and strangers who constitute the solidarious collectivity of la raza. In the introduction to Crimes Against the State, Crimes Against Persons, which is the most recent critical study of the neopoliciaxo in English, Braham has accounted as follows for the origins of the distinctive political vocation that most clearly distinguishes the Latin American neopoliciaxo from its U.S. antecedents.

The neopoliciaxo is more overtly political and leftist than the American hard-boiled novel. . . . Latin American writers have adopted the genre in the years since [1968] precisely because it permits a critical scrutiny of their social institutions in the light of modern liberal principles and their late-twentieth-century manifestations in the ideological narratives of neoliberalism and globalization. Contemporary Hispanic detective fiction is an explicitly ideological literature with international connections. Its leftist politics were honed in the international student movements of 1968, Spain’s post-Franco transition period, Argentina’s Dirty War, and the Cuban Revolution. (xiii, xv)

Despite the intensity of this political engagement, hard-boiled Latin American detective fiction has rarely been written in direct service of a specific political platform. The only obvious exception, as Braham recounts in her study, would be the case of Cuba, where the detective novel was officially promoted as an instrument of revolutionary socialist ideology beginning in 1972 and with lamentable results.

In addition to defining themselves through political solidarity and in opposition to corrupt institutions of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) regime, Taibo’s protagonists also define themselves by
what they read. Through frequent and politically tendentious literary references and allusions, they seek kinship with other readers, including ourselves. As Taibo’s detectives move through the city, they read and even understand themselves as literary constructions. His best known detective character, Héctor Belascoarán Shayne, is a connoisseur of Chandler, Chester Himes, and Ross MacDonald but boasts of never having read a single British mystery novel. Belascoarán is also a faithful reader of the modernists Dos Passos, Hemingway, and Malraux, and at a certain point he discovers the social novels of Pío Baroja, which I will emphasize as an important link to the picaresque tradition.

**The Taibo Model**

Taibo’s plotting of Mexico City occurs primarily in the first six novels of the Belascoarán series (1976-90) and in two others protagonized by a young reporter named Olga Lavanderos: *Sintiendo que el campo de batalla* . . . (Sensing that the Battlefield . . . 1989) and *Que todo es imposible* (Everything’s Impossible, 1995). As rendered by Taibo, Belascoarán is an electromechanical engineer of Basque and Irish parentage who impulsively renounces a managerial position in a Mexican General Electric plant and a comfortable domestic existence in the Colonia Nápoles to assume the anomalous and uncertain role of Mexican independent detective. Aside from a license bought by mail, Belascoarán has no qualifications and invents the role as he goes along, borrowing techniques from his readings and attitudes from Humphrey Bogart. His methods are exactly those of the U.S. hard-boiled private eye. In the novel *Algunas nubes* (*Some Clouds*, 1985), the narrator explains them as follows.

Héctor, who didn’t believe in logical thinking, hadn’t even brought a notebook. He just sat and listened. Waiting for something. Waiting to know where to start, a street, a corner. Something to lead him into other people’s lives, other people’s deaths, other people’s ghosts. One way or another it all boiled down to a question of streets, avenues, parks, it was a question of walking, of pecking around and sorting out. Hector only knew one method. He’d throw himself bodily into someone else’s story until the story became his own. (*Some Clouds* 19)

Whereas the classical bourgeois detective was conceived as a thinking machine, or in Monsiváis’s words an incorporeal mind, the hard-boiled private eye has grown flesh and muscles. He is a dynamic, violent, and intrusive body, in keeping with Salvador Vázquez de Parga’s account of the distinction between ratiocinative and hard-boiled crime fiction:
[T]he function of the enigma serves in the novela negra only as a guiding thread to justify the detective’s adventure and his intrusion into environments and landscapes that are not his own (Viaje 21).

In his 1976 debut, Días de combate, Taibo’s detective wanders the city from evening until morning, in hopes of crossing paths with a serial strangler who scatters victims from the fringes of Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl to the northern industrial zone. The apprenticeship in detective work consists first and foremost of going out onto the street and circulating through central areas, as well as marginal areas where prudent middle-class citizens would not venture. Through his incessant roaming the detective forms a mental map of faces, places, gestures, which allows him to feel for the first time that the city is his. At times he refers to this labor as putting ground under his feet. The climactic confrontation with the strangler takes place in the basement of an extravagantly appointed mansion in the affluent neighborhood of Las Lomas, much in keeping with Hammett and Chandler’s vision of corruption as emanating from the sanctuaries of wealth and privilege. The detective’s arrival at this climax is not due to virtuosic feats of deductive reasoning, but rather to a stubborn and sometimes reckless commitment to action, to putting himself in harm’s way in order to shake up the situation. At the conclusion of Días de combate, Belascoarán acknowledges his inability to reach into the realm of even more powerful criminals protected by the state, but in all the subsequent novels, this is precisely what he persists in attempting.

While Taibo’s detective protagonists clearly emulate the quasi- or neopicaresque operations of U.S. private eyes, they do so largely without the benefit of the certain minimal resources enjoyed by their predecessors. The democratic detective Belascoarán, for example, prefers Mexico City’s labyrinthine network of public transportation to the private automobile, an emblematic attribute of the U.S. private eye, and so covers the city on foot, in taxis, on buses, and peseros, and, whenever possible, by train. Especially in Días de combate, the detective surrenders himself to intimate subterranean contact with the multitude as part of his difficult redemption from the privileged existence of the professional managerial class. He now studies the ugly industrial suburbs through which he once commuted by car, and he now investigates the remote urban horrors he once tried not to imagine (An Easy Thing 58). Like the old Belascoarán, the novel’s capitalist villain cruises the streets enjoying the insulation provided by his Dodge Dart, surrounded by hygienic solitude, the purifying sound of the radio, the air conditioning, the automobile’s smooth glide as if through clouds and cotton (Días de combate 161).
Thus, while the strangler sleeps alone in an enormous bed in a vast mansion, the detective makes do in a cramped apartment and a shabby office shared with other workers. His home is inundated with smells and sounds from other apartments, and his office with the noise of traffic and pop music from a record store downstairs. In the megalopolis, the ultimate luxury is comfortable privacy, which provides at least an illusion of social hygiene amid twenty million promiscuously packed bodies. Belascoarán can no longer afford it. Like other hard-boiled private eyes, the Mexican independent detective is defined by his workspace as one marginal professional among many, surrounded by lawyers, phantom businesses, small shady unions, a old dentist wrinkled by the passage of time without clients, a distributer of children’s books, and a smelly and excessively close bathroom (Días de combate 14). The economy being what it is, however, he cannot afford a secretary, and the plumber who rents him a corner of an office rents the remaining corners to an upholsterer and a deep-drainage engineer.

In Taibo’s fiction, modes of transportation and domestic and professional accommodations are significant because it is by following the detective’s interactions with strangers, neighbors, friends, and relatives that the reader is thrust into the oceanic flux of social life in the megalopolis. As I mentioned previously, it is not long after undertaking his first investigation that Belascoarán recognizes the necessity of creating a solid social environment for himself, one full of strange friendships if he is to survive in his new line of work (Días de combate 115). The dichotomy of solitude and solidarity is a constant in these novels: one acts by venturing forth into urban society, or one surrenders by barricading oneself in one’s apartment and eventually dying in front of the television. Belascoarán’s contacts not only provide him with allies but also bring historical and ideological perspectives to his investigations. His brother, for example, is a radical labor activist; his landlord is a Republican veteran of the Spanish civil war; and one of his coworkers is a lifelong anarchist. These characters shape the detective’s understanding of political power and corruption in the city as he investigates case after case in which government officials are revealed promoters or agents of the most sinister crimes. Belascoarán comments that coexistence with his coworkers allows him to see himself as just another artisan, and their professional activities clearly complement his own in various ways. As the detective labors to open the city like the fetid stomach of a whale, or a can of spoiled preserves (Días de combate 25), the plumber intrudes in people’s bathrooms and toils to clear blocked pipes, the upholsterer rips the guts out of old furniture, and the deep-drainage engineer pores over blueprints of the capital’s sewer...
system, pausing periodically to expound on the ever-impending prospect of a city swamped by its own filth.

**Abundance without Cohesion**

One of Taibo’s merits as a writer is surely his ability to populate his fictional city with characters diverse and preposterous enough to hint at the mindboggling proliferation of individuals in the Mexican megalopolis. As his detectives plod the streets, they meet, observe, and register the constituents of the multitude: beggars, street vendors, schoolchildren, fire eaters, indigenous immigrants, musicians, commuters, policemen, and drug dealers—short, the untold legions of desperate survivors making their tens of millions of daily journeys across la mancha urbana (the urban stain). Along with all of them, the detectives suffer and complain about lethal smog, crushing inflation, economic austerity measures, deteriorating infrastructure, rampant street crime, and ever more visible human misery in a city, and a country, where the bad guys are eternally in power. Often, as in the vivid sixth chapter of *Sintiendo que el campo de batalla...*, Taibo employs his protagonists as privileged witnesses to and chroniclers of the countless varieties of private and official violence by which residents of the city are beset. Yet amid chaos and despair, Taibo’s detectives also perceive the basis for the perpetuation of life and creativity. In the following exemplary paragraph, drawn from the conclusion of *Regreso a la misma ciudad y bajo la lluvia* (Return to the Same City, 1989), Belascoarán surveys his neighborhood at dawn.

He opened the window. Sleepy children were going to the corners to wait for the school bus. Maids on the way with milk. Drunks going home. Industrial workers starting the hazardous hour-and-a-half trip to the assembly line. Adolescents absolutely lovelorn, convinced that they wouldn’t be loved this time either. Writers who hadn’t slept well going out to take a walk before getting into bed to dream with their eyes open about the novel that wasn’t coming out. Circus magicians mentally practicing the marvelous act that had kept them awake. Farmers without land coming from far away to loathe the bureaucrats of the Agrarian Reform as they stood in line. Remorseful suicides. Pregnant and early-rising mothers; teachers who pulled ingenious algebra lessons out of their hats; insurance salespeople who didn’t believe in insurance; miraculous subway conductors; physicists who couldn’t be like Leonardo da Vinci; journalists on the way home; lottery salespeople who would never win; FM radio station announcers on their way to the job, who knew that once again they would read false news and who dreamed of one of these days passing on the information that was denied them; proud old people who no longer knew...
how to sleep; nurses of the soul; stray dogs; unpublished poets; blacklisted film directors; democratic bureaucrats on the verge of being fired; rock drummers; compulsive Althusser readers; teenagers swaggering defiantly at six in the morning who couldn’t stop believing they owned a city that adored them; Cardenista bricklayers, zealous conservators of the skill of laying bricks vertically without plumb lines. All the manufacturers of different metropolises, of apparently impossible futures, on their way to the routines pretending that they would be the ones to one day make the city blossom like a flower and become another. (Return to the Same City 176 77)

Here Taibo pays direct homage to early twentieth-century Spanish novelist Pío Baroja by rewriting the conclusion of Baroja’s La busca (The Quest, 1903), one of the most celebrated works of urban naturalism written in Spanish.9 In this and other similar passages, serial enunciation and staccato syntax evoke the flow of fragments and what Swensen called the abundance without cohesion so characteristic of urban experience. Through proliferative enumeration, Taibo evokes the sensation Chesterton described, the sense of urban magic arising from the accumulation of mysteries and of unknown lives in the wild and obvious cityscape. Like Chesterton, he sees the laying of bricks as a exemplary manifestation of the civilizing enterprise, and here at least he regards with cautious optimism the determination of ordinary (and extraordinary) Mexicans to survive and create under the most adverse conditions. Unlike Chesterton, however, Taibo sees local agents of political and economic power and of police management as exploiters and oppressors rather than defenders of such creativity, and it is for this reason that he adopts hard-boiled discourse.

Ecology of Fear

The hard-boiled detective novel has always represented sprawling urban environments where power is guarded by corrupt and conspiratorial elites, such as Chandler’s Los Angeles, Mickey Spillane’s New York, and Brett Halliday’s Miami. As critics have noted, the hard-boiled cityscape that first emerged in the novels of Dashiell Hammett was shaped by the urban fiction of contemporary Naturalist writers and by the muckraking of early twentieth-century journalists, such as Lincoln Steffans (Cawelti 154; Grella 105; Porter 172). The hard-boiled depiction of the city as a place of moral desolation, criminal and capitalist savagery, and endemic vice and violence must be linked historically to public anxieties generated by a harrowing boom in organized criminality during Prohibition
(1920–33), as well as to more general cultural effects of the postwar period and the Depression. Especially in peripheral cities such as Los Angeles, rapid and vast accumulations of legal and illicit capital compromised and undermined legal and political institutions, providing endless scandals for the sensationalist press and endless plots for crime novelists.

As I suggested in Chapter I, a steep decline in public security in Latin American cities during the neoliberal period likewise constitutes one of the unmistakable extraliterary factors determining the trajectory of Spanish-language crime fiction on this side of the Atlantic. The theme of intensified urban violence is one to which I will return repeatedly in subsequent chapters, but I might begin to substantiate this trend by quoting an overview presented by Venezuelan sociologists Roberto Briceño-León and Verónica Zubillaga in an article from 2002:

The last few decades have witnessed an unprecedented growth in the homicide rate in Latin America. There now prevails a daily violence in magnitudes never known in the past, occurring at the same time the region has been feeling the impact of the changes in global society. Latin America had previously had the reputation of being a violent region, but the situation was quite different until the mid-1980s; some countries, such as Mexico, Brazil and Venezuela, had the same homicide rates as the United States, while the rates in other countries, such as Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Costa Rica, were two or even three times lower. . . . Homicide rates began to rise in almost every country of the region towards the end of the 1980s, affecting both countries with a long tradition of violence such as Colombia and others which had traditionally been peaceful like Costa Rica. This trend continued in the 1990s, to the point where the number of victims of violence increased three to four times over the course of 20 years. (19)

Like other researchers, Briceño-León and Zubillaga attribute this sharp increase in violence to a combination of economic stagnation and impoverishment with increased expectations for consumption fueled by the discourses and values of global consumer capitalism. Comparing national rates of homicidal violence in Latin America at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Briceño-León and Zubillaga place Brazil, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela in an intermediate category defined by annual homicide rates between ten and thirty-nine per one hundred thousand inhabitants. These rates are intermediate only in comparison with extremely high rates, exceeding forty per one hundred thousand, in other countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala, and Colombia.
While it is not sufficient to explain the emergence of hard-boiled crime fiction as a simple effect of this intensification of criminal violence, as Persephone Braham warns (46), it is also impossible to disassociate the contemporary fiction from a growth in urban violence that is undermining the rule of law in Latin America and propagating a low-intensity war in which thousands of Latin Americans die every year (Briceño-León and Zubillaga 34). In order to explain the relatively recent advent of the Mexican hard-boiled detective novel, I do think it helpful to consider a parallel between the urban chaos unleashed in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s and the integration of what Monsiváis has called an ecology of fear in the Mexican capital in recent decades. Sustained and intensified in Mexico by the ecological, economic, and political crises alluded to earlier, this ecology of fear was arguably initiated by the emergence in the 1970s of a new and virulent strain of criminality organized from within the Mexican state and leading to a drastic deterioration in public security, especially in the capital by the mid 1990s. So drastic has been the state’s failure to protect its citizens during this period that by 1999 one study found that 70 percent of Mexico City residents saw the police not only as weak and incapable of resolving insecurity but also as directly involved in delinquency (López Portillo Vargas 20). Taibo, who was a historian before he was a novelist, is extremely explicit in linking violent repression of the student movement of 1968 and the antiguerrilla dirty war of the 1970s to the subsequent mafiazation of police forces within the capital and elsewhere. For example, the investigation in Taibo’s most successful detective novel to date, *No habrá final feliz* (*No Happy Ending*, 1981), reveals a criminal conspiracy originating, ironically, in the very 1971 attack on Mexican students that Monsiváis cited as evidence of the triumph of state criminality and the consequent inviability of fiction of detective justice in Mexico.

As the first epigraph to his first novel, Taibo chose a quote from an unspecified text by Leon Trotsky, which reads, Feeling that the battlefield belonged to him, he began to act according to his own means. Twelve years later, introducing a novel with a new detective protagonist, Taibo explained in a preface his decision to draw its title from that same quote: it helped me then to put onto paper the feeling I had in those years that the city that once had been ours was slipping through our hands, and that the possession of the battlefield was only an illusion. That feeling returned in the mid eighties (Sintiendo que el campo de batalla . . . 7) The master plot in Taibo’s novels is that of the Mexican state, long dominated by the PRI, to exploit and deceive the Mexican populace, and it is staged primarily in the megalopolitan theater of Mexico City. The
pyramidal structure of this authoritarian conspiracy is comprised of technocrats, officers of local and regional police forces, and an associated class of paid thugs and protected criminals (el hampa policiaco). Also implicated, as I have indicated, are an elite of criminally compromised capitalists whose interests this political system usually protects. These agents conspire to animate what Taibo has called the monster of the capitalist state, which he holds responsible for the immiseration and disenfranchisement of the megalopolitan masses.

The Monstrous City

It is interesting to juxtapose here Taibo’s representation of the mood of the city the 1970s, ’80s, and ’90s with the observations of Néstor García Canclini. García Canclini states, for example, that while the awareness of catastrophe in Mexico City was not generalized until after the 1985 earthquake, the failure of the urban industrial model of national development was well evident there by the mid-1970s, when demographic explosion and global economic trends canceled the promise of prosperity through modernization and turned the capital into what Belascoarán sadly calls the world’s biggest city at its own expense, the biggest cemetery of dreams (Return to the Same City 48). The anomie and alienation that both Taibo and Romero posit as the very mood in the megalopolis was also cited by Kevin Lynch as a universal effect of existence in an environment that resists mental totalization and whose orientating axes are no longer immediately apprehensible, as García Canclini recalls in Imaginarios Urbanos (132). As Lynch and García Canclini agree, dealientation requires a reconquering of the sense of place and a reconstruction of intelligible geographies. García Canclini notes that, in real life, the immensity of the megalopolis usually prevents even the most well-intentioned social movements from comprehending the root causes of local crises, even as they enact initiatives of reterritorialization in the face of cultural and economic deterritorialization on a global scale. I would maintain that the plotting and mapping undertaken by Taibo’s detectives is a symbolic initiative of reterritorialization on a local scale, as well as an initiative of cognitive mapping of the greater political and ideological reality of Mexican life during the period of transition to neoliberalism.

Throughout Taibo’s novels, the metaphors that he selects to represent the unrepresentable city are beastly: it is a bloodthirsty monster, a vulture, a hyena, a porcupine, or a whale in whose fetid stomach the populace languishes. García Canclini’s research into the behavior and attitude of Mexico City commuters confirms as dominant the perception of the city
as a hostile environment, as a maze of hazards that must be negotiated on a daily basis and from which one retretes on evenings and weekends. I have mentioned that Taibo’s detectives are resisters of solitude, defiers of the pervasive fear that promotes defensive isolation or autism as a survival strategy. García Canclini, in turn, explains encapsulation as a fundamental dynamic of urban life in a period in which modern forms of citizenship and sociability are being superceded. The citizenry retreats from the streets, bars, cafes, theaters, cinemas, parks, and sports arenas, into the refuge of a domestic sphere now electronically equipped for entertainment (television, radio, VCR, and the home computer). At the same time there occurs what anthropologists call a historical encapsulation, as a deterritorialized or global culture of the moment arrives through electronic media and reassigns citizens as consumers in a transcendent market with no binding stake in the national past.

In the face of such developments, Taibo’s attitude is unmistakably nostalgic and defiant. His detectives strive to reclaim lost territories, plot history, suture urban fragments or microlandscapes, and thus rearticulate a disintegrated Mexico. If, as Jameson claims, Raymond Chandler provided the literary microcosm of centerless and socially atomized Los Angeles, Taibo certainly provides the same for the Mexican megalopolis, a city disintegrated in a centerless space whose limits are not quite known (García Canclini, Consumidores y ciudadanos 72). In Taibo’s political geography, criminal plots are hatched from within the sanctuaries of power (mansions, corporate offices, police stations), while opponents of corrupt authority risk their lives by walking the lawless streets. Confronting systemic corruption on a megalopolitan scale, Belascoarán is defined by the meagerness of his resources, and his objectives could be summarized in the motto: you just play to survive and to keep on fucking with the other guy (Some Clouds 102). As Taibo has stated in interviews, he considers the era of the solitary and victorious detective hero definitively over, and the only adventure worth imagining now is that of the individual act in collaboration with the social (quoted in Ramírez and Rodríguez-Sifontes 42). He posits the disintegration of the apparatus of the state in conjunction with the integration of urban geographies and communities of dissent.

**Urban Surveillance and Cognitive Mapping**

In his various series, Taibo exemplifies the conception of the hard-boiled private detective as a body propelled through the streets and as a vulnerable but vigilant surveyor who inspects the city, recording and processing
it for us like a remote mobile camera: His eyes like those of a vulture, like
the center of a telescopic sight kept accumulating unconscious observa-
tions, desires, dreams, suggestions (Días de combate 24). In this sense,
Taibo’s protagonists align with the original model of the modern detective
whose well-documented visual and descriptive vocation, symbolized
as much by the iconic Holmesian magnifying glass as by the U.S. term
private eye, identifies him as the most popular and clearly defined agent
of the panoptical aspirations of nineteenth-century realist narrative
toward absolute surveillance (Miller 35). In the words of Dennis
Porter, the Great Detective of fiction had himself the essential qualities
of the unseen seer, who stands at the center of the social Panopticon and
employs his science’ to make all things visible on behalf of the forces of
order (125). Though contemptuous of scientific methods and lately
one-eyed, due to an injury sustained in one of the earlier novels,
Belascoarán in particular encarnates the generic quest for visual and episteme
logical command of the cityscape, the culmination of which seems
to come in the most recent and bizarre novel in the series.

In Muertos Incómodos (The Uncomfortable Dead, 2005), written in col-
laboration with Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos of the Ejército
Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, Taibo reintroduced the character of
Belascoarán after an eleven-year hiatus, and the detective’s brief exertions
in this latest novela negra epitomize the panoptical aspirations of the
detective agent, as well as any of his previous outings. On the first page
of his first chapter, Taibo places Belascoarán on a rooftop where he sur-
veys a jungle of proliferating antennas.

Belascoarán lit his final cigarette and gave himself the seven minutes it
would last before leaving his perch. Over the last few months, he had
begun to prefer seeing Mexico City from above. From the highest roofs
and bridges he could find. It was less harmful that way, more like a city,
just a solid thing as far as the eye could see. He liked it and still likes it.
(The Uncomfortable Dead 29)

Yet as Taibo, at the instigation of Marcos, revives the vigilant detective, a
weariness pervades the rehearsal of familiar activities and sentiments: It’s
already becoming a cliché, this notion of being tied to the city by an
umbilical cord. . . . The sleepless Belascoarán was looking out his window
on the neon night and reviewing his own words. He was feeling like the
last of the Mohicans (The Uncomfortable Dead 42–43). In the novel’s
climax, the aging detective confronts an aging former dirty warrior in a
run-down office on the forty-first floor of the Torre Latinoamericana, the
1950s-era skyscraper that once symbolized Mexican modernity, but whose symbolic preeminence the detective now recognizes as eroded.

For many years, the Latinoamericana Tower had been the center of Mexico City. . . . There, in the shadow of the tallest building in Mexico, people intending to commit suicide would congregate, so much so that they wound up fencing in the scenic observation deck. But the place was also frequented by young couples visiting the sky bar, from where you could see almost to the edge of the known world. But now, however, the Latinoamericana Tower was no longer the tallest building in the biggest city in the world. And some people were saying that it was not even the biggest city in the world anymore. . . . In any case, with all the pollution there were precious few days when you could see anything at all from the observation deck. And in the final rat-shit analysis, just to finish fucking it completely, Mexico City had lost its center . . . there was no center at all what had been the center was now a collection of neighborhoods whose inhabitants didn’t know their neighbors and rarely even went outside to contemplate the dangerous splendor of the urban world. (The Uncomfortable Dead 259 60)

Though Belascoarán triumphs in the climactic confrontation, the visual command and symbolic ascendancy he exerts by precipitating the death of his antagonist in a fall down the stairs of the tower is dimished by the recognition of the building’s decadence and by these allusions to the impairment of visibility and to the atomization of urban life. Even when installed in former center of the modern megalopolis, this detective agent no longer aspires confidently to bind the dispersive fragments of which Jameson spoke. He recognizes, rather, the anachronism of his struggle even as he plays it out, and the pleasurable prospect of viewing and comprehending the cityscape as an integrated whole ( a solid thing ) seems ultimately discredited.

It is here that I will pause to reflect on the relevance of Jameson’s concept of cognitive mapping to the narrative procedures of the novela negra, as exemplified in the first instance by Taibo. As expounded in a 1988 essay and later in Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Jameson’s notion of cognitive mapping draws, like García Canclini’s observations previously cited, on Kevin Lynch’s thesis in The Image of the City that urban alienation is directly proportional to the mental unmapability of local cityscapes (Jameson, Cognitive 283). Jameson’s own conception involves, as he states, an extrapolation of Lynch’s spatial analysis to the realm of social structure, that is to say, in our historical moment, to the totality of class relations on a global (or
should I say multinational) scale. Jameson concludes his proposition by claiming that an aesthetic of cognitive mapping is . . . an integral part of any socialist political project, given that the incapacity to map socially is as crippling to political experience as the analogous incapacity to map spatially is for urban experience (283). Though Jameson’s primary concern is with mapping the form of some (unrepresentable, imaginary) global social totality (286) associated with postmodernism and with the historical moment he calls, following Ernest Mandel, late capitalism, my own proposal is for a more local praxis enacted by the *novela negra* and involving the mapping of specific urban geographies and the social and power relations inscribed upon them.

For Jameson, one of the principle of indicators of a striving toward cognitive mapping in postmodernist narrative is the omnipresence of the theme of paranoia as it expresses itself in a seemingly inexhaustible production of conspiracy plots of the most elaborate kinds. Conspiracy, one is tempted to say, is the poor person’s cognitive mapping in the postmodern age; it is a degraded figure of the total logic of late capital, a desperate attempt to represent the latter’s system (Cognitive 286). As has been suggested by my review of Taibo’s novels here, the *novela negra* thrives on just such a poor person’s conspiratorial view of corrupt power in a metropolitan environment in which, as Jameson observes with respect to the social world created by global capitalism, the truth of the phenomenological experience of the individual subject . . . no longer coincides with the place in which . . . that limited daily experience transpires (278). Jameson’s contention that the overarching structural coordinates determining individual lives in the global system are no longer accessible to immediate lived experience and are often not even conceptualizable for most people (278) relates closely to the *novela negra*’s programmatic insistence on the occult criminality of power (the monster of the capitalist state) and its ritual tracking of agents of criminal power to their urban lairs (most emblematically, perhaps, the Torre Latinoamericana). If it is the espionage novel, with all its paranoia and problematization of identities, that most explicitly thematizes the global power relations of which Jameson speaks, the *novela negra* may be said to undertake a similar enterprise of cognitive mapping on a more local and urban scale. In Latin America, this enterprise has often been motivated, like Jameson’s model, by a yearning for a socialist cohesion (Taibo’s hortatory we) with which to resist the socially dispersive impact of consumer capitalism, felt most acutely during the neoliberal period.
While Taibo stands as by far the most prolific exponent of the *novela negra* in Mexico, and while his narrative may serve as the exemplar of cognitive mapping in the hard-boiled detective mode, I will also pause here to address the text generally recognized as the most substantial precedent for the Mexican *neopolicíaco*, Rafael Bernal’s *El complot mongol* (The Mongolian Conspiracy, 1969), an utterly hard-boiled text that also constitutes one of the few Mexican contributions to the espionage genre. In Bernal’s novel, a disenchanted veteran of the Mexican revolution collaborates with agents of the FBI and the KGB to investigate a plot to assassinate the presidents of the United States and Mexico in Mexico City. In the course of the investigation, the Chinese communist assassination plot of Bernal’s title is revealed as a screen designed to justify a coup prepared by Mexican politicians and military officers, and in this respect the novel anticipates the *novela negra*’s view of Mexican political and economic elites as conspiratorial and criminally corrupt. Bernal’s protagonist also anticipates the urban activity of subsequent Mexican detectives in his incessant movement between domestic spaces, the streets of the metropolis, and the enclaves of political power where violent policies are dictated.

In contrast with the far-ranging movements of later Mexico City detectives, those of Bernal’s protagonist in *El complot mongol* are limited to a fairly small zone consisting of the historic city center and the Colonia Guerrero, but the places he visits and which constitute the geography of the novel do directly anticipate the contrast of extremes that continues to structure the *novela negra*. The investigation begins with an assignment received in the office of a coronel of the armed forces and ends in the private study of a government minister, but in between these endpoints the plot leads through the Chinese-run cafés and businesses in the neighborhood of the Calle Dolores, a prostitute’s tenement apartment, a seedy hotel, an opium den, and a series of grim downtown bars. Variously marginal, sordid and mysterious (all things Chinese being mysterious and potentially sinister from Bernal’s racist perspective), these low and recondite urban sites typify the hard-boiled predilection for *bajos fondos* (low urban places) and for imagining criminal conspiracies binding the two mystifyingly remote social extremes. Bernal’s mapping of sites of danger and violence in *El complot mongol* has been noted by genre critic Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz in the following terms:

This is a novel of intrigue founded on the urban: Mexico City is here the seat and scenario of crimes and investigations, of violent and amorous encounters. The city is a trap and a labyrinth, a hiding place and a lure, a
participant in and a witness to everything that goes on, whether in an apartment building, the Chinese cafés of the Calle Dolores, Avenida Juárez or the center of the Mexico City where ghosts from various and contrasting eras coincide. (48)

This hard-boiled conception of the megalopolis constitutes one of the primary contributions by Bernal to definition of the Mexican novela negra as consolidated in the 1970s and 1980s primarily by Taibo and Rafael Ramírez Heredia. Ilan Stavans considers El complot mongol a sort of template for Taibo II especially in that Bernal sketches a literary map of Mexico City, not from the aesthetic perspective of [Carlos] Fuentes in Where the Air is Clear, but on the level of a rubbish heap, a cesspool of violence, drugs, blood, and crime. Taibo follows Bernal’s lead in employing a truly hard-boiled narrative language, swift, pared-down and profane, but also in practicing a narrative mapping that delves deeply into the farthest reaches of debased and miserable lives (Stavans 97).

As Stavans and other critics acknowledge, Mexico City has been the dominant scenario in Mexican detective fiction since well before the ascendancy of the novela negra variant. It is only after Bernal, however, that writers such as Taibo and Ramírez Heredia fully embrace the hard-boiled vision and pay tribute to the Distrito Federal, with its mysterious niches, its labyrinthine passions, and its growing misery. They describe markets, factories, bars, slums, violent areas, prostitutes on corners, sewers, government offices (Stavans 119). As the second most celebrated practitioner of the novela negra in Mexico City, Ramírez Heredia traces his own geography of the megalopolis in a series of investigations exploring, as always, the criminal activities of political authorities. Unlike his predecessors in the novels of Bernal and Taibo, Ramírez Heredia’s detective Ifgenio Clausel resides outside the city center, in the southern delegación of Coyoacán, but his investigations lead him through numerous colonias and from cantinas and cabarets to the mansions and offices of the political elite. The representation of the latter is of particular interest in Ramírez Heredia’s novels, since it is in the domestic and professional spaces of power that corruption is staged and hard-boiled punishment administered. Trampa de metal (Metal Trap, 1979) features an investigation into a murder committed by a criminal organization trading in stolen or misappropriated cars and headed by the subordinates of a government minister, and the novel concludes with detective Ifgenio Clausel’s lethal confrontation of the criminal bureaucrats in the elegant residence of a government undersecretary in a wealthy Pedregal neighborhood. The fantasy of retribution for illicit enrichment recurs in
Muerte en la carretera (Death on the Highway, 1985), in which Clausel’s investigation into the murder of a politician leads through sites such as a downtown penthouse with a commanding view of the Paseo de la Reforma where congressmen hold orgies with prostitutes (53). The investigation again ends with the detective hearing the confession of morally disgraced and criminally complicit members of the Mexican economic and political elite in a setting emblematic of unjustly attained privilege, in this case a sprawling, walled mansion in the Colonia Florida.

The fundamental significance of this scenario of retribution is confirmed by its repetition in other pioneering works of the Latin American novela negra. The first of Taibo’s Belascoarán novels, Días de combate, stages a climactic confrontations in the residence of a wealthy businessman in Las Lomas, while the second, Cosa fácil (An Easy Thing, 1977), culminates in a dynamite assault on a castle located, again, in Pedregal and utilized, again, for orgies, this time involving government ministers and actresses. In Chile, Ramón Díaz Eterovic initiated Latin America’s other most enduring detective series with a novel whose ending is nearly identical to that of Cosa fácil. In La ciudad está triste (The City Is Sad, 1987), published during the final years of the Pinochet regime, Díaz Eterovic’s detective mounts a climactic assault on a luxurious cabaret that doubles as a torture center for the security forces of a country never named but identical to Chile. If the investigation in a typical hard-boiled plot discovers a web of conspiracy that reflects the presence of a hidden criminal organization and leads back to the rich and respectable levels of society, ultimately exposing the corrupt relationship between the pillars of the community and the criminal underground (Cawelti 148–49), one distinction of the Latin American neopoliciaico is its denunciation of the criminal alliances underpinning specific governmental regimes such as those of Pinochet in Chile or the PRI in Mexico. By tracing the origin of plausibly realistic crimes back to the dwelling places of the commercial, professional and political elites who benefited from such undemocratic regimes, and by exacting symbolic retribution on fictional representatives of these elites, the neopoliciaico maps dynamics of power and exclusion as it surveys the city, opposing and relating bastions of privilege to the worst parts of town (An Easy Thing 218) or, in the more colorful original text, las colonias más jodidas (Cosa fácil 185).

**Criminal Ascendancy**

The vigorous mapping of the metropolis and the administration of vigilante justice that characterize the Mexican neopoliciaico of the 1970s and
1980s seem to have been superceded during the 1990s by a mutation in the narrative model, whose historical basis I will venture to explain as follows. As previously indicated, economic crisis, combined with the imposition of neoliberal policies and the explosion of narcotrafficking during recent decades have led to a precipitous deterioration in public security in Mexico and turned large swaths of cities into battlefields on which criminal violence and social violence combine with truly horrific results, particularly for those who live in poor urban areas, where 80% of all crimes are committed (Monsiváis quoted in Godoy-Anativia 9). Luis de la Barreda Solórzano, director of the Instituto Ciudadano de Estudios sobre la Inseguridad, states plainly in a recent article that Mexico’s capital has been transformed into a city of fear due to the steep rise in criminality beginning in the mid-1980s (29) and culminating in the declaration of a renewed war on drug traffickers by current president Felipe Calderón. Updating observations cited earlier in this chapter, Barreda Solórzano cites recent studies documenting the continued intensification of the ecology of fear among citizens as violent crime has continued to proliferate, especially in Mexico City, despite a slight decline in the homicide rate since 2000 (28). Indicators of a crisis of confidence in the legal process are unmistakable: less than one in five crimes are reported, arrests are made in less than six percent of cases, and nine out of ten city residents express little or no confidence in their local police forces (28). It is this climate of extreme insecurity and distrust that also appears to have discredited the original neopolicia’s project of locating and symbolically erradicating the sources of urban corruption.

Although the Mexican neopolicia has continued to thrive in the work of younger writers directly indebted to Taibo and his collaborators, the modifications introduced into the paradigm since the 1990s are significant. Juan Hernández Luna, for example, strongly echoes his predecessor in his own definition of the genre, but rejects one notable feature: In my modest opinion, the Mexican neopolicia is a genre in which an initial crime or a crooked situation allows for narration of an entire social context, a city, regardless of whether you resolve the crime or not. To hell with detectives and investigation. Crime is only a pretext for narrating cities (quoted in Torre 16). Winner of the annual Hammett Prize for the best novela negra written in Spanish, Hernández Luna’s Tabaco para el puma (Tobacco for the Puma, 1996) exhibits most of the basic characteristics of the neopolicia as defined by Taibo: an investigation into governmental abuses, in this case the illegal expropriation of communal lands at the dawn of the NAFTA era; subplots involving the history of labor struggles in the post-revolutionary period; and a conventional adventure
narrative motivated by a search for hidden treasure and punctuated by outbursts of hard-boiled violence. Rather than featuring a single, professional detective protagonist, however, *Tabaco para el puma* delegates the struggle against corruption to an unlikely trio consisting of a magician, a film student and a waiter known for organizing domino tournaments (197), and, as in Hernández Luna’s other works, the scenario of struggle is no longer Mexico City, but Puebla, Mexico’s fourth largest urban center and one neglected, in Hernández Luna’s view, by previous generations of novelists in favor of the capital (Segura 50). While the focus remains on the mapping of criminal forces in the urban landscape, Hernández Luna responds to Taibo’s claim that the detective novel is the great repairer of injustices by asserting that for his profoundly disenchanted generation there is no more room for hope in the detective novel (quoted in Blanco).

The epidemic growth of violent crime in Mexico during the 1990s was accompanied, as Trujillo Muñoz observes, not only by a new depth of disenchantment with public institutions and police forces in particular, but also by a notable diversification and decentralization of the *neopoliciaco*, as a new wave of authors introduced fiction set in secondary cities such as Puebla, Monterrey, Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez (23-24). Persephone Braham describes the general trend of this more recent production as follows:

In the post-Belascoarán generation of detective novels . . . the serial protagonist became increasingly insignificant. Temporal continuity is also less and less evident, as numerous story lines, narrative styles and periods crisscross each other throughout a single text. The absence of the serial protagonist and the lack of narrative continuity are indicative of the growing instability of the Mexican outlook, and of the problem of producing genre fiction in general within a Mexican context. While Taibo’s narrative express nostalgia for coherent ideologies, the newest generation of Mexican writers goes beyond these apparently irrelevant or failed paradigms of modernity to express the chaos they see in their present, and in their future. (96-97)

As production has migrated north toward the border, however, and as the regional variant of the *narconovela* emerged, less attention tended to be paid to the uniquely urban concerns associated with the megalopolis and more to the dispersive and transnational dynamics of drug trafficking. In one rather contemptuous account of the proliferation and the aesthetics of the *narconovela*, Rafael Lemus has written as follows:
Our narrative . . . produces stories and novels about el narco, too many stories and too many novels. . . . It’s inescapable: drug trafficking conquers all, and all writing about the north is about drug trafficking. . . . Among the writers who meet it head on: Federico Campbell, Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz, Élmer Mendoza, Luis Humberto Crosthwaite, Juan José Rodríguez, Eduardo Antonio Parra, Luis Felipe G. Lomelí. . . . A narrative about el narco, an ordinary strategy: painstaking costumbrismo, colloquial language, populist plots. . . . The plots are habitually conventional. . . . Stories are drawn from the usual sources: the picaresque, melodrama, and, increasingly, the detective novel. . . . Look up: the north is producing a subgenre. . . . We can see how its elements are set laboriously in place: colloquial language, plastic violence, regionalist pride, populism, the picaresque.

Without attempting to explore the breadth of this more recent and provincial production, I would like to close this chapter by looking briefly at one of the more prominent of the novels critiqued by Lemus, Eduardo Antonio Parra’s Nostalgia de la sombra (Nostalgia for the Shadow, 2002), in order to illustrate some final reflections on recent changes in the neopoliciaco’s construction of images of urban space and its conception of violence, which is to say, in its practice of cognitive mapping.

**Descent into Abjection**

In Parra’s novel, set in Monterrey, a middle-class newspaper editor and family man is wounded in a mugging, but resists his attackers and spontaneously kills them. The violent encounter results in the protagonist’s transformation into a disoriented derelict and, after an indeterminate time spent living on the abject margins of urban society, ultimately into a contract killer. The principal action of the novel centers on the protagonist’s stalking of a female financial consultant whom he has been contracted to murder, and he imagines himself deciphering the text of the biography she inscribes on the surface of the city: you are writing it on those streets and those places you move through every day in Monterrey (211). A good part of the novel is taken up by his recollections of his own memories inscribed in urban places, but the primary view afforded by Nostalgia is of a secret, sinister, subterranean city.

Monterrey asleep? No way. It pretends to rest, but in its foundation, in its sewers, in its subterranean basements it’s stirring, more awake than ever. I know you, damn city, you seem calm and quiet when you’re agitated beneath the pavement, behind the walls you shriek and jump and sink down, you cast your inhabitants into darkness and you shrink them as you expand to reach everywhere and to devour the innocent and unwary . . .
you spend your eternal life pondering your revenge against those of us who pound you down every day with the soles of our shoes . . . Yes, the city hates us for having made it the monster it is, that’s why the false calm is always broken by murmuring, rumors, deaf shrieks: crying, rancor, gnashing of teeth. It’s the demons we’ve engendered in Monterrey, in Mexico City, everywhere. (205 06)

Among the most prominent urban sites described in the novel are a brushy hollow by a bike path where the protagonist awakes following his night of inaugural violence, a marginal yet central area transformed at night into a danger zone by the presence of gangs, homosexuals, prostitutes and potheads (81). From there he flees to seek refuge in other of the city’s most abject margins: He wandered through empty lots, ruined buildings, riverbeds not yet filled in by development. Even through cemeteries. For a week he cohabitated with three crackling cadavers inside a crypt (127). The character’s definitive assimilation into a lawless urban underworld occurs when he takes up residence among garbage pickers in a dump that constitutes the novel’s most vividly described social environment. This experience of the fetid and violently insecure existence of Monterrey’s most destitute citizens, when combined with the protagonist’s middle-class past and his subsequent employment by unnamed participants in the booming business of money laundering for drug traffickers, affords him, and by extension the reader, an unusual perspective on three urban worlds that, according to the novel, coexist but never touch (205).

While Parra’s novel resembles the neopoliaca novels of Taibo and Ramírez Heredia in its mechanisms of pursuit and continuous exploration of urban space, its cognitive mapping and narrative management of urban dangers is markedly different. Indicative of a shift in the perspective of representation of urban criminality is Parra’s characterization of his hitman protagonist as a former editor for a daily newspaper specializing in bloody crime reporting (the nota roja) and as an aspiring scriptwriter capable of identifying with solitary, insomniac detectives in U.S. novels or films, such as Se7en (101 02). Whereas neopoliaca writers favored hard-boiled private detectives and reporters as protagonists suited to the explanation of crime and the attribution of guilt, Parra imagines a middle-class citizen and crime journalist who escapes pervasive fear and victimization by becoming himself a mercenary agent of violence. Evil, as Parra’s protagonist reflects shortly after his transformation, has no beginning and resides in no one place (90), and thus it may neither be explained
in tidy political terms nor contained by convenient narrative distinctions between good and bad subjects.

**EXOTIC VIOLENCE AND THE POST-neopoliaciaco**

In an incisive article contrasting *Nostalgia de la sombra* with Alejandro González Iñárritu’s influential 2000 film *Amores perros*, Ignacio Sánchez-Prado suggests that violence is at the very center of a problematic new model of identity emerging in contemporary Mexican narrative. Sánchez-Prado sees violence treated in Parra’s novel as a consistent presence that becomes a constitutive part of the social tapestry (45) and as a social code that enters the urban environment as a strategy of social relationships and as a component of subjectivity (46). While preferring Parra’s treatment of violence to the relatively conservative *Amores perros*, Sánchez-Prado warns forcefully of the danger of uncritical acceptance of an emerging discourse characterized by the increasing status of violence as an indicator of the Latin American experience (50) and giving rise to an imaginary that simultaneously appeals to the worldview held by the privileged groups that benefit from the region’s neoliberalism and to the voluntaristic politics of the progressive and pseudo-progressive sectors of Western intelligentsia. (40) This violent imperative, he observes, may rearticulate in neocolonial fashion the discourse of civilization and barbarism, affording metropolitan cultural consumers enjoyment of the spectacle of the Other’s misery (50) while persuading Latin Americans themselves to accept violence as a natural component of their identity. Sánchez-Prado’s warnings seem particularly pertinent in view of the evident and ongoing proliferation of criminal-centered crime fiction in the neoliberal period, both in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America.

If Paco Ignacio Taibo II established the *neopoliaciaco* in the 1970s as a politicized literary response to the catastrophic growth of the megalopolis and to the criminalization of public institutions and of the Mexican state in the post-Tlatelolco era, the intensification of the crisis in public security throughout the 1980s and 1990s seems to have provoked a new mutation of the *novela negra* that I will call post-neopoliaciaco. Although Parra’s *Nostalgia de la sombra* may be considered paradigmatic of this mutation, a number of other novels published in recent years offer strong parallels in their reimagining of urban violence as depoliticized, intimately subjectivized, and decisively removed from reductive schemes of moral containment. The most prominent of these, including Olivier Debroise’s *Lo peor sucede al atardecer* (The Worst Happens at Dusk, 1990), Hernández Luna’s *Yodo* (Iodine, 1998), and Guillermo Fadanelli’s *La otra*
cara de Rock Hudson (Rock Hudson’s Other Face, 1997) and Lodo (Mud, 2002), also center on the agents rather than the opponents of criminal violence, a tendency that approximates Mexican production to that of countries such as Colombia and Argentina in the same period.

While Hernández Luna’s receipt of a second Hammett Prize in July of 2007, this time for Cadáver de ciudad (Corpse of the City), should further enhance his reputation among novela negra readers, Fadanelli’s high profile in the current literary market presents an equally interesting case. I will round out this chapter with a brief consideration of Fadanelli’s crime-inflected literatura basura (garbage literature) or dirty realism. The recent reissue of two of Fadanelli’s earlier volumes, including La otra cara de Rock Hudson, by prestigious Barcelona publisher Anagrama seems to be one indication of the emergence of Latin American dirty realism as one alternative to such failing market stereotypes as magical realism. La otra cara de Rock Hudson tells the story of an apprenticeship in crime, as Fadanelli’s narrator, who is fifteen years old at the beginning of the novel, falls in with a professional killer and drug dealer who he will replace by the novel’s end. The action of the novel transpires in a run-down central district of Mexico City, Colonia Obrera, just south of the Chinese district where Bernal set much of El complot mongol.

On the novel’s second page, Fadanelli’s protagonist surveys his neighborhood from a corner pharmacy, claiming the privilege of urban vision that would belong to a detective in a neopoliciaco novel. The scene he surveys is the first of many in which Fadanelli evokes an environment of relentless filth and degradation.

[H]e only needed to raise his eyes to dominate several streets at once, all of them the same except for Bolívar, which was a bigger avenue, all of them with dirty and disfigured pavement, full of potholes and tumors, the storm drains spitting out acidic, intestinal smells, as if down there in the stomach of the sewars, someone were cooking up the dozens of dogs that were run over by cars every day. (10–11)

In a fashion closely anticipating the novels of Mario Mendoza, to be explored in Chapter 3, Fadanelli describes a city whose interior spaces are suffocating and excremental as the exterior ones are diseased and putrescent.

A hallway like so many others endlessly repeating in an infinity of cold dark throats, blind tunnels through which one could enter the entrails of the old buildings almost never more than six stories high, hallways whose
darkness invited pedestrians to duck in and urinate, leaving the floor damp with pestilent pools. (16)

Fadanelli’s cityscape brims with pollution and reeks of decomposition, and death seems to pervade life. The narrator describes traffic on the avenue as a dead river of automobiles, a dirty and polluted river smelling of rubber and burning gasoline (26), and Fadanelli’s protagonists weigh cocaine, shoot heroin, and plot killings in dingy hotel rooms and tenements. They meet in a Chinese café that seems only to have decayed since Bernal’s time.

The café had been frozen in time for more than thirty years . . . the isolated shadow of the interior was hardly remedied by two neon lights . . . under the influence of the neon the battered glasses and other objects looked like loose pieces of a rotten skeleton: an atmosphere where the faces of the customers were sunken in a kind of sepulchral anguish. (108)

Fadanelli’s utterly cheerless depiction of an urban existence dominated by poverty and crime is animated only by brief bursts of hard-boiled violence (a bullet penetrated his ear opening a conduit of raw flesh through which pain drilled into the depths of his brain [123]) and sex that is either cruel, incestuous, or commercial.

With novels such as La otra cara de Rock Hudson, Fadanelli appears to approximate what Sánchez-Prado called the understanding of violence as a social code that enters the urban environment as a strategy of social relationships and as a component of subjectivity, but the question again arises of the ethical implications of a fiction that wallows so unreservedly in abjection and that adopts a narrative perspective so internal to a culture of violence whose reality is not in dispute. In one of the few critical reflections on Fadanelli’s fiction published thus far outside Mexico, Diana Palaversich addresses a volume of stories by Fadanelli and a novel by his fellow realista sucio Rogelio Villarreal, taking issue with what she considers their slavish reiteration of the most retrograde and misogynist clichés of machismo. Under the pretense of defying bourgeois conventions of good taste and decency, observes Palaversich, the male protagonists of Fadanelli and Villarreal seek to prove their nonconformism by violating sexual taboos (necrophilia, incest, sadism, bestiality) almost invariably at the expense of women while scrupulously avoiding the only taboo whose transgression would threaten their identification as machos: that of homosexuality (80). While critics frequently cite U.S. dirty realists John Fante, Raymond Carver, and Charles Bukowski as predecessors to
Fadanelli’s aesthetics of degradation, Palaversich points out that Fadanelli and Villarreal narrate sex more in the style of *Penthouse* than that of Bukowski, who documented his bodily frailties as faithfully as his appetites.

In a criticism that I believe also holds for *La otra cara de Rock Hudson*, Palaversich concludes that Fadanelli’s pretense of countercultural defiance fails completely in the field of sex and the sexual politics that demonstrate an incapacity to escape the esthetic and erotic molds of mainstream society (81). Palaversich also proposes a distinction between the violent aesthetics of Fadanelli and Villarreal and the more vital provocations of Cuban Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, another Anagrama writer whose dirty sexual realism is distinguished by its festive and jubilant tone and by a capacity to imagine female pleasure and difference. Whereas Gutiérrez’s aesthetics of disgust may be read, as Guillermina De Ferrari has argued persuasively, as an incisive artistic intervention in the political order of Cuba in the 1990s, I would hesitate to make the same claim for Fadanelli given the troublesome nature of his sexual politics and the fundamental compatability of his provocations with the aesthetics of pornography and spectacular violence that are hegemonic in global markets. These are problems to which I will return in Chapter 3, particularly in my discussion of the degraded realism of Mario Mendoza.

Another Mexican novelist of Fadanelli’s generation, Cristina Rivera Garza, spoke recently about difficulties she has encountered in attempting to write a novel dealing with contemporary violence in her country. Her reflections on the ethical dilemma of writing about urgently real violence provide, I think, a fitting conclusion to this chapter.

In writing and minutely narrating a violent act, do I become complicit, am I killing the victim a second time? Am I continuing the work of the serial killer who, according to some experts, is motivated and obsessed by the possibility of looking inside? Am I contributing to the creation of the spectacle of violence in order to attract readers, to sell books? . . . All this has worried me deeply and it has constituted the greatest obstacle to continuing with the text. I was interested in distancing myself from the glamour which has come to surround the aggressor and from the glamour surrounding the killer’s obsession. . . . I wanted, of course, to see the world from the point of view of the victim, which is another way of speaking of violence from the point of view of pain.

The conclusion that Rivera Garza draws from her own deliberations is that every allusion to violence should ultimately be a condemnation of violence, a criterion against which much of contemporary crime fiction
would not measure up well and which the literary market certainly does not support.

In an article occasioned by the reissue of *La otra cara de Rock Hudson* by Anagrama, Guillermo Samperio has written that, whatever the novel’s shortcomings, it’s cause for celebration whenever a Mexican author manages to cross the ‘invisible fence’ erected around Spanish and Latin American readers by the marketing policies of multinational publishers (86). While commercialization and critical endorsement of the most recent and ever harder-boiled crime fiction may indeed aggravate a long-standing foreign identification of Latin America as a realm of exotic violence, as Sánchez-Prado warns, the *novela negra* continues to thrive as a model for narrative reflection on the new urban violence. Its vitality as a component of Post-Boom narrative is evident in its diversification and expansion across borders and into countries where detective literature has not traditionally thrived. Chapter 3 is devoted to Colombia, which stands not only as the Spanish American country most emblematic of exotic violence in the global imaginary but also as perhaps the most dynamic recent producer of hard-boiled crime fiction in Spanish.
Chapter 3

Bogota

Surfeit of Violence, Dearth of Detection

Until the publication of a thorough historical study by Hubert Pöppel in Medellin in 2001, the Colombian detective novel was largely terra incognita, even for scholars of Spanish-language detective writing. Amelia S. Simpson’s 1990 survey of Latin American detective fiction, the first monographic study published in the United States, addressed only one Colombian text, Gabriel García Márquez’s 1981 anti-detective Crónica de una muerte anunciada (Chronicle of a Death Foretold). Likewise, Argentine novelist Mempo Giardinelli, in a study of the novela negra genre first published in 1984 and revised in 1996, cites only one text from Colombia in his overview of Latin American contributions to the genre (251). An oft-invoked supposition with regard to the apparent dearth of detective fiction in Colombia relates to the argument made by Monsiváis and echoed by many other commentators affirming the incompatibility between the rationalistic and law-affirming detective paradigm and the cultural and political realities of actually existing Latin American societies. In view of Colombia’s extraordinary history of political instability and the endemic violence that continues to disrupt its public life, contemporary novelist Santiago Gamboa has suggested that a literary form so rigorously designed to mediate and contain lawless and socially disintegrative energies has lacked credibility in a country so long afflicted by an excessive proximity of violence (quoted in Fajardo). While terms such as La Violencia and novela de la Violencia have defined major periods and tendencies in twentieth-century Colombian history and narrative, only recently has the novela negra appeared as a vital medium for literary reflection on the nation’s ongoing crisis of institutional order and public security.

As I indicated in my introduction, European detective fiction was published in translation in Bogota as early as 1901, but Pöppel describes
the subsequent reception of the genre and the constitution of a national tradition of detective writing as sporadic and discontinuous. Detective stories, nearly always by foreign authors, began to appear in Colombian magazines during the 1930s, and the first detective novel fully identified as such by a Colombian author appeared in 1941. Pöppel contrasts the flourishing of the genre in Argentina during the 1940s with its relative abandonment in Colombia during the ’40s, ’50s, and ’60s, and his explanation of this disparity focuses on the relative stability of Argentine society and politics and the relative predominance of the petit bourgeois values on which he understands classical detective fiction to rest. The initiation in 1948 of *La Violencia*, approximately a decade of low-intensity civil warfare between Colombian Conservatives and Liberals, proved far more disruptive to Colombian society than did the contemporary political struggles of Peronist and anti-Peronists in Argentina, and the orderly premises of the imported classical detective genre seemed largely irrelevant to Colombians under such circumstances. As in fascist Italy and Spain, Pöppel suggests, the values prevailing in Colombian society during this period did not correspond to those on which the detective genre was founded.

The theme of partisan violence and a resulting generalized violence no longer leaves room either for the literary-intellectual game deriving from a single murder or for the detective novel’s epistemological premise, with its promise of the possibility of arriving at the truth, much less for thinking in terms of a sequence of disorder-investigation-order. (58 59)

Pöppel asserts that not until the 1990s did the so-called novel of *La Violencia* achieve rapprochement with the detective tradition in two ways: first, in novels investigating the political assassination that sparked *La Violencia*, and second, in a series of less investigative crime fiction centering on the exploits of narco-traffickers and *sicarios*.

Whereas the hard-boiled detective novel sputtered to life during the 1970s in Mexico and, as we shall see, in Argentina and Spain, Colombian history thus dictated a different trajectory. Pöppel provides a detailed bibliographic chronology of publications of all subgenres of detective and crime fiction in support of his conclusion that the foundation of a consolidated Colombian tradition in these subgenres was established only during the last two decades (65). Up until that time, genre publications were, by his account, very infrequent and most often ill defined in their relation to international genre models, resulting in a near total absence of scholarly research and criticism on the genre in Colombia (1).
While few works by post-boom Colombian writers have yet appeared in English translation, and while none have achieved widespread renown in the U.S. market, literary commentators have begun to remark on the emergence of a generation of novelists far removed in aesthetic sensibility from their best known predecessors, García Márquez and Álvaro Mutis. Writing for non-specialized readers in a 2003 New York Times article, Juan Forero identified Mario Mendoza, Santiago Gamboa, and Héctor Abad Faciolince among those narrators whose straightforward, darkly realistic urban novels, (A3) often reminiscent of U.S. hard-boiled classics, were defying the still prevalent stereotype of Latin America as a magical realist realm. Among the explanations cited in Forero’s article for this turn is, as in the case of Mexico, the transformation of Colombia from a predominantly rural into a predominantly urban country during the course of the twentieth century. Indeed, wrote Forero, the Colombia of small-town revenge and folksy characters has been replaced by a hard world of megacities, power politics and a brutal conflict characterized by massacres and assassinations (A3). In a more specialized article published around the same time as Forero’s, Francisco A. Ortega, now of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, provided a broader view of the range of the new narrative and identified an aesthetic of rupture arising from a shared perception that the chaotic logic of [Colombia’s] megalopolises exceeded all forethought; that many, fragmented and disorienting violencias replaced La Violencia of yesteryear, and that accepted literary conventions were radically unable to give account of such novel experiences (81). Though Ortega acknowledges the considerable stylistic diversity among the younger narrators, he concurs with Forero as to the predominance of urban and criminal themes and of certain related narrative models. Plots often involve the underworld, where drugs commingle with scandalous institutional corruption, guerrilla attacks, death squads, and common crime. Favored genres are the hardboiled thrillers, crime novels, pulp fiction, and even journalistic fiction. (82) In what follows, I will explore this sharp turn in Colombian narrative toward the urban and narrative codes of crime fiction in relation to the transnational dynamics already discussed.

**Novela Negra, Sicaresca, Narconovela**

As I have suggested in the previous chapters, the historical circumstances of the emergence and consolidation of the novela negra in Spanish may be related to those which initially determined the origin of the U.S. hard-boiled narrative during the 1920s and 1930s. The boom in organized
crime triggered by Prohibition and the social dislocation of the Depression are often cited as immediate extraliterary factors shaping the violent hard-boiled worldview, which generally attributed a breakdown in public security and social order, especially in urban environments, to the triumph of corrupt monopoly capitalism.\(^2\) Although private detectives in the mold of the Continental Op and Philip Marlowe remain emblematic of classic hard-boiled justice, it is important to recall in the context of discussions of the contemporary *novela negra* that a major line of U.S. hard-boiled crime fiction dispensed entirely with the investigator figure. In contrast to Carroll John Daly, Dashiell Hammett, and Raymond Chandler, other major U.S. genre writers such as James M. Cain and Jim Thompson employed criminal protagonists to provide a radically cynical view of a predatory society ruled by ruthless self-interest and in which collective ideologies and popular solidarity had been degraded by surveillance and competitive individualism (McCann 215). In view of the intensely violent conflicts that continue to afflict Colombian civil society, it is understandable that of these two hard-boiled lines, the latter should have prevailed in the Colombian *novela negra*.

Before proceeding to discuss a number of the most significant crime novels published in Colombia in recent years, it will behoove me to relate the *novela negra* in the inclusive sense used here to more local literary categories, such as the *sicaresca* and the *narconovela*. The *novela negra*, as we have seen thus far, is distinguished from the classical clue-puzzle type detective novel by its relative disinterest in procedures of rational deduction, its relatively greater attention to real social conflicts, and its disenchantment view of law and the social contract. In Spanish, as I have indicated, the term *novela negra* encompasses hard-boiled crime fiction whether centering on a private detective protagonist, like Taibo’s *neopolicicaco*, or on characters who perpetrate rather than investigate crimes. One of the broadest and most frequently cited definitions of the *novela negra* is provided by Javier Coma, who identifies it with a realistic and sociopolitical focus on contemporary criminal themes and a critical contemplation of capitalist society from the perspective of the criminological phenomenon, usually by specialized writers (15). Although Colombia has produced very few, if any, novelists entirely specialized in the *novela negra*, a number of the best-known Colombian novels of recent decades have indeed focused on criminal protagonists, particularly young killers-for-hire residing in the gritty margins of the metropolis.

For more than a decade, the term *sicaresca*, coined by novelist Héctor Abad Faciolince, has served to designate a subgenre of Colombian crime
fiction centering on *sicarios*, the young gunmen employed first by the Medellín drug Mafia and subsequently by other other criminal organizations. The *sicario* came to national prominence during the 1980s when teenage criminals perpetrated a series of spectacular assassinations of high-level political and legal officials, beginning with that of Minister of Justice Rodrigo Lara Bonilla in Bogota in 1984. From endless news reports of these violent episodes and from the research of social scientists into the new criminal culture sprung a narrative literature that fused the sensational appeal of spectacular violence with certain pretensions to testimonial documentation. By Abad Faciolince’s account, the *sicaresca* resembled the classical Spanish *picaresca* (picaresque) in that it usually consisted of a first-person account of the misdeeds of a young protagonist (Interview Orrego). Although early non-fiction chronicles such as those produced by Alonso Salazar (*No nacimos pa’ semilla: la cultura de las bandas juveniles de Medellín*, 1990) and Víctor Gaviria (*El peloito que no duró nada*, 1991) provided startling and sober insight into the social origins and ideology of the *sicarios*, Abad Faciolince observes that subsequent fictional narratives slipped all too easily into the realm of truculence and macabre exploitation (*Estética y narcotráfico*). In the years since its introduction, however, Abad Faciolince’s critique seems to have done little to diminish the commercial vitality of the *sicaresca*, and the ongoing diffusion of both its literary and cinematic manifestations will return us to the problem of exotic violence as posited by Sánchez-Prado.

With this understanding of the *sicaresca*, and in keeping with Rafael Lemus’s assessment of the Mexican *narconovela*, I will not consider it necessary here to separate either of these models from the overarching category of the *novela negra* as previously defined. Neither the *narconovela’s* definitive characteristics as summarized by Lemus (again, colloquial language, plastic violence, regionalist pride, populism, the *picaresque*) nor the *sicaresca’s* nearly identical components represent a departure from the established aesthetics of the hard-boiled crime fiction, especially in its criminal-centered variant. Although we observe manifold differences in the local vocabularies, geographies, and histories informing contemporary crime fiction in Mexico and Colombia, we may also observe significant continuity in representational form. Likewise, the experiences narrated in this fiction are united by their relation to a series of transnational phenomena including not only the spread of organized crime across international borders but also urbanization, the penetration of global capitalism and mass-market consumerism in unevenly modernized societies, and the reshaping of subjectivity by the contemporary mass-media. Although some critics such as Tony Hilfer have preferred to posit
a diametrical opposition between detective and crime fiction, here I will continue to respect the predominant understanding of the novela negra as a broad generic category encompassing both detective-centered and criminal-centered subgenres, both of which may give rise to subgenres of their own. In my brief remarks on the Medellín-centered sicaresca toward the end of this chapter, I will thus follow Pöppel (251) in considering it as a locally inflected variant of the more transcendent subgenre of criminal-centered hard-boiled crime fiction. In what follows, I concentrate on the contemporary crime fiction of Bogota, which, when read in conjunction with the better known sicaresca literature, provides ample evidence of the strong parallel between the contemporary Colombian novela negra and that of Mexican authors, such as Hernández Luna, Parra and Fadanelli, as well as that of the Argentine authors to be discussed in Chapter 4.

**Volumes of Violence**

Having described in Chapter 2 the rise of a new urban violence in Mexico City during the final decades of the twentieth century, and before proceeding to examine Colombian texts that have responded to similar crises, I should like to consider briefly the parallels between Mexico and Colombia and the pervasiveness of the crisis of public security in much of Latin America at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As I began to establish in Chapter 2, the period of the initial emergence of the Latin American novela negra was defined broadly by the exhaustion of the import-substitution model of state-directed modernization, the resurgence of authoritarian military regimes in the Southern Cone and elsewhere, and the beginning of the imposition of neoliberal economic policies in nearly all countries. Debt crisis and austerity measures were among the factors dictating a general depression of living standards in many parts of the region during the lost decade of the 1980s, and since then, economic displacement has continued to fuel a drastic deterioration in public security, particularly in metropolitan areas. Although Colombia might have seemed to casual foreign observers an exception to the general regional trends of peace accords, economic reform, and transitions to electoral democracy during the 1980s and '90s, Latin American social and political scientists have persistently denounced the shallowness of the democracy achieved and the proliferation of economic inequality and crime in the region as a whole during this period. Roberto Follari of Universidad Nacional de Cuyo in Argentina is not unusually gloomy in summarizing the state of regional affairs at the dawn of the twenty-first century as follows:
It is true, then, that today Latin Americans are justified in speaking of desperation and that day-to-day life in our countries is indeed becoming increasingly desperate. Growing unemployment and marginality, permanent problems of security for the population, an increase in drug trafficking, a crisis in the normative adherence that guarantees social bonds, government corruption, galloping external debt, pressure from creditor organizations. (4)

The global causes and local inflections of these phenomena are, of course, well beyond the scope of this book, but I will emphasize again the existence of an acute and ongoing crisis in public security in many Latin American cities, where rates of impunity for serious crimes might commonly exceed 90 percent, as has occurred in Mexico City and Bogota in recent years. Venezuelan criminologist Rosa del Olmo speaks of the vertiginous increase in the principal cities of Latin America, beginning in the 1980s, in the relationship between violence and criminality, and especially in violent criminality (77), and she notes that as recently as the late 1990s, the Pan American Health Organization characterized Latin American murder rates as higher than those of any other region. This boom, along with the crisis in the reproduction of traditional social norms to which Follari refers, constitutes the necessary backdrop against which to contemplate the most recent mutation of the novela negra.

International studies thus indicate that through the 1990s, even following peace accords and the formal transition to democracy in many countries in Central America and the Southern Cone, Latin America remained one of the world’s most violent regions, surpassed in some estimates only by sub-Saharan Africa, which includes Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The already cited Roberto Briceño-León, observes that In almost all of Latin America violence is among the five top causes of death, and is the first cause of death in several countries: Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, El Salvador, Mexico, and he characterizes this new violence as predominantly urban, and related to other ordinary crime such as robbery. Brazilian researcher Paulo de Mesquita Neto of the Center for the Study of Violence at the University of São Paulo also remarked in 2002 on a dramatic increase in crime and violence in Latin America, particularly in the 1980s, and he noted that Latin America posted average homicide rates higher than those of any other region despite relatively low levels of violence in countries such as Chile and Costa Rica. Although the epidemic of crime and violence, according to Mesquita Neto, has been particularly acute in the larger cities and metropolitan areas, it is clear that the crisis of public security and the reality of near total impunity
for perpetrators of violent crime are, in a regional panorama, by no means merely aberrations unique to megalopolises, such as Mexico City and São Paolo, since entire nations such as Guatemala and El Salvador have lately suffered proportionally massive breakdowns in public security. Given this regional context, the view of the contemporary metropolis provided by the Colombian novela negra will seem less the tortured contrivance of a parochial sect of dark fantasists than substantial literary testimony to a transnational crisis of citizenship, urban sociability, and the rule of law.

Although it is by no means reducible to novela negra alone, the new Colombian narrative recently promoted by publishers, scholars, and journalists is effectively married to Colombia’s identification in the global imaginary as a place of emblematic and exotic violence. A recent study by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime summarizes the reality underlying this identification when it describes Colombia as a country whose homicide rates [as of 2005] are eight times higher than the average international rate, which has experienced a low-intensity armed conflict for over five decades, and that occupies the first place in coca leaf production and exporting of cocaine hydrochloride (8). Under such circumstances, as writers such as Gamboa have suggested, perhaps the greatest obstacle to the establishment of a Colombian novela negra tradition is, paradoxically, the very abundance and proximity of phenomena that have defined the stories told by the genre: lethal violence, organized criminality, illegal commerce, and occult complicity between criminal and political actors. Yet, as Mario Vargas Llosa observed in a 1999 article on the emerging mythology of the sicario, Nothing creates as propitious and stimulating an environment for creation and art as this sensation of catastrophe and social collapse. . . . Colombian literature is undergoing a creative effervescence. As in Mexico, contemporary crime fiction in Colombia is characterized by a notable scarcity of police detective protagonists, but in contrast with Mexico, where the private detectives of Taibo and Ramírez Heredia enjoyed some success, little of the crime fiction produced during the period of this recent effervescence conforms to the norms of the neopoliciaco. As we shall now see, various Colombian novelists have indeed experimented with investigative plots in novels incorporating intense activities of urban surveillance and mapping, among other hard-boiled elements, but their agents of violence and of surveillance are seldom stably aligned with the institutions or even the ideals of legal justice.

**The Deactivated Detective**

Óscar Collazos’s 1999 novel *La modelo asesinada* (The Murdered Model) exemplifies a number of the central preoccupations, as well as the limitations,
of contemporary Colombian crime fiction. While the novel is structured, in classical hard-boiled fashion, on the basis of a murder investigation leading to the revelation of sinister collusion between criminal, financial, and political elites, Collazos identifies his narrator rather more closely with the law than is normal in hard-boiled fiction. La modelo asesinada centers on the killing of one of Colombia’s most successful fashion models by a sicario acting on orders of the model’s former lover, a Harvard-trained economist known by the victim to be implicated in the illegal arms trade. The novel’s narrator, a former prosecutor only recently obliged to retire after delving too vigorously into the paramilitary ties of a Colombian ambassador, witnesses the killing from his apartment in a high-rise tower and subsequently collaborates in an investigation directed by his best friend, another scrupulous and diligent but still officially employed prosecutor. Private investigators who are also former police officers are by no means unusual in the hard-boiled tradition, but former prosecutors with advanced legal degrees and literary aspirations are considerably more rare. On the whole, Collazos’s protagonist displays perhaps more of the attributes of the classical reasoning detective than of the hard-boiled P. I. In his investigation he relies more on observation and research than on physical confrontation; he is a connoisseur of fine food, wine, novels, and painting, and he enjoys almost limitless leisure, thanks to early retirement and his wealthy wife. Yet the hard-boiled intonation of La modelo asesinada is evident in the visual instrument that substitutes for the Holmesian magnifying glass and defines the ex-prosecutor’s relationship to the crime. Collazos’s investigator observes the crime accidentally through the lens of a video camera that he uses to intrude on the intimacies of his neighbors.

Urban voyeurism has been integral to the detective tradition at least since Sherlock Holmes fantasized about lifting the roofs off London houses in order to peep inside at the inhabitants in A Case of Identity, and Collazos gleefully exploits this tradition, opening and closing his novel with evocations of the grand cityscape of Bogota. Surveyed, on the novel’s first page, at night and from twenty-eight floors up, the city spills in all directions, tracing an immense and irregular map of lights (11). Although the narrator promptly redirects his gaze toward the spectacular intimacies of his neighbors in the opposite tower, the novel returns time and again to panoramic views that strive to totalize comprehension of the city as the narrative advances toward disclosure of the criminal alliance. Collazos also recalls Taibo’s rewriting of Baroja in his reflections on the coexistence of nocturnal and diurnal cities, remarking first on the nightly awakening of a shadow society of muggers, indigent drug addicts, prostitutes, and street
kids in the city of felonies and lurking dangers (30). Subsequently, the narrator sketches the topography of a city center animated at night by criminal commerce and depredation: Toward 10th Avenue between 20th and 26th Streets, the world began to resemble a flesh bazaar where the sick and the criminals lay in wait, where muggers from the outskirts invaded the live center of a city that didn’t sleep (110).

The most suggestive reflection on the state of contemporary Bogota occurs when the prosecutor in charge of the murder investigation crosses the Plaza de Bolívar, which is the symbolic center of the capital city and of the Colombian nation, and recalls Bogota’s transformation over half a century from an amiable and provincial city of courtly refinement into a disintegrating postmodern megalopolis.

The sixties marked the beginning of vertiginous urban growth. And the city would begin to spread southward and northward like a monstrous lizard, toward the savanna, toward the hillsides, prefiguring the no less monstrous city of today. It seemed to be bursting its seams. The map could no longer be taken in by the gaze, and no power could contain the growth. It grew like a misshapen body, multiplying its ailments, stitching ever more dignified remnants onto older, more dignified ones, stacking neighborhoods whose nomenclature no one could any longer memorize on top of those already existing, building slums out of nothing and with the desperate impulse of need. (187)

In summarizing Bogota’s lurching transformation from a city of 660,000 inhabitants in 1951 into one of five million by the 1990s (Greenfield 146, 148), Collazos here invokes a number of ideas familiar from my discussion of the Mexican megalopolis. The foregoing passage echoes not only the terms employed by García Canclini in his account of the urban experience of contemporary Mexico City residents but also the analysis of Colombian urban scholar Juan Carlos Pégolis, who describes Bogota as dispersed into infinite images and innumerable behaviors that prevent us from understanding any supposed totality of this city whose principal characteristic is precisely its fragmentary structure (xiii). Collazos, like other novelists I will examine here, acknowledges a process that Pégolis theorizes as the ungraspable, gaseous expansion of a city constituted on light and unstable structures (21). The multiplication and disaggregation of urban territories degrades the imageability of the cityscape, as both maps and nomenclature strain to contain the proliferation of margins. Metaphors of monstrosity, excess, and unbinding abound.

Despite repeated evocations of Bogota’s mean central streets and references to its infinite, unknowable margins, La modelo asesinada ultimately
devotes more attention to imagining the spaces of power and social privilege than it does to the urban underworld. The murder investigation implicates four powerful figures in various criminal actions and enterprises: the Harvard-trained economist, a federal congressman, the director of a high-profile modeling agency, and a jailed drug lord. A great deal of the novel’s primary action consists of conversations in luxurious apartments and in the offices of the prosecutors or in those of the chief suspects. Interrogations are staged in the congressman’s office, at the very center of Colombian political power, and in a corporate office tower, Bogota’s well-known World Trade Center. In the novel, this corporate complex houses elite agents of transnational capital including the economist who orders the model’s murder after she acquires evidence of his illegal arms trading activities. The location of the source of corruption in centers of political and economic power again coincides with the typical pattern of the hard-boiled story as described by Cawelti. Collazos’s rehearsal of this formula is exceptional in the Colombian context in that it approximates in some respects the police procedural, a detective sub-genre centering on the routine procedures and collaborative enterprise of official police forces, but *La modelo asesinada* does deploy his protagonist in hard-boiled fashion as primary narrative agent of surveillance and scourge of high-level corruption. Also hard-boiled is the moral ambiguity attending the first of these functions.

Even when it happens (most improbably) to generate video evidence of a sensational murder, the narrator’s confessedly immoral and lascivious visual intrusion into the lives of others stands in stark contrast to the classical detective’s heroic disavowal of the excessive, aggressive, and transgressive desires figured by the criminal antagonists of the detective genre. Although Collazos includes the narrator’s indecisive separation from his wife as a prominent secondary plot element, *La modelo asesinada* vigorously re-inscribes the misogynistic and pornographic tendencies so prominent in the tradition of hard-boiled narrative. The novel’s title and central incident announce the sexual politics of a narrative in which an implicitly male reader is enticed with images of punishing violence inflicted on a desirable but unattainable or dangerous female body, and in which the fantasy of violent vengeance exacted by a righteous male hero only flimsily conceals the narrative’s exploitation, and the reader’s anticipated enjoyment, of images of sexualized violence. Collazos’s heavy investment on the troublesome force of this appeal is exemplified not only by his narrative treatment of the victim’s body, but also by a revealing scene of confession introduced toward the end of the novel in which
both male investigators and the reader are implicated vicariously in the 
enjoyment of representations of sexual violence.

In the novel’s opening sequence, the protagonist spies on a woman, 
subsequently revealed to be the famed model, as she performs a striptease 
for an unseen spectator, and he records her performance with a video 
camera until it ends unexpectedly with her murder. As the protagonist 
hesitates to accept what he’s witnessed, the woman’s body is dumped 
down a garbage chute and shortly thereafter is found by police in a dump-
stier. When reporters and cameramen arrive and attempt to photograph 
the naked, sullied, and famous body, the novel half-heartedly chastises 
the very morbid pornographic impulses it will continue to engage. Many 
chapters later, the investigation concludes with the confession of a witness 
and accomplice to the murder who recounts the full story of the crime to 
a roomful of high-ranking male officials, and the tensions dramatized in 
this scene speak eloquently of the contradictions on which the novela negra 
thrives. As the chief prosecutor and his subordinates listen and as a 
camera records, the witness recounts A long, sordid sequence of exhibitionism 
and ostentation of power (314), in which a sicario hired by the 
economist rapes and humiliates the model.

According to the narrator, who watches a video of the confession 
weeks later, the witness recounted the abuse in detail not so much to 
revel in the humiliation suffered by the model as to offer an exact version 
of the encounter (316). In reproducing this detailed testimony, however, 
the narrative seems troubled by its own reproduction of the abuse. All 
that separates the fiction of this testimony in the novel from rape pornog-
raphy is the remorseful attitude of the nonetheless voluble witness, and 
the protests of the chief investigator who instructs him to avoid lurid 
embellishment, but to little avail.

Spare us the scabrous details, Arias repeats, but it would seem that Alatriste 
needs those details in order not to lose himself in the flow of the story. Or 
in order to convey the true dimensions of the misery. Arias recalls having 
found erotic magazines in Alatriste’s apartment, and he believes that the 
woman’s indignation, his disgust is real, just as his irrational taste for 
scabrous details is real. (317)

Here, before resuming fictional transcription, which is to say, literary 
imagination, of the excessively detailed recollection of a model’s rape, 
humiliation and murder, the narrative seems to acknowledge its own 
affinity with pornography, even as it dramatizes a conflict between its pri-
mary drives. On the one hand, the recounted actions of the remorseless
and preening *sicario* figure an aggressive and transgressive desire to possess, penetrate, and punish the body of the unattainable, commodified woman, a desire in which the narrative renders complicit both prosecutors and reader. On the other, the prosecutor who intervenes in an attempt to restrain this excess figures the disciplinary drive that defines detective fiction, although here the drive appears feeble in its ultimate failure to restrain the narrative’s exploitation of a snuff fantasy. Finally, Arias, the agents, the chief prosecutor, everyone accepts that Alatriste can’t help including the details (319). It is also significant in this respect that the *sicario* was released illegally from prison by corrupt guards in order to carry out the murder.

As I stated at the beginning of my discussion, *La modelo asesinada* thus exemplifies a number of the limitations that characterize the Colombian *novela negra*. Although Collazos’s novel concludes with the full explanation of the murder scenario and the identification and arrest of the perpetrator and instigators, it also depends heavily for dramatic interest on the prurient appeal of the incident witnessed by the detective voyeur in the opening pages and then reconstructed during the climactic confession in detail acknowledged by the narrative as excessive. The novel works to describe criminal conspiracy between political and business elites, on one hand, and drug lords and paramilitaries on the other, but the investigation and denunciation of money laundering and illegal arms trafficking remains secondary to a narrative fascination with celebrity, female models and wealth. The former prosecutor positioned as narrator and protagonist is also characterized as an unrepentant voyeur, and since he is no longer officially authorized, he is increasingly displaced from the investigation in the later part of the novel and reduced to the narrative function of transcribing conversations recounted to him by his friend, the chief investigator. The narrator thus concludes the novel not as the active agent of justice, but as the third-generation consumer of the novel’s central spectacle of pornographic sadism, as he watches the taped confession of a witness to the rape and murder that the narrator himself partially recorded and whose confessional reconstruction the novel exploits as the narrative payoff, one that very nearly reproduces the pornographic *telos* of the *moneyshot*. Despite the novel’s enactment of legal prosecution of powerful criminals, it ultimately presents a weak and displaced investigative protagonist who is unabashedly complicit in the misogynistic sexual politics of the hard-boiled narrative.
Recalling Santiago Gamboa’s previously quoted observation regarding the problem of an excessive proximity and constancy of violence and the consequent implausibility of a comprehensive and definitive solution to any investigation relating to Colombia’s most permanent conflicts, we may conclude that Collazos’s novel tackles social violence and the underlying causes less adeptly than does Gamboa’s own novela negra of the same period. In an interview with María Claudia Zarama, Gamboa related his *Perder es cuestión de método* (Losing Is a Question of Method, 1997) to a conversation in which Paco Ignacio Taibo II asked him why Colombia had produced no novela negra when Colombian reality was itself so black. Gamboa again attributed this lack to the oversaturation of the Colombian news media with stories of criminal violence. He went on to explain that his own strategy for novelizing already all too familiar and quotidian forms of violence was to focus on a subtler, more peripheral violence rather than most direct and immediate manifestations about which Colombians are already very well-informed. He recalled that the writing of *Perder* required him to assume a certain distance from the headlines and also to incorporate journalistic discourse in the texture of the novel, because in Colombia, that violent reality belongs to the press. Elsewhere, he explained his notion of peripheral violence thus:

Leaving aside the best known factors of violence in Colombia, such as the drug trade, the guerrillas and the paramilitaries, I decided to talk about a more diffuse violence resulting from that other great violence (quoted in Fajardo). By narrating a narrower by more substantial intrigue than Collazos, Gamboa succeeds in conjuring violence, both in the sense of invoking and of allaying it.

*Perder* echoes *La modelo asesinada* in its hard-boiled concern with organized crime and corrupt business dealings, as well as with urban mapping and the undressing and inspection of bodies. The novel narrates a reporter’s investigation into corrupt dealings between construction magnates, lawyers, and a Bogota city councilman who compete and conspire to obtain land titles necessary to advance a large residential development project outside Bogota. Although Gamboa is less sweeping than Collazos in his observations with regard to the urban geography of Bogota, he sets the novel in a typically hard-boiled selection of contrastingly extreme high and low urban locales. On the one hand, *Perder* introduces us into the offices and luxurious homes of business lawyers, city councilmen, and construction magnates and into the Executive’s Club, and the downtown penthouse office of a Mafioso. On the other hand, it leads us through
brothels, a prostitute’s humble apartment in the marginal Ciudad Kennedy district, a central police station, a mental hospital, two morgues, and the city’s Cementerio Central, as well as a lugubrious gravedigger’s bar adjacent to it. The hard-boiled compulsion to inspect bodies is cleverly accommodated by the inclusion of scenes in a nudist colony occupying the disputed lands and through the novel’s inaugural presentation of an unidentified cadaver. Gamboa’s opening gambit his narrative hook involves the body of an unidentified man who appears to have been restrained and drowned, then impaled and crucified on the shore of a lake outside Bogota. The novel’s protagonist arrives at the crime scene, approaches the corpse, sketches its placement in his notebook, photographs it, and complies with his (and the hard-boiled genre’s) detestable job of examining the body (14).8 Perder relies heavily on its grisly inaugural image of malicious corporeal degradation (drowning supplemented by impalement and crucifixion) and the horror of organic indistinction or obliteration of personal identity to ignite interest in the investigative plot that follows. From afar it looked to him like an obese Christ. A pallid elephant drawn by a child (14). Thus does Gamboa rehearse the hard-boiled scenario of abjection. The dissolving, permeable, and anonymous corpse poses, as always in detective fiction, are a threat to subjective identity and knowledge, and the investigating subject must contain or sublimate that threat through reasoning, recognition, and explanation, thus asserting and sustaining, as per David Trotter (27), the stable subjecthood on which the genre narrative relies.

Gamboa opens his second chapter in Bogota’s central morgue, the Instituto de Medicina Legal, and it is this space, as much as the police station, that characterizes legal authority in the novel. As the investigating reporter listens, a medical examiner provides a brief, unsympathetic summary of autopsy results, complaining, That shit they brought in last night was some of the nastiest I’ve seen in my whole life (21). The forensic conclusion is that the death could be attributed to any one of a number of devastating injuries: He’s busted up all over. His spine’s fractured, his stomach’s ruptured, there’s water in his lungs and his throat’s closed up. With even half of any of that, it’s Good bye, Charlie’ (21). The excessive violence inflicted on the corpse has ample precedent in both the hard-boiled genre and in Colombian fiction generally,9 but less familiar is the vivid evocation of the amphitheater itself. Humidity has stripped the paint from the ceiling, revealing cracks and perforations, and the antennae of a cockroach peek out of one of them. The medical examiner doesn’t bother to remove his plastic gloves as he sips coffee and eats a pastry, but what most horrifies the reporter protagonist is a collection of trophies
immortalized in formaldehyde: a heart with three bullet wounds, a liver eaten away by cirrhosis, a hand clutching a knife (21).

Other scenes in the novel strongly reinforce the critique of bureaucratic laxity, decay, and cynicism, and the journalistic and forensic inspection of the impaled cadaver is marked not only by the disenchanted objectivism of hard-boiled discourse, always more concerned with the spectacle of corporeal violence than with its subjective impact, but also by what we may recognize as a postmodernist waning of affect (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 10). While not entirely constrained by hard-boiled conventions, Gamboa’s novel does invoke them as a narrative strategy for apprehending at least certain limited manifestations of Colombian social violence and, less concretely, for mitigating the unbearable abjection embodied, in Julia Kristeva’s words, by the corpse seen without God and outside of science (3). Unlike *La modelo asesinada*, which also foregrounds a degraded cadaver but which ends with legal prosecution of the primary culprits in the murder, *Perder* enacts a very limited justice. One character involved in the struggle for the land titles, a corrupt city councilman who traded in public lands and unclaimed property (257), is killed by his former collaborator, a lawyer who sought to procure the titles for his own ends. Although the lawyer is detained by police, other characters responsible for kidnapping, extortion, murder, and other crimes remain free at novel’s end, evidently as the result of an agreement by the police captain in charge of the investigation to close the case in exchange for employment by the construction magnate who gave the order to impale the cadaver in order to intimidate his rivals. At the conclusion of *Perder*, as in other contemporary Colombian novels using variations of detective formulae to engage with the theme of epidemic violence, impunity reigns largely unchecked, and the result is thus less a therapeutic binding of evidentiary fragments into a meaningful narrative whole than, in the words of Hubert Pöppel, a detective novel that, on the final and most fractured level, no longer investigates the question of ‘What really happened?’ nor even ‘What might have happened?’ but rather ponders, rather, ‘What do we do with the remains?’ (144).

Santiago Gamboa’s novel echoes Pöppel’s final question not only in its emphasis on cadavers, morgues, and cemeteries or in Monsiváis’s words, the city’s death chambers, but also in its leitmotif of excrement, particularly associated with an underworld Mafioso figure who uses his knowledge of his former boss’s murderous business practices to extort control over the disputed land. Yet *Perder* affords, for the most part, only glimpses of spaces of urban abjection, as when the investigating protagonist slips into the Cementerio Central at night and bribes a leprous
gravedigger to allow him to open a coffin. In general, criminal activity transpires in socially and architecturally elevated spaces, foremost among them being the Mafioso’s penthouse office located atop a hotel in the city center and affording him a commanding, panoramic view of the city’s most recognizable landmarks: His own office, in the penthouse of the Hotel Esmeralda, was a rectangular room with windows looking out at Monserrate, the Torres del Parque and the Plaza de Toros. By simply turning his chair, he could see the Avianca building and the ghostly tips of the frustrated Hilton Hotel (142). Just as Collazos attributed responsibility for the model’s murder to an elite economist working in Bogota’s World Trade Center, Gamboa locates his criminal agents above street level, in keeping with his understanding of the national crisis.

Colombia’s current violence, Gamboa writes elsewhere, is not rooted in genetics, nor, really, in drugs, but in a political history of highborn politicians in Bogota’s elegant drawing rooms who seek to protect their privileges with partisan rhetoric that instigates peasant uprisings and mass bloodshed (Secret Histories). In the same essay, Gamboa defends the novela negra as Latin America’s most forceful literary expression of life at the social margins and the corruptions of public life, the latter concern being particularly evident in Perder. Yet it is the next Colombian novelist to be examined here who gives fullest expression to Gamboa’s observation in the same essay that for the novela negra the city is the preferred space—the city viewed from the margins, not the center, from a perspective that provides intimate knowledge of its darkest secrets. In the vibrant panorama of the contemporary Colombian novel, Mario Mendoza stands out as a specialist in those darkest secrets of the urban margins.

**The Killing Floor**

In 2002, Barcelona publishing house Seix Barral awarded the Premio Biblioteca Breve, a prestigious international literary prize, to Mendoza’s Satanás (Satan), bringing sudden fame to a writer who was, until then, scarcely known outside his native Bogota. In three previous novels and a collection of short stories, Mendoza had already developed one of the most sustained and disturbing literary reflections on the escalation of violence, which peaked in Bogota in 1993, the year before publication of his first novel. Although the city has become, by statistical measures, somewhat less dangerous since then, Mendoza’s dark narrative echoes the enduring perception by Bogota residents of the urban environment as hostile and threatening. Here I will discuss Mendoza’s first two novels,
La ciudad de los umbrales (The City of Thresholds, 1994), which reads as a program for his subsequent work, and Scorpio City (1998), one of the most suggestive of all Colombian detective novels. As the title of the first book announces, Mendoza’s will be a fiction of limits, but rather than reaffirming subjective, moral, legal, and rational boundaries as detective fiction has long served to do, these novels will strive relentlessly toward a radical transgression and exploration of danger zones of urban geography and unfamiliar dimensions of subjective and social experience. Repeated references to Robert Louis Stevenson’s The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886) provide one touchstone of a narrative devoted to the examination of processes of psychic, social, and urban disintegration that Mendoza locates in the city of Mr. Hyde. 12

Speaking in interviews, Santiago Gamboa has recognized Mendoza as the best chronicler of marginal Bogota, and the relevance of the chronicle genre to Mendoza’s narrative is attested by the fact that in the United States, the Library of Congress classified and catalogued his first novel not with other works of Colombian fiction but rather with non-fictional works on the history of Bogota (F2291). La ciudad de los umbrales indeed presents itself as the reflections of two Bogota residents, members of a small circle of friends united in their admiration for a philosopher named Guillermo Lejbán. The first of the narrators, Simón Tebcheranny, is a young literature professor and aspiring writer who refers frequently to his work on a novel that seems to be La ciudad de los umbrales itself. It also bears mentioning that Tebcheranny’s biography is very reminiscent of Mendoza’s, and he bears the name of Mendoza’s Lebanese immigrant grandfather. The second of Mendoza’s three chapters consists of diary entries attributed to Aurelio, a lawyer and art history professor who shares many of Simón’s intellectual concerns. Like many of Mendoza’s protagonists, Aurelio also chafes under the economic and spiritual constraints of modern, urban existence, and he strives to transcend middle-class normalcy and drudgery through sexual transgression. Aurelio’s diary is replete with graphic anecdotes of sex, sadomasochism, necrophilia, cross-dressing, and, ultimately, homicide.

Before Aurelio himself becomes a killer, he works as a public defender in Bogota’s Cárcel Modelo, and his comments on this experience there provide an early example of Mendoza’s often radically negative perspective on the law and the Colombian justice system. Aurelio enjoys defending guilty clients, he says, by breaking the rules, deceiving juries, and taking advantage of the crude mistakes made by the police. He has no qualms about freeing criminals, since he admires their strength and their
ruthless determination to survive, which he sees as virtues consistent with
the universal logic of the natural world (71 72). In chapter 2 of _La ciudad de los umbrales_, Aurelio thus articulates a fascination with violent, irrational force as a natural and liberating antidote to bureaucratic urban modernity and a bourgeois domesticity perceived as suffocating, alienating, and intolerable. Speaking as a legal professional, he also discredits the functioning of the rule of law in Colombia, presenting a view of pervasive corruption that is common in contemporary Colombian fiction, but especially dark in Mendoza’s novels.

In a series of increasingly violent sexual encounters, Aurelio claims that he learns to draw the darkest and most secret forces out of myself (76), and he inflicts them, predictably, on female bodies. Beset, however, by a persistent sense of desolation and unsatisfied with sadism, Aurelio finds inspiration in Lejbán’s theory of transvestitism to fulfill his declared destiny: my destiny is to penetrate the dark side that dwells within me, to face the inner beast we call the spirit (80). By dressing as a woman, Aurelio doubles himself, though less mysteriously than Stevenson’s Dr. Jekyll, and becomes, by his own explanation, the object of his own desire. His second transvestite foray leads him back to a slaughterhouse, already experienced earlier in the narrative as a place of primal and erotic excitement. The diary entry recording this second visit epitomizes as well as any other passage Mendoza’s bold aesthetics of abjection, as Aurelio returns to the slaughterhouse, and, finding himself again intoxicated by the sounds and smells, throws himself on the floor among the excrement and rotten scraps and masturbates by rubbing against the floor until his clothes are torn. He leaves disheveled but happy, immensely happy (85). While Collazos and Gamboa also exploited sexual and excremental imagery in their narratives, Mendoza here does them one better by reveling lasciviously in filth. Here, and in other works, he explicitly invokes an orgiastic, Bacchic sensibility, and associates transcendence and liberation with transgression, violence, carnality, and abasement. When an aggressive drunk pursues Aurelio on his third outing in drag, the irritated transvestite attacks and kills his harasser by the Cementerio Central. The experience produces no remorse, but rather mystical ecstasy, as he feels his body dissolve into liquid, gas, and finally cosmic dust, as the distinction between self and the universe gives way (87). Aurelio ends the novel imprisoned not for homicide, but for the previous physical abuse of his lover, providing further evidence of the inefficaciousness of the Bogota justice system.

Aurelio is notable for being both a lawyer and the first of a number of homicidal protagonists in Mendoza’s narrative, but his diary appears
embedded in *La ciudad de los umbrales* between chapters narrated by Simón Tebcheranny, the novelist-within-the-novel who strives to carry out the philosopher Lejbán’s advice that he write the city by tracing the subjective experiences of its accidentally interacting inhabitants (96). On the novel’s first page, Tebcheranny announces that he has spent years seeking knowledge of the city, and the passage he quotes from an earlier, failed attempt at writing the city serves as an invocation for all of Mendoza’s narrative.

> Down there, at the bottom, the city blinked and understood. . . . Bogota, city of night vision, poisoned by shadows and darkness that turn every house into a brothel, every park into a cemetery, every citizen into a cadaver desperately clinging to life. . . . Bogota, monstrous clitoris that bleeds with the Beatitudes of your strange and promiscuous delirium. . . . Bogota, city of madmen and beggars destroyed by the caresses of a piercing torture, horde of human waste that is the promise of a hecatomb. . . . Bogota, face of infamy. (11)

Turgid and truculent, this passage exemplifies the harsh tonalities of Mendoza’s discourse, and it also introduces a number of the ideas that will remain central to his imagination of the city: monstrosity, insanity, waste, death, and violence impelled by erotic desire. Tebcheranny begins by anticipating a downward gaze into the dark urban depths, and his narrative indeed leads us through brothels, dive bars, cemeteries, slaughterhouses, and streets haunted by the indigent and sick. Of the friends whose various letters, manuscripts, and diaries Tebcheranny incorporates into his narrative, one ends up in prison, another commits suicide, and a third, who is a political militant, flees to Mexico after killing a military officer who once tortured her comrades. Tebcheranny’s mentor Lejbán leaves Bogota and travels to Israel to do research, only to be shot and killed there after he is mistaken for an agent of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. As in other of Mendoza’s narratives, the city itself seems to damn its inhabitants by instilling in them a self-destructive and nearly demonic violence.

Since *La ciudad de los umbrales* features many more reflections on contemporary Bogota than would be convenient to summarize here, suffice it to say that at the heart of the narrative lies Lejbán’s ideal project of a novel whose protagonist would be the city itself and which would view the souls of city’s inhabitants as products of urban space (62). Lejbán’s prescription for writing the city recalls many of the issues of urban representation already discussed here.
[I]n that hypothetical novel postulated by Lejbán, the thread of the various stories of the characters is split, broken into fragments, turning the narration into a jumble of remnants that, even while maintaining a certain continuity, abandons the characters at a certain point. . . . And, most importantly, the characters think the city, they are voices that emit statements attempting to explain it. Thus, each of the characters becomes an intermittent traveler who goes in search of his or her destiny and who, in order to reach it, must suffer the city. (62)

Lejbán here provides directives, which Mendoza will implement not only in *La ciudad de los umbrales* but also in his subsequent novels. Elsewhere in *La ciudad*, Tebcheranny expounds this conception of Bogota as the city of the indeterminate, of the formless, of the unresolved (97) and as a disintegrating force: the destructive presence of Bogota, disuniting, conspiring, undoing all ties (99). Mendoza’s characters inhabit, not a solid and continuous urban plane, but, according to Tebcheranny, something far more treacherous. Bogota: abyss, precipice, rhapsodizes the narrator. Bogota: labyrinth with neither entrance nor exit, unfortunate construction (99). As Lejbán suggests, the narrative of lives lived in such a space cannot proceed in a purposeful, linear fashion, but must consist instead of disjointed and erratic segments that cross and diverge without weaving themselves into a coherent text.

Mendoza’s Bogota is a city of thresholds and trapdoors across and through which inhabitants pass suddenly into dimensions of subjective and social experience that will be characterized in *Scorpio City* as Plutonic. Tebcheranny identifies certain urban places as thresholds to zones of indiscernibility beyond ordinary perception and consciousness. He suggests that no one knows these portals to the unknown better than the *desechables* (street people), such as the contemporary nomads who roam the city at night collecting recyclable materials in wooden carts (115). If, as Gamboa suggests, the *novela negra* insists on a view of the city from the margins, Mendoza gestures toward a specific and local margin that his next novel will claim. A passing reference in this passage to Emanuel Swedenborg’s doctrine of correspondence will prove less significant to the development of Mendoza’s aesthetics than will earlier references to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s theory of nomadism and to Paul Virilio’s aesthetics of disappearance. Deleuze and Guattari are first invoked by an epigraph to *La ciudad de los umbrales*, which reads in part: There are not only strange voyages in the city but voyages in place. . . . Voyage in place: that is the name of all intensities. . . . To think is to voyage (Deleuze and Guattari 482). Virilio is cited most explicitly in a passage in which Lejbán
relates the lives of Rimbaud and Dostoevsky to the Virilian topics of speed, epilepsy, and the aesthetics of disappearance (35). It is perhaps the latter concept, with its emphasis on interruptions in perception and on the discontinuity of consciousness, that weighs most on Mendoza’s next novel, which is both a continuation of La ciudad de los umbrales and his only detective-centered novela negra.

Detective Down

Scorpio City (1998) begins as a rather conventional contemporary hard-boiled investigation by police inspector Leonardo Sinisterra into a series of murders of prostitutes in the center of Bogota. Suspicion falls on an apocalyptic Christian sect, Cristianos de Final de Milenio, for collaborating with police elements in a campaign of social cleansing intended to purify the city in preparation for the second coming of Christ at the end of the millennium. Sinisterra learns of the sect’s involvement from El Apóstol, a marijuana-smoking Christian mystic who also seeks to defeat the sect and who reveals that the prostitutes are being killed for symbolic reasons and in the order of their zodiac signs. In the novel’s central section, Sinisterra locates the sect’s headquarters and confirms that they are killing prostitutes not only in Bogota but in Miami as well, but the following day he is removed from the case and obliged to resign from the police force. Shortly thereafter and at the exact center point of the novel, Sinisterra is kidnapped by agents of the conspiracy and detained in a mental hospital where he is plunged into a state of amnesia and helplessness by the administration of electroshocks and unspecified drugs. Once his identity is obliterated, Sinisterra is released onto the streets of the city center where he wanders lost in what another character calls La Zona, the psychosocial margin inhabited by alcoholic, drug-addicted, and mentally ill street people (116). For weeks he wanders Bogota as an indigent, recognizing nothing of his urban environment (129), before joining a tribe of recyclers who travel the city streets at night and sift through refuse in search of resalable materials.

Approximately the second half of Scorpio City is dedicated to the protagonist’s struggle to recover his memory and identity and to protect the recyclers from assaults by the social cleansing gangs. Little by little, while walking the city, he recovers flashes of a past life and begins the rescue of his humanity (130). Among the tribe of recyclers, the former detective finds solidarity and community, and in their activities he also finds a metaphor for his existence without memory:
Familiarity with garbage put him in contact with an unknown world: the perishable, the ephemeral, that which a society uses and discards in order to go in search of new objects to use. The vicious circle of attachments and consumption was revealed to him as he scrutinized and ventured among the now old and useless elements. (131)

The contemplation of discarded waste leads him to reflect on the ephemeral nature of his own body, and it might well also serve as a metaphor for his amnesia or for that of an urban consumer society predicated on disposability and incessant innovation. The transformation of Sinisterra from police detective into garbage-picking indigent and amnesiac represents another crossing of thresholds and offers strong parallels with the narrative trajectory of Parra’s *Nostalgia de la sombra*, discussed in the previous chapter. Here the descent into the city’s Plutonic underworld (47) leads the protagonist to reside not on the outskirts but at the very colonial center in a once-elegant but since disastrously deteriorated neighborhood known as El Cartucho. Sinisterra joins the community of recyclers living on Calle del Cartucho, known at the time of the novel’s writing as a center of intense criminal activity and perceived by Bogota residents as the most dangerous place in the city (Silva 86).

In the novel’s final chapters, after Sinisterra joins the tribe of recyclers residing in El Cartucho, he convinces and trains them to resist social cleansing with arms provided by a guerrilla group. A lethal counterattack on a social cleansing gang backfires, resulting in intensified repression of the recyclers and in Sinisterra’s expulsion from the tribe. By finally condemning the former police detective to an accidental death in the sewers of the city, Mendoza dramatizes even more strongly than Gamboa the weakness of judicial institutions and the implausibility of detective fiction in Colombia. Sinisterra dies while fleeing from the implacable agents of the social cleansing conspiracy, falling from a ladder under a manhole cover and lying injured for days as his lucidity and reason, the emblematic qualities of the detective hero, ebb away (152–53). Though comparable in its circumstances to the death of Taibo’s private detective Belascoarán Shayne in *No habrá final feliz*, the accidental, slow, and inglorious nature of Sinisterra’s demise in a dark sewer refutes even more forcefully the genre fantasy of heroic individual struggle against an organized urban criminality involving corrupt police agents. Sinisterra’s name is revealed to contain a double prefiguration of his fate as he is forcibly exiled into a sinister, lawless, and nocturnal urban underworld and deprived of his former identity and of legitimate territory (*terra*).Returning to the idea of an ordering and reappropriation of urban space
undertaken by the neopoliciaco and by hard-boiled narrative generally, we may observe that rather than symbolically securing and binding the dispersed fragments of the metropolis through the movement, surveillance, and knowledge-gathering of a detective agent, Mendoza imagines an urban environment so treacherous as to disperse and immobilize the detective subject, in a process also relating to the author’s persistent critique of the ideology of the unitary self.

Another way in which Scorpio City works to decenter detective narrative is through its use of multiple and unidentified narrators with varying relationships to the protagonist. Referring to Sinisterra sometimes in the third person and sometimes in the second person, these narrators also vary in the inflection of their narrative voice and in the extent of their knowledge of the story. In an epilogue to Scorpio City, Simón Tebcheranny appears again, as in La ciudad de los umbrales, as a novelist-within-the-novel and as the arbiter of narrative polyphony. Through his diary entries the reader learns how Tebcheranny came to know and write the story of Sinisterra and why it interested him intensely. These comments by Mendoza’s intratextual alter ego recall Jameson’s observations with regard to the quasi-picaresque function of the hard-boiled detective in Raymond Chandler’s novels of dispersed Los Angeles.

Yes, this is what I had been waiting for: a story that cuts through the city in all its layers, like a journey to the center of an onion. An inspector, crimes, disguised medieval zealots in search of power, vagabonds and prehistoric nomads living off garbage, and finally the sewers of the city like the innermost intimacy, like the unconscious where the city’s prohibited materials flow and reside. (164)

Later diary entries echo repeated allusions in the novel to late twentieth century Bogota as an apocalyptic city and as the vanguard of disaster. If Paris and New York were the archetypical cities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Tebcheranny asserts, the archetype of the present is the Third World city with its chaos, violence, shantytowns, nomadic vagabonds in search of food, murdered children and child murderers, sewer-dwellers, a mob of crazy people in the streets (165). While the South can no longer aspire to emulate the North, Tebcheranny adds that the North can now look to the South for an image of its own future, as northern metropolises come more and more to resemble Bogota, Rio de Janeiro or Mexico City. We’re the future (166). In conjunction with this, Mendoza’s writer in the text also offers an explicit refutation of the detective genre in the context of the Latin American metropolis.
I have no desire to write a traditional, Manichean detective novel with the usual triumph of good over evil in the last pages. No. I’ll allow reality to triumph over form, I will respect the story just as Zelia [a friend of Sinisterra] told it to me. I do not wish to impose moralizing structures in order to exorcize the chaos and the injustice. In a country with 97 percent impunity, a detective novel with a happy ending is purely fantastic literature. Here in Latin America the descent into Hades is irreversible.

As apocalyptic as Mendoza sounds here, it is worth noting that his prediction echoes similar assessments by other prominent Colombian writers, such as Laura Restrepo and Fernando Vallejo. The second passage just quoted is possibly the most explicit acknowledgement offered in any novela negra of the conditions determining the development of urban crime fiction in contemporary Latin America.

Like the hard-boiled protagonists of innumerable previous novels, Sinisterra begins Scorpio City as an observer of the nocturnal fauna of an urban territory, introducing us vicariously into the nightlife of central Bogota. Bums, beggars, recyclers with their wooden carts and their dogs, crazy people, pimps, cruising fags, whores, loners, insomniacs, alcoholics, drug addicts. What is remarkable is that halfway through the novel the detective himself is stripped of his privileged identity and position and expelled and integrated into this underworld he initially policed, and in which the struggle for survival appears to invalidate Manichean notions of good and evil. As in La ciudad de los umbrales, Mendoza’s fascination with the city as a labyrinth of multiple, superimposed dimensions involves the exploration of the abject margins of the contemporary metropolis, represented in Scorpio City by places such as strip clubs, brothels, transient hotels, crack houses, prisons, cemeteries, sewers, and homeless tent cities. The excavation of suppressed dimensions of urban existence also, however, involves the subjection of his rational and lawful protagonist, a former student of anthropology, to immersion in a popular urban culture in which the norms of rational and scientific modernity do not entirely prevail. Both before and after his kidnapping, Sinisterra listens avidly to a midnight radio program devoted to occult and supernatural themes, and the novel reproduces discussions by Bogota residents who call in to attest to experiences of alien abduction, witchcraft, shamanic healing, and past-life regression. To Sinisterra, this program reveals the magical and bizarre city of the popular mentality and the potency of an oral culture enduring beneath what Ángel Rama termed the lettered city. One brief chapter of the novel consists
entirely of the journal of El Apóstol, Sinisterra’s mystic informant who alternates drug-induced voyages through past lives with observations on the pursuit of the murderous sect, and it is El Apóstol who alerts the inspector to the existence of other cities underlying the one he knows: mystical Bogota, astrological Bogota, sacrificial Bogota (31).

Following his transformation through electroshocks and drugs, Sinisterra himself experiences a vision of the Biblical apocalypse in the Cementerio Central, and the novel generally presents irrational experiences without discrediting them, allowing the reader leeway to attribute them to some combination of mental pathology, drug-induced hallucination, and mystical revelation. Astrological themes, though prominent in the investigation of the serial murders committed by the sect, are ultimately significant only as embellishment on the familiar hard-boiled notion of a religious sect fomenting criminal conspiracy. Though clearly conceived as both an intervention in and a reflection on the novela negra tradition, one criticism invited by Mendoza’s reliance on the novelist-within-the-novel is that Scorpio City repeatedly proclaims the apocalyptic character of urban reality without patiently substantiating it through sustained description of social environments or deeply subjectivized character perspectives. As Sinisterra walks the city center in both halves of the novel, his movements are frequently located with regard to specific streets and places, and his sensory perceptions are sometimes richly evoked, as during his visits to a popular market. But despite seeking out the lowest urban places, Scorpio City’s intensely adventurous plot, in addition to its attention to mystical experiences and discussions of paranormal phenomena, ultimately detracts from the hard-boiled dirty realism to which it aspires.

In a discussion with university students in Bogota following the novel’s publication, Mendoza reprised a number of Tebcheranny’s statements in his own voice, explaining his motivation for writing as a desire to enter the sewers of Bogota, the outskirts, almost the urban and suburban unconscious, and he interpreted his first books as offering a map of Bogota (Interview Vargas Millán and Salgado). More recently, in a 2006 interview, he expounded at some length on his perceived relation to detective genre.

I’ve flirted with the genre from afar, and not with the traditional detective novel. . . . I’ve approached from the Latin American side, Paco Ignacio Taibo II, Rubem Fonseca and a few others . . . in the Latin American detective novel it’s impossible to know where the good guy is and where the bad guy is, just as in our countries. . . . Every time we see the news of
political corruption, of the armed forces linked to dirty dealings and all the rest, we realize that those entrusted with enforcing the law and keeping order do exactly the opposite. In that Latin American detective novel there’s no moral reconstruction of society, there’s no classic triumph of the forces of good over evil: in the end we realize that everything is a muddle, a labyrinth, a chaos and a *maremagnum* that confuses us all to hell. I’ve flirted with the genre and I think it’s a good tactic for entering the contemporary Latin American city. The detective novel almost always obliges us to address the city. (Interview Extremera)

Taking these comments into account, it is tempting to consider *Scorpio City* as an emblematically transitional text in a *novela negra* corpus founded on a project of urban mapping, an increasingly disenchanted worldview, and commitment to the critical examination of the contemporary proliferation of urban violence. Mendoza’s degradation and deactivation of Sinisterra seems in retrospect a natural prelude to his subsequent foregrounding of criminal protagonists in *Relato de un asesino* (A Killer’s Tale, 2001) and *Satanás* (2002), his first novels to be published abroad as well as in Colombia.

**Criminal Ascendancy 2**

As I argue in Chapter 2 and elsewhere, the *neopolicia-co* model that won adherents in a number of countries during the 1970s and 1980s has ceded hegemony in Latin America to a post-*neopolicia-co* mode in which criminals gain ascendancy over detectives, and Mendoza’s narrative trajectory exemplifies this tendency perhaps better than that of any other novelist. *Relato de un asesino*, Mendoza’s third novel, is the fictional memoir of a possibly psychotic Bogota writer imprisoned for murdering his pregnant lover. While the narrator’s reconstruction of his life again includes explorations of the city’s most remote Plutonic corners (124) and journeys into its heart of darkness (126), his fate seems to turn on the incompatibility of his artistic vocation with heterosexual partnership and domestic cohabitation. His lover’s pregnancy provokes a complete creative sterility in the narrator, and when his resentment is aggravated by the discovery that she is cheating on him, he explodes into a rage, butchers her, and destroys the fetus that seemed to thrive at the expense of his art. Mendoza’s narrator again relates his descent into violence to Stevenson’s Mr. Hyde and to the Scottish novelist’s discovery of the urban adventure story: the journey through the periphery of the modern city, the excursion to the forbidden zone, the crossing into the hellish circles of the industrial city. This spatial difference speaks to us of a frontier that is
found within, in the psyche (55). Here Mendoza reminds us that his fictitious excursions into dark urban margins are always linked to an exploration of submerged forces threatening the stability of rational subjectivity in the city of Mr. Hyde.

This analogy between the dangerous margins of the metropolis and the dark regions of personality is, as we have seen, a constant in Mendoza’s narrative, and it received its best-known expression in Satanás. This, Mendoza’s most commercially successful work, is a novelization of the story of a mass-murder committed in Bogota in 1986 by Campo Elías, a Colombian Vietnam veteran who, at the time of the killings, was a literature student and, by chance, an acquaintance of Mendoza. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* again features very prominently, since the real killer carried the novel with him during the massacre, and perhaps the most marked difference with regard to Mendoza’s previous novels is, as the title indicates, the relatively greater weighting of transcendent notions of evil. Although Mendoza contends in an interview with Luis García that Satan is, for him, a psychic force operating inside the characters, the novel seems to treat the eruption of violence less as a psychological phenomenon than as a metaphysical one. One subplot of *Satanás* involves a doubting priest faced with a case of demonic possession, the reality of which is not questioned in the narrative. After the priest dies in the novel’s climactic massacre, an epilogue informs the reader that on the same day of Campo Elías’s spree, the possessed girl killed her mother and a servant and signed her crime in blood using the same Bible phrase inscribed by Campo Elías at the scene of his massacre: *I am legion* (283). The possessed girl then disappeared, according to the epilogue, leaving journalists to speculate: surely she’s wandering through the streets, lost among the crowd of beggars and demented people who travel the city for endless hours and who sleep in vacant lots, abandoned houses, in lonely parks or under bridges in stinking, improvised shelters (283). *Satanás* concludes with this dubious conflation of apparently metaphysical evil with social marginality, and Mendoza’s subsequent fiction has continued to explore the social reproduction of violence from the perspective of subjects who variously choose to inflict it, suffer its traumatic effects, or find themselves invigorated and even liberated by the accidental experience of it.  

While Mendoza’s publications over the span of a decade qualify him as the primary exponent of the *novela negra* of contemporary Bogota, other Colombian novelists have also contributed notably to the expansion of the genre in recent years. In Bogota, the most notable of these contributions is Nahum Montt’s *El Eskimal y la Mariposa* (The Eskimo and the Butterfly), a novel comparable in style to Mendoza’s and winner of the
2004 Premio Nacional Ciudad de Bogotá. Like Satanás, El Eskimal offers a fictional reconstruction of violent historical incidents, but unlike Mendoza, who invokes landmark political events only as reference points in the fictional elaboration of personal biographies, Montt imagines a conspiracy linking a string of high-profile assassinations that took place in Colombia between 1984 and 1990. Montt’s fictional protagonist, nicknamed El Coyote, is employed as a bodyguard by the Colombian Departamento Administrativo de Seguridad, a national intelligence and security bureau, but he is portrayed as a collaborator in the real assassinations of Justice Minister Lara Bonilla (mentioned at the beginning of this chapter) and presidential candidates Luis Carlos Galán, Bernardo Jaramillo Ossa, and Carlos Pizarro. Montt’s historical fiction ultimately attributes responsibility for these and other politically motivated killings to an invisible cabal so powerful as to be able to scapegoat Pablo Escobar for its actions.

Montt’s novela negra features not only a by now predictable meditation on urban geography, but also a selection of hard-boiled locales that coincide sometimes directly with those evoked by Gamboa and Mendoza. The novel’s most powerful criminal, an intermediary between El Coyote and the invisible Federation that employs him, resides on the thirteenth floor of a downtown high-rise that El Coyote likens to a tower of Babel with foundations mired in pornography, impunity, human detritus and hunger (56). Abject urban spaces include a bankrupt clinic turned homeless shelter, a wrestling arena, an abandoned office building occupied by vagrants, an underground crypt in the Cementerio Central, and the morgue of the Instituto de Medicina Legal. One character charged by Montt with reflecting on urban knowledge is a taxi driver who also works as a masked wrestler and as a low-life informant for El Coyote, with whom he shares his theory of the city as text.

The city-book must be read in time and not in space, he once told him. A lot of people memorize the streets and construct fragmented and incomplete maps. I don’t memorize forms, spaces, but rather events. . . . I see it like a living book that is transformed in my memory. The city isn’t made of brick and asphalt, but rather of words and desires. If the city is a book written every day by its inhabitants, I’m its best reader, since the book grows and rewrites itself in my memory. (69)

In describing the incessant reproduction of an imaginary city (that city written and read by the fantasies of its inhabitants 230), Montt’s taxi driver sounds rather like García Canclini, and he also alludes to the
novel’s interest not only with the marking of places but also with the reconstruction of memory. El Coyote reinforces this allusion when he remarks on his informant’s prodigious capacity for storing and ordering urban stories (230). Much as the informant claims to map the city through a comprehensive ordering of its endlessly proliferating stories, *El Eskimal* devides a conspiratorial fiction capable of concentrating reflection on a series of violent memories persisting in the collective consciousness, although arguably at the expense of a mystifying of discrete historical events through amalgamation.

The majority of *El Eskimal* is devoted to narration of El Coyote’s final assignment before learning that he himself has been marked for death by his employers, a fate that he avoids by opting for an internal exile reminiscent of Sinisterra’s. In the novel’s final chapters, the most feared trigger-man of his time (241) becomes a *ñero* or street-person and hides in open sight by taking refuge, like Sinisterra, among the nearly invisible indigent population of El Cartucho. Before and after this transformation, Montt depicts a hard-boiled Bogota in which police officers traffic in confiscated heroin and recruit *sicarios* for hits on politicians, where submachine guns can be bought from street clowns in downtown markets, and where drug-addled grave robbers work at night in the Cementerio Central boiling the meat off bodies in order to sell the skeletons to medical students. Again like *Scorpio City*, *El Eskimal* also contains a writer-in-the-text, in this case a journalist who interviews the dying gunman in a clinic in La Candelaria and, in the novel’s conclusion, sets about writing a text that closely resembles the novel itself.

Through the character of this journalist, El Eskimal, Montt reflects more subtly than Mendoza on the implications of his own literary enterprise. Inspired as a child by the stories of Poe and pulp crime fiction (46), El Eskimal writes on crime for a sensationalist tabloid until he is fired for publishing increasingly outrageous ideas, culminating in the proposal of a National Crime University dedicated to improving the artistry of Colombian criminals in an implicit homage to Thomas De Quincey’s *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* (1827). The problem of the writer’s complicity in narrating and publicizing the acts of criminals is articulated in the novel by El Coyote’s boss, a retired military officer who directs the assassinations and decorates his walls with press clippings. After reading one of the journalist’s playful musings on death, he remarks, *El Eskimal* thinks crime is entertainment (64). The *novela negra* is, of course, a form of literary entertainment based squarely on crime and, especially when writers such as Montt and Mendoza build their fiction around the reconstruction of specific historical incidents,
they expose themselves to accusations of aesthetic or commercial exploitation of the transgressions or the suffering of others.

As discussed in the conclusion of Chapter 2, the problem of circulation and consumption of representations of exotic violence in the contemporary globalized marketplace provides particular problems for artists seeking to engage realistically with the phenomenon of public insecurity of the contemporary megalopolis. In a 2007 conference presentation, Mario Mendoza commented that, as a Colombian writer, he had long been preoccupied with the problem of how his generation could give adequate artistic expression to the catastrophic events of the 1980s and 1990s: When would we able to capitalize on that disaster with the creative and life-giving forces of art? (Comments) Mendoza spoke of the challenge of converting deathly forces into creative erotic ones, and when asked in personal conversation about the profitability of artistic representations of violence, he insisted that the depiction of intense violence in fiction such as his own was in fact an obstacle to commercial success, since publishers shy away from shocking and grotesque material. Nonetheless, it is notable that literary prizes awarded to *El Eskimal* and to *Satanás* brought Montt and Mendoza, respectively, to national and international prominence, and that the latter novel has spawned a well-financed film adaptation that attracted more than one hundred thousand spectators during the first five days of its release in Colombia (Más de cien mil). The effervescence of the new Colombian narrative is, as Vargas Llosa suggested, due in some large degree to the ability of novelists such as Gamboa, Mendoza, and Montt to capitalize aesthetically on the violent decomposition of their urban societies. The effective commercialization of their aesthetic achievements cannot but implicate them in the problematic dynamics of a globalizing capitalist market of cultural goods. Whatever the project’s merits and motivations, a best-selling demonic Colombian mass-murderer novel giving rise to a blockbuster film adaptation cannot but look worrisome when considered with regard to its potential impact on a transnational imaginary such as that described by Sánchez-Prado.

*Sicario City*

In this chapter I have opted to focus on the *novela negra* of Bogota, but a more extensive study might profitably focus on the crime fiction of Colombia’s other metropolitan centers. In contrast with urban demographics in Mexico, where the capital city’s explosive growth has dwarfed that of other metropolitan centers, a number of Colombia’s regional capitals are...
comparable in size to Bogota, and a number of them have been far more intensely affected by the public security crisis during the period discussed here. The rise in violent criminality in Bogota throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s was paralleled by a similar but more intense deterioration of public security in Medellin, to cite only the best-known instance. While the homicide rate in Bogota climbed sharply throughout the late 1980s and is calculated to have peaked in 1993 at the dreadful rate of eighty per one hundred thousand inhabitants per year (Silva 83), Colombia’s second largest city suffered rates reported to exceed 440 per year during the early 1990s (Calvo), leading Human Rights Watch to identify Medellin in 1994 as the city with the highest per capita murder rate in Colombia and the world (30). This extraordinary breakdown in civil order gave rise not only to the literature of the sicaresca, as mentioned in the second section of this chapter, but also to a number of widely seen feature films, beginning with Víctor Gaviria’s bleak Rodrigo D. No futuro (1990) and culminating with Emilio Maillé’s romantic thriller Rosario Tijeras (2005), one of the most commercially successful Colombian movies of all time.

The wide circulation of novels such as the best-seller on which this last film was based has prompted Santiago Gamboa to identify the figure of the sicario as Colombia’s contribution to noir literature (Secret Histories). In 1999, Jorge Franco Ramos’s Rosario Tijeras won the Premio Hammett, awarded annually for the best crime novel written in Spanish, and since then it has been largely responsible for making Franco the most commercially prominent representative of the nueva narrativa colombiana. The most critically acclaimed of sicaresca novels remains, however, Fernando Vallejo’s La virgen de los sicarios (Our Lady of the Assassins, 1994), and a brief look at this remarkable text will conclude the present chapter. By no means a conventional novela negra, La virgen blends autobiographical memoir and diatribe in its evocation of the Medellin of 1993. The narrator, Fernando, returns to Medellin after a decade-long absence and offers a running commentary on the chaotic growth and the social decomposition of the city that now provides a lawless and hyper-violent backdrop to his aimless strolls in the company of his two successive sicario lovers. Fernando walks the streets less in the manner of a detective than in that of the flâneur, not even deigning to duck when caught in cross fire during an encounter between rival gangs. His temperament, however, is a good deal more bilious than that of his nineteenth-century Parisian predecessors, leading critics to characterize his view of the city variously as apocalyptic (Restrepo-Gautier), dystopian (Barros), and Dantesque (Fernández L’Hoeste). For the benefit of a narratee sometimes
identified as a foreign tourist, Fernando introduces Colombia as the most criminal country on earth, and Medellin the capital of hate (Our Lady 5), and he echoes José Luis Romero in describing Medellin as two cities in one: below, the industrial metropolis of Medellin proper, constructed in the hollow of a valley and above, on the surrounding mountainsides, Medallo, a sprawling mass of comunas or improvised settler neighborhoods that he calls the spark and the kindling that keep the fires of the killing alight (88). Fernando presents himself as our guide not only to the central city he explores that of colonial-era churches and modern high-rise towers but also to the violent periphery that he knows almost exclusively through his sicario informants.

Like the protagonists of Scorpio City and El Eskimal, Fernando thus serves as the conduit for knowledge of a dark and violent other city, though it is more overworld than underworld in the social geography of Medellin. As Carlos A. Jáuregui and Juana Suárez have observed (380), Fernando defines this ciudad-Otra not only as the space of human waste, abjection, and slaughter but also as a source of erotic excitement, in a dynamic reminiscent of a number of Mendoza’s novels and epitomized by the scene of masturbation on the killing floor. Rory O’Bryen relates Francisco’s movement through Medellin to Michel de Certeau’s famous notion that to walk the city is to practice space and to be the other and to move toward the space of the other (quoted in O’Bryen 199). Unlike Sinisterra and El Coyote, however, Fernando establishes bonds of understanding and complicity with marginal urban subjects without altogether relinquishing a prior identity and becoming other. As a further alternative to the classical detective paradigm of urban mapping, binding, and containment of transgression, Vallejo’s protagonist accomplishes an unusually intimate cartography of violence by befriending and seeking to protect criminal characters as he assimilates their language into his discourse during the course of the novel and becomes increasingly involved in their relentless killing, though he seems ultimately to condemn it.22

In view of Fernando’s patrician origins and his self-identification as a grammarian and man of letters, María Fernanda Lander has remarked on the significance of his abandonment of his policing role in matters of language (85) and of the regulatory function that, theoretically, the intellectual should fulfill in society (86). In keeping with the dominant tendency of the Colombian novela negra, Fernando also ridicules the police as ferociously as he does all other public institutions in Colombia, and it is notable that the one unresolved enigma in the text has nothing to do with the identity of murderers or the rationale behind crimes, but
precisely with a criminal detective (124). Fernando recalls El Ñato, the only police character in the novel and a hated persecutor of homosexuals, as having been killed thirty years earlier, but in the novel’s present he learns that an El Ñato has apparently again been killed. After attending El Ñato’s wake, which is disrupted by a drive-by shooting from a hearse, Fernando concludes that it is in fact the same man, and he offers no explanation for this duplication. But if thirty years had gone by, how the hell could he be the same? I leave it to you to work this little problem out (119). Elsewhere in the novel, Fernando generally honors his acknowledged narrative responsibility to maintain chronological order (35), but the predominantly realistic texture of the novel warps precisely around the figure of the murdered homophobic and criminal detective. Although the novel has been repeatedly criticized for the perceived fascist excesses of Fernando’s rhetoric, Vallejo here wryly calls attention to his radical and in some sense libertarian rejection of the conventional disciplinary mechanisms of crime narrative (firm moral distinction between lawful and criminal subjects, tight chronological sequencing, elaborate rational causality, teleological suspense, and decisive narrative closure). It is this rejection that makes La virgen de los sicarios the most unconventional and provocative of narrative reflections on Medellin’s experience of extreme urban violence.

**Urban Erotics**

The novela negra is not the only narrative literature to imagine the contemporary Colombian metropolis, and as the preceding pages will have indicated, its view of urban life is restricted rather exclusively to its destructive aspects. Another way to describe the functioning of the novela negra as a mode of urban fiction would be to enumerate its blind spots, which is to say, the many and fundamental aspects of social and subjective experience in metropolises such as Bogota and Medellin that the genre programmatically ignores. A few of these spring immediately to mind. Read together, the novels previously discussed project the image of a city nearly devoid of children and families and of productive labor, and in which human reproduction is as of little interest, as are ordinary legal forms of economic production. In contrast to Taibo’s neopoliciazo, with its emphasis on class conflict and social solidarity, the Colombian novela negra is populated primarily by isolated male protagonists whose disenchanted individualism usually permits only ephemeral identification with communities or partners. Vallejo is exceptional among the authors addressed here in identifying his novel as a love story, but in another sense
it confirms the rule of the *novela negra*’s exclusion of the feminine and its subsumption of Eros to Thanatos. As Mary Louise Pratt observes, Vallejo’s narrator reserves a particular hatred for women who reproduce, and he defines for himself a monosexual masculine world, constructed in a social space given over to violence and death (92). Pratt points out the reappearance of this tendency in a number of other novels from the 1990s and interprets it as a reaction to the failure of a patriarchal sexual contract long prevailing in Latin American societies. I would add that her definition of a new monosexual social order in which female bodies are superfluous (93–94) is applicable to a significant extent to the *novela negra* in general.

Although the sexualization of fraternal bonds is not normally so evident in the *novela negra* as in *La virgen de los sicarios* or, to cite another of Pratt’s primary examples, Ricardo Piglia’s *Plata quemada* (*Money to Burn*, 1997), all of the novels discussed in this chapter seem to presume the untenability of affectionate heterosexual relationships, or at least their incompatibility with hard-boiled fantasy. In *Scorpio City*, as in many of Taibo’s Belascoarán novels, a female character loved by the detective is kept conveniently offstage, and in the Colombian *novela negra* generally prostitutes, strippers, nudists, and models predominate among active and present female characters, reflecting the genre’s compulsions of objectification and voyeurism especially with respect to female bodies figured, in Pratt’s words, as an absolute, opaque, meaningless alterity (98). In a repeatedly emphasized scenario, female bodies perform dances of seduction for a distant male gaze, motivated not by their own desire but by monetary incentives or violent coercion. Collazos opens *La modelo asesinada* with one striptease and Mendoza closes *Scorpio City* with another, leaving Tebcheranny to ponder his solitude in the novel’s last paragraph while staring at a stripper’s black sex (171). The *novela negra* posits a male subject estranged both from the female other and from the unknowable city, and the genre’s tends to conflate these two objects of desire, as when the narrator of Franco Ramos’s *Rosario Tijeras* likens Medellin to a mother who’s a seductress, a whore, a flamboyant and flashy woman (99).

In this sense, the *novela negra* may be said to exemplify a tendency considered by Luz Mary Giraldo as characteristic of contemporary Colombian urban narrative: in the cities written by Colombian narrators their constant representation points toward an attractive body, the seductive woman’s body. . . . The representation thus responds to a recondite vision of the Arcane (myth: woman-city, mother-city, home-city), and of an Eros that also leads to death (51 n.44). This idea of a cityscape eroticized and
feminized by a male gaze is made extremely explicit in Mendoza’s *La ciudad de los umbrales* when the same narrator, who revels in abjection on the slaughterhouse floor, becomes aroused by looking out his window at a Bogota covered in mist: I masturbate thinking about the thresholds of houses and buildings, about the drains, basements and sewers that make up the underground depths of the city (61). Like Fernando’s erotic interest in the most exciting *comunas* of Medellin, the lust of Mendoza’s narrator for the dark and filthy recesses of the city expresses an erotic characteristic of the *novela negra*, in which desire and seduction are associated with darkness and death.

The ambivalence exhibited by *La modelo asesinada*, the most conventional detective novel examined here, in its treatment of a sexualized violence inflicted on female bodies exemplifies not only the historically close relationship in the *novela negra* genre between the calculated stimulation of fantasies of porno-violence and the exonerating ritual of containment of transgression through investigative and narrative closure. It is notable that in contrast to the conventional plotting, formal closure, and dubious sexual politics of Collazos’s novel, Vallejo’s wandering diatribe provides, within the confines of its monosexual world, a far more compelling indictment of violence by disavowing detective agency altogether and by adopting a recklessly immoderate narrative rhetoric in response to a recklessly immoderate urban violence. If, as a number of novelists have recently suggested, an ethically responsible fiction of violence must substantiate the pain of the victim, Vallejo’s mordant and cynical narrative, so often denounced as nihilistic or fascistic by its detractors, seems to me ultimately more responsible than the other fiction discussed in this chapter in that, by communicating an experience of love, as the conventional *novela negra* rarely does, it is also able to communicate the pain caused by loss of a loved one, a sentiment to which the other novels may allude but which they cannot express. While the gothic and conspiratorial imaginaries of Gamboa, Mendoza, and Montt dwell extensively on the extreme manifestations and the geography of violence in the contemporary Colombian metropolis, enticing adventurous readers time and again into cemeteries, slaughterhouses, morgues, and sewers, they never achieve the impact of Fernando’s visit to the Medellin morgue in the conclusion of *La virgen de los sicarios*. Paradoxically, it is Vallejo’s ultimate rejection of hard-boiled notions of masculinity and of the romance of violence that make his least formulaic of *novelas negras* the blackest of all.
The national tradition of detective writing in Argentina may not be the most prolific among Spanish-speaking nations, but it is almost certainly the longest. The first two recognizably generic detective novels written in Spanish were published in Buenos Aires in 1877 by a lawyer, journalist, and legislator named Luis V. Varela, who became president of the Argentine Supreme Court in the same year of their publication. Both Varela and Eduardo Holmberg, the only other Argentine detective novelist of the nineteenth century, were affiliated with the Generation of 1880, an elite of progressive liberal writers of Positivist orientation who were intimately involved in both the founding of a national narrative tradition and the shaping of the modern Argentine state. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Buenos Aires emerged as a literary capital and the seat of South America’s most powerful publishing industry, and as I have established in Chapter 1, part of this development consisted in the importation, consumption, and domestic production of translations of European and U.S. popular and pulp fiction. The sophisticated achievements of the Sur writers in the classical detective genre during the 1940s constitute the best-known continuation of the early initiatives of Varela, Holmberg, and other River Plate pioneers, such as Paul Groussac and Horacio Quiroga. More relevant to my concerns here is the comparably slow flourishing of a novela negra tradition with antecedents in the British and U.S. mystery-adventure pulp novels that circulated in translations marketed by popular Spanish publishers Molino (relocated during the civil war from Barcelona to Buenos Aires, as I have recounted) and Argentine publishers, such as Tor, J. C. Rovira, Malinca, Hachette, and Acme. The publication in Buenos Aires in 1943 of the first Spanish-language translation of a Raymond Chandler novel represents...
one milestone in the domestic assimilation of the U.S. hard-boiled aesthetic, an erratic process in which, as in Spain, the reception of film noir also played a major role.

The rejection of hard-boiled aesthetics by the *Sur* group and the championing of U.S. hard-boiled writers by leftist critics associated with influential Buenos Aires journal *Contorno* during the 1950s (Lafforgue and Rivera 23, 103n2) reflected a fundamental divergence between one line of Argentine culture that Josefina Ludmer identifies as the cultural project of the patrician Creole elite of the Generation of 1880 and *Sur*, and a second, progressive and modernizing line defined largely by children of immigrants and by the professionals of the emerging mass cultural industries. The influential *Séptimo Círculo* series included very few translations of U.S. hard-boiled novels, especially while Borges and Bioy Casares served as editors. This exclusion was in keeping with their longstanding contempt for a subgenre they considered vulgar, degenerate, truculent, pornographic, and excessively violent. Popular publishers such as Malinca and Acme were less discriminating in their selection, and they profitably marketed hard-boiled translations and pseudotranslations throughout the 1950s and '60s in series such as those mentioned in my introduction. The most successful of these, Acme’s *Rastros*, commenced publication the year before *El Séptimo Círculo*, in 1944, with an edition of Armitage Trail’s 1930 U.S. gangster classic *Scarface*, and the series endured for over thirty years, issuing well over six hundred titles. Cheaply made, hastily translated, and briskly sold and resold at kiosks, the novels of *Rastros* and other popular collections introduced the U.S. hard-boiled idiom, mobilizing a reading public less educated than that addressed by the *Sur* group and also providing professional sustenance to those translators and writers who, though by no means prestigious in literary institutional terms, come closer than perhaps any other writers in the Argentine tradition to the metropolitan norm of serial specialization in a mass-marketed genre.

Beginning in the mid-1940s, the classic U.S. hard-boiled fiction of Hammett, Chandler, Cain, and their peers were gradually disseminated in Argentina through popular novel series and magazines, and in the late 1940s Argentine professionals began to contribute their own titles to kiosk collections increasingly specialized in the hard-boiled idiom. Like the popular crime novels produced in Spain during the same era, many of the Argentine pulp titles were set in U.S. locales and populated with Anglo characters, but occasional works such as Ignacio Covarrubias’s *Nadie sale vivo* (No One Gets Out Alive, 1952) and Adolfo Jasca’s *Los tallos amargos* (Bitter Stalks, 1955) transpose the hard-boiled formula to
urban Argentine settings. The consensus of the few historians of Argentine detective fiction, however, is that most of the native production in the hard-boiled mode during the 1950s and ’60s remained on the level of pedestrian pastiche, with industrial demands of rapid and regular production prevailing over creative initiatives of local adaptation. Echoed by later critics, such as José Sablich (171), Jorge B. Rivera’s evaluation of this corpus of the ’50s and ’60s reads as follows:

On the whole, these narratives are very disparate in value and interest, and it is fair to say that they rarely reach the great peaks attained by certain ad hoc models of the Anglo-American and French literature. They generally reflect the application of a formula and a certain tendency toward stereotyping in which the traces of editorial pressure are easily recognized (not to exceed a certain number of pages, not to address certain themes, not to surpass a fixed production time, to write in the style of, etc.). Also evident is the underestimation of a subject matter chosen almost exclusively as a none-too-prestigious modus vivendi. (Lafforgue and Rivera 85 86)

Donald A. Yates, the first U.S. academic to devote sustained attention to the Spanish American detective novel, considered this period to be one of decadence following the golden decade of the classical detective novel in Argentina, which he dated between 1944 and 1954 (cited in Lafforgue y Rivera 31n3). More recent critics, however, have reinterpreted this period emphasizing the emergence of new models of crime writing in such texts as Rodolfo Walsh’s non-fiction investigative novel Operación masacre (1957) and the few locally oriented hard-boiled texts already mentioned. Although the importation to Argentina of the private detective hero had already been recognized as problematic by the golden age writers, critics also observe a pronounced turn toward criminal protagonists during these years in works by writers such as Jasca, Manuel Peyrou, Roger Pla, Dalmiro Sáenz, and Víctor Saíz (Simpson 46 52, Ponce, Diagonales 121 34). The gradual displacement of the classical ratiocinative detective model by the novela negra culminated, by critical consensus, in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the achievement by the latter of a certain intellectual legitimization. The cultural prestige acquired by the novela negra during these years is signified first by the intensified publication of the U.S. hard-boiled classics by more reputable publishers and in editions of better quality and, second, by the emergence during the early 1970s of a generation of accomplished Argentine novelists interested in exploring the creative possibilities of the novela negra. Given the paucity of prior production in this genre, 1973 stands as an annus mirabilis in the history of Argentine crime fiction, since it was in
this year that Manuel Puig, Osvaldo Soriano, Juan Carlos Martelli, Juan Carlos Martini, and Guillermo Saccomanno issued novels deeply engaged with the codes of the *novela negra*. The year 1973 thus marks what Lafforgue and Rivera call the moment of coagulation of a new dominant in the Argentine crime fiction (28).

**1973—Birth of a Subgenre**

Given the relatively broad range of writers who have cultivated the *novela negra* in Argentina in recent decades, I will limit my discussion here to a selection of those who have reflected most extensively on urban violence and the contemporary cityscape, and particularly on that of Buenos Aires. The initial flourishing of the genre in the years preceding the military coup of 1976 included a number of texts whose radically parodic, meta-generic or otherwise anti-realistic character diminish their relevance to the concerns of the present study. In general, the features that attracted critically oriented Argentine writers to the *novela negra* during these years were those that had been singled out by left-leaning intellectuals beginning with the *Contorno* group. Critics such as Juan José Sebreli and, later, Ricardo Piglia praised the U.S. hard boiled novel for its insight into the alienation and social disintegration wrought by urban industrial capitalism and for the perceived materialism of a discourse disinterested in psychologism or logical puzzles. As Sebreli wrote in 1959, that parable of crime, that poem of barbarism, that guignolesque universe whose sadism and violence had little precedent in literature, was ultimately the story of capitalist society at a particular moment in its turbulent historical evolution (quoted in Lafforgue and Rivera 222).

Subsequently, this line of interpretation has been advanced by Piglia, who was already mentioned as one of the primary promoters of the *novela negra* during this seminal period. In comments originally formulated in 1976 and then edited for inclusion in his 1986 essay collection *Crítica y ficción*, Piglia characterized the classical detective story as driven by a bourgeois fetish of pure intelligence. In contrast,

there is a mode of narration in the *novela negra* that is linked to what I would call a materialist treatment of reality. One need only think of the place that money holds in these narratives. . . . The only enigma that the *novela negra* proposes and never resolves is that of capitalist relations: the money that legislates morality and sustains the law is the only reason in these stories in which everything is for sale. (116 17)
While this interpretation of the hard-boiled model is familiar from the writings of neopoliciaco authors and Marxist critics such as Ernest Mandel, the critical function claimed by the Argentine novela negra received extraordinary historical reinforcement by the political events of mid to late 1970s, to wit, the advent of authoritarianism, the repression of leftist artists and intellectuals, and the imposition of state terror. As novelist José Pablo Feinmann argued in a 1991 essay, it was the novela negra’s vision of a society in which crime is the law that appealed to Argentine writers as political space became increasingly lethal and the state itself became an agent of crime (Estado policial 145, 147). Echoing Taibo’s formulation of resistance to the monster of the capitalist state, Feinmann articulates the general orientation of the Argentine novela negra of this period around enigmas that anticipate and figure what Elisa Calabrese calls the paranoia, the immanence of persecution and the criminality of power, characteristics of state terrorism during the dictatorship of the so-called Proceso (80).

Although the development of the novela negra during the 1970s tends away from reliance on stereotypically familiar foreign locales in locally produced crime novels, not all of the novels published during the initial surge in novela negra production referred immediately to violent local realities. Soriano’s Triste, solitario y final (Sad, Loney and Final, 1973), for example, transpires in California and appropriates Philip Marlowe, Stan Laurel, and John Wayne as characters in a farcical adventure, while Martini’s Los asesinos las prefieren rubias (Murderers Prefer Blondes, 1974), also set partially in California, combines a similar celebrity appropriation with dark political and sexual fantasy. Martini’s narrator is an Argentine general who regularly visits San Francisco while overseeing, in the capacity of War Secretary, the Argentine government’s campaign against an unspecified revolutionary movement. Maintaining this civil war on a remote secondary plane of action, the novel foregrounds the investigation by a police inspector named Sinatra into the general’s gory murder of Marilyn Monroe in an imaginary 1950s-era California, which is depicted as somehow contiguous with the Argentina of the 1970s. In its frequent reference to movie stars encountered in the general’s sojourns in Hollywood and Beverley Hills, Los asesinos exemplifies, along with Triste, solitario y final, the profound debt of the Argentine novela negra to the mythology of cinema, as well as its determination to adapt hard-boiled codes to narrative reflection on the increasingly violent political conflicts that wrecked Argentina in the 1970s.6 It also exemplifies with striking clarity the sadistic misogyny already noted as a persistent feature of the
novela negra, even in its ostensibly progressive or, as in this case, revolutionary manifestations.7

Of the texts that constituted the first wave of the Argentine novela negra, it is perhaps Martelli’s Los tigres de la memoria (Memory Tigers, 1973) that most forcefully evokes the image of a society in which, as Feinmann observed, crime is the law. Martelli’s protagonist, Cralos, is a former guerrilla and criminal who has taken refuge in a provincial town far from the city where bombs explode. Far from the country where barracks are stormed (57). In order to protect his children, who are active guerrillas, Cralos is forced by a corrupt ex-coronel of the security forces to collaborate with a policeman in a drug trafficking operation. Although the text alludes to illegal repressive practices, such as police torture, disappearances, and violent provocations by paid thugs against striking workers, the action of the novel centers on a struggle for control of drug business between criminals identified to some considerable degree with institutional authority (el Sistema). The novel’s dense atmosphere of anxiety, menace, and distrust combines the classical hard-boiled vision of capitalist social relations as violent Darwinian struggle (la lucha por la vida 38) with the evocation of incipient war between insurgents and state security forces in the novel’s specified present of 1973. Like Los asesinos las prefieren rubias, Los tigres de la memoria closes with an affirmation of faith in the impending triumph of revolution, but in the subsequent development of the Argentine novela negra, this glimmer of political optimism would prove less enduring than Martelli’s dismally dark view of the criminality of police agents and political authorities.

In contrast with the novels of Martini and Martelli, Manuel Puig’s The Buenos Aires Affair (1973) displays a significantly greater degree of creativity in its narrative structure, and its flaunting of genre conventions is one reason that it has continued to generate critical readings into the present. Published with the subtitle Novela policial, Puig’s novel does include criminal incidents and passing allusions to contemporary guerrilla activities in Tucumán and elsewhere, but its discursive heterogeneity is such that, as José F. Colmeiro concludes, it cannot be read as an orthodox detective novel, but only as a simulacrum of one. The principle conventions of the genre are subverted for parodic and structural reasons (Lenguajes propios 186). Puig’s exercise in narrative collage and the crossing of languages, as Colmeiro puts it, relates to an exploration of subjectivities and cultural imaginaries far more sophisticated than anything undertaken by conventional crime fiction.8 The novel’s generative criminal incident, committed twenty years before the story’s end in 1969, is an unpunished homosexual rape that culminated in an apparent but
unconfirmed killing. Although this sex crime serves most clearly as occasion for an exploration of the psychology of sexual repression, Puig also links it to political concerns by making reference to a later, parallel crime: that of the torture and killing under similar circumstances of a political dissident during the Onganía dictatorship (1966–70). Although critics differ significantly in their interpretations of this parallel, most acknowledge it as a key element in what Jo Labanyi calls the novel’s political subtext, a discreet framework of political references hinting at the relation between psychosexual issues foregrounded in the novel to broader social realities. In this society, continues Labanyi, where everything is based on looking, everything is based on surveillance (vigilancia’). There are constant passing references to police control (114). Similarly, Francine Masiello interprets this parallel as an attempt by Puig to draw attention to widespread strategies of repression, both psychological and political. He thus gives us a point of connection between the secrets of sexuality and the secrets of national politics (65).9

The treatment of political violence in The Buenos Aires Affair is far subtler than in the neopoliciaco, and shortly after printing, the novel was banned by the Peronist government, not for political reasons but rather for the obscenity of its sexual content. Upon closer examination, however, Puig’s ingeniously heterogeneous discourse anticipates the concerns most characteristic of the Argentine novela negra of the succeeding decades and, in particular, the concern with a social violence fueled by repressive state ideologies and institutions. Puig’s criminal protagonist is almost incidentally a former communist militant tortured by police under the first Peronist administration (1946–55), and the novel generally paints an oblique but powerful portrait of an Argentine society fraught with explosive tensions on the eve of the so-called Cordobazo. The repression of a student uprising in the city of Cordoba in May of 1969, a few days after the end of action in the novel, is often seen as marking the initiation of a cycle of political violence in Argentina, and most critics of the novel have remarked on Puig’s implicit allusion to these events. Despite the frustration of conventional expectations raised by subtitle Novela policial, Puig’s novel is profoundly concerned with the social reproduction of violence in a climate of escalating political conflict, and René A. Campos suggests that it is also pervaded by a cinematic noir aesthetic, particularly in its representation of the city: The play of light and shadow, the oblique shots, the mirrored surfaces, the ominous and furtive presences transform the habitual world of Buenos Aires into a space populated by anomalous beings, prisoners of neuroses, frustrations and masks (199). In comparison with other texts discussed in this chapter,
Puig’s literary construction of the cityscape is relatively indistinct and inattentive. In keeping with his preferential interest in psychical rather than material reality (Kerr 150), he does not generally map action with specific, referential coordinates (street names, neighborhoods, monuments, etc.). His successors, however, will render noir Buenos Aires with far more concrete precision.

**Black Buenos Aires**

In 1953, in a prologue to the first anthology of Argentine detective fiction, Rodolfo Walsh proclaimed Buenos Aires a city no longer hostile to the novel (8). The monumental achievements of Roberto Arlt, Leopoldo Marechal, and other urban narrators of the preceding decades undoubtedly lent credence to Walsh’s claim, and the classical detective fiction of the Argentine golden age also laid not infrequent claim to the urban geography of the capital, as exemplified by the title of the first Argentine detective novel of the twentieth century, Sauli Lostal’s *El enigma de la calle Arcos* (The Enigma of Arcos Street, 1932). Even Borges, an impatient critic of localist realism and a great imaginer of remote and unfamiliar fictional locales, considered *La muerte y la brújula* (Death and the Compass, 1942) his most satisfactory evocation of the atmosphere of the suburbs of Buenos Aires despite the story’s substitution of imaginary for real place names.10 The rare publication of locally set hard-boiled fiction during the 1950s and ’60s, however, served only as a prelude to the definitive emergence of that Buenos Aires as a primary scenario of the *novela negra* during the 1970s.

In the novels already discussed, Martelli and Martini imagined Buenos Aires as home to powerful criminals identified to differing degrees with the authority of the state: the coronel in *Los tigres de la memoria* and the general in *Los asesinos las prefieren rubias*. Another of Martini’s early novels, *El agua en los pulmones* (Water in the Lungs, 1973), offers one of the rare instances of a conventional hard-boiled private investigator in the Argentine *novela negra*. In this novel, Martini identifies his detective Simón Solís as a resident of Buenos Aires, and although he sets the principle action in the neighboring city of Rosario, the investigation revolves around inherently urban concerns comparable to those of Gamboa’s *Perder es cuestión de método*. Martini’s investigator is drawn into a violent struggle resulting from an illegal plan to pressure municipal officials into expropriating lands on the outskirts of the city in order to deliver them cheaply to a foreign company that seeks to build an industrial plant in the city. Reworking the hard-boiled prototype of Hammett’s *Red Harvest*
(1929), Martini presents a cast of ruthless industrialists, crooked lawyers, violent former police officers, and hired thugs, and he portrays a provincial city dominated by a clique of treacherous, conspiring capitalists. His subsequent novels, though less faithful to classical hard-boiled conventions, center more closely on Buenos Aires as the scenario of urban conflict. *El cerco* (*The Siege*), published in Barcelona in 1977, was the last novel Martini wrote in Argentina before joining the exodus of writers and intellectuals under the military dictatorship, and it dispenses with the detective to focus on a wealthy industrialist to resist a campaign of intimidation by anonymous kidnappers and assassins. Martini’s inclusion of an epigraph by Franz Kafka announces one source of inspiration for *El cerco*’s climate of diffuse and constant danger, but the novel also maps a specific social geography as it moves between the industrialist’s suburban mansion and his corporate headquarters on the elegant Avenida Alvear. In its insinuation of violent, unresolved menace into spaces of utmost privilege, *El cerco* provides one of the definitive literary images of a Buenos Aires that, while no longer hostile to the novel, was growing increasingly hostile in other respects.11

**Grime and Desire**

Given the proliferation of the *novela negra* in Argentina during the 1970s and 1980s, I will turn my attention henceforth to an ever narrower selection of available texts in order to read in more detail those I consider particularly apt for illustrating the development of the subgenre in relation to themes of urban mapping and violence. Among an array of contemporaneous and comparably straightforward hard-boiled crime tales, Rubén Tizziani’s *Noches sin lunas ni soles* (*Moonless and Sunless Nights*, 1975) stands out as a well-made, if structurally conventional, narrative of the criminal underworld of Buenos Aires, one that pays fine attention to the social geography of the metropolis, the texture of low urban environments, and the speech of a specific criminal culture. With an admirable economy of action, Tizziani tells the tale of a professional thief nicknamed Cairo, who is sprung from prison outside Buenos Aires in order to visit his best friend and partner, dying in Paraguay. The novel narrates several days of flight and pursuit, beginning with the escape and continuing with the protagonist’s attempt to procure false documents and to recover a stash of money hidden in the city, hiding all the while from the police and from other thieves who help him escape from jail but then attempt to hold him prisoner in order to extort more than the agreed-upon fee. In contrast with the more technically ambitious hybrid narratives of Soriano, Puig,
and, to a lesser extent, Martini in *El cerco*, Tizziani holds closely to the spare hard-boiled formula exploited with great success by the pulp professionals of the ’50s and ’60s, but his implementation is distinguished by an unusual descriptive sensitivity and by a surprising mitigation of the subgenre’s nearly unrelenting misogyny. In an effective turn on the crime genre’s classic identification of detective with criminal, Tizziani portrays an intelligent, sober-minded, and unrepentent criminal pursued by a violent police captain who pauses to wonder why he, having come from the same poor background as his adversary, chose to serve the law rather than defy it, and why he continues to serve the system when he is continually denied a share of the spoils it produces for others (156).

Having tortured the protagonist, Cairo, prior to his imprisonment, the policeman Maidana harbors a personal grudge over his failure to extort the locations of the hidden money and of Cairo’s fugitive partner, but he also bears a certain manly respect for Cairo’s refusal to talk. Only in the novel’s closing pages are Maidana’s deepest motives finally revealed to be no different than those of the thieves he combats, when he admits his long repressed, lifelong obsession with money and acknowledges to himself that he saw in Cairo’s arrest a long-awaited opportunity to seize a bundle of cash for himself (165). This, the reader learns, was the underlying motive for the torture inflicted by Maidana on Cairo. As he is shown beating suspects and informants alike, Maidana’s characterization squares with the hard-boiled stereotype of the crooked and violent cop, and Cairo confirms that in his experience the Buenos Aires police always use violence (136). More striking is Tizziani’s inclusion in *Noches sin lunas ni soles* of a conversation in which Cairo recounts to his lover in some detail the experience of having undergone police torture while being held at a clandestine location outside the city until he was finally located by a lawyer. Although Cairo is a common criminal rather than a policial dissident, the experience he recounts strongly anticipates the extensive literature documenting the repressive methods of the military government installed by the 1976 coup.

In other respects, *Noches sin lunas ni soles* practices a gritty urban realism in sordid environments reminiscent of those explored by Roberto Arlt during the 1920s and ’30s. Tizziani’s narrator describes the lives of the thieves, prostitutes, and forgers by providing snapshots of their dreary dwellings. One example of the passages that lend strong texture to the urban environment is a description of Maidana’s office in the police station seen in the unforgiving morning light, in which the narrator’s eye picks out details, such as cracks in the wall, a faded city map, worn upholstery, furrows on the desktop, and scratches on other metal furniture.
Interior spaces depicted in this manner throughout the novel provide the material analogue to the inner lives of characters whose professions imply violence and risk and who live haunted by fear and disappointment. As Cairo comments in one of several self-reflexive conversations in the novel, the decision to live outside that law and to resist submission to a capitalist regime of labor discipline has brought him not liberation but a life lived always on edge (83). The material figure of this accumulated malaise would seem to be the *mugre* (grime) that coats Tizziani’s urban environments. Grime, pollution, and sticky asphalt are the first elements that Cairo perceives when reintroduced to the city during his escape from the courthouse (14), and it seems to precipitate especially densely in the dwellings of his fellow criminals. In a description of the decrepit apartment of his liberator turned captor, the narrator notes its presence on the wallpaper, on a dishtowel, and on the inhabitants, who cannot be troubled to wash after having sex. When Maidana pays an unwelcome visit to a document forger in his hunt for Cairo, the forger’s downtown apartment building is described in similar terms. Maidana’s quarry resides in a decrepit building above a junk shop on a block filled with other shabby businesses whose shopwindows are cluttered and dim with filth (57–58). The narrator integrates the forger with his environment as he notes more grime on the forger’s shirt collar and his robe and in his dreary room. These emphatic descriptions, in conjunction with that of the police captain’s office, remind us again of Fredric Jameson’s observations regarding the specialization of the classical hard-boiled novel in very shabby urban places: those parts of the American scene which are as impersonal and seedy as public waiting rooms: run-down office buildings . . . dingy office interiors . . . police stations; hotel rooms and lobbies . . . rooming houses with managers who work illegal lines of business on the side (On Raymond Chandler 128).

The centrality of money in the materialist enterprise of the *novela negra*, as remarked by Piglia, is evident in *Noches* in repeated discussions of professionalism and professional ethics among criminals. In a revealing conversation with the prostitute who helped him escape from the double-crossers, Cairo explains his trade with a measured professional pride. He does not consider it glorious but rather a job like any other, to be done well or badly. He adds that thieves never kill if they can avoid it, and that when they do, they suffer remorse since they have feelings and a sense of professional pride and camaraderie (130). Besides his pursuit by the policeman obsessed with his hidden stash, Cairo’s principal conflict, as I have indicated, is with fellow thieves who do not respect a contract for a criminal service. When the double-crosser (*el mejicano* in the novel’s
lively criminal slang) is arrested, he attempts to convince Maidana that it was Cairo who refused to honor the contract and pay him. Maidana correctly doubts this version of events, since he knows and respects Cairo’s criminal honor (115).

In comparison with el vigilante, the violent torturer who pursues him, and with the young guns who bungle their attempt to extort him, Cairo emerges in Tizziani’s novel as a veritable pillar of virtue. Although a three-time loser who has spent a decade in jail, he is characterized as quick-witted and rational (un cerebro according to Maidana), as well as loyal and sensitive, having risked his life escaping in order to help a dying friend. Although Cairo is also shown to be a resolute criminal who is willing to kill in order to preserve his own freedom, the novel credits him with an understanding of the shortcomings of his strategy for distancing himself from the submissive crowd of wage laborers. The narrative’s treatment of him is generally sympathetic, making no reference, for example, to the source of the nearly sixty million stolen pesos that await him. In contrast to Puig’s novel, no explicit reference is made to a wider political frame for local incidents of violence, but the class origins of both Cairo and Maidana are firmly established. Cairo is shown as affectionate and generous toward his friend’s Italian immigrant father, and the narrative repeatedly associates Cairo’s decision to live proudly by crime with an implied lack of opportunities for true prosperity for men of his class. Another of the most sympathetic aspects of Tizziani’s characterization of Cairo is his extraordinarily decent treatment of the prostitute who becomes his companion during the days following his escape.

As has been amply illustrated by previous examples, the novela negra in both its reactionary (Spillane) and revolutionary (Martini) manifestations has long propagated an utterly deplorable sexual politics. While Tizziani’s inclusion of a prostitute as the only major female character in Noches is formula standard, his development of the brief relationship between the prostitute, Ana, and Cairo is a refreshing departure. First introduced in typical hard-boiled fashion as a blond, long-legged, and mischievously provocative gangster moll, Ana drives Cairo to distraction on the heels of his thirty months of jail-enforced celibacy. With the hard-boiled bluntness that characterizes the novel’s treatment of sex as well as violence, the narrator relays Cairo’s immediate perception of Ana as a woman made for sex (74). After Ana spontaneously accompanies Cairo in his second escape, this time from the apartment of the double-crosser with whom she was living, she proves not only an apt sexual partner but also an active ally and a trustworthy confidant, soliciting from him the aforementioned account of his torture and his criminal vocation. Tizziani briefly illuminates the
novela negra’s dark panorama of misogynist objectification and violence by imagining sincere verbal and sexual communication between a male protagonist and a female companion, most notably in a sequence in which Cairo reciprocates Ana’s sexual generosity toward him by bringing her orally to orgasm.

In this sequence, the free indirect style that elsewhere approximates the reader to the perspectives of Cairo and Maidana here modulates into a discourse of female pleasure: finally the tide rises, in leaps, ... Saliva wets the vertex hidden by the wrinkled lips: the center of gravity discovered, the point on the tangent (147). In this and other scenes, Tizziani complies with the genre’s anticipated pornographic quota, but does so with an unwonted attention to female desire. Ana has worked as a prostitute and bears unexplained scars on her breasts, but she evinces no self-pity in her conversations with Cairo, giving us to understand that the circumstances that led her beyond decency were no worse than those endured by any other woman of her class and culture. The reckless instinctivity displayed in her momentaneous decision to abandon one criminal lover for another provokes deep unease in the policeman Maidana, who senses something in her behavior that threatens to negate his own unhappy submission to the law, something like a state of grace, something strange and unfamiliar that he needed to fight against because even if he didn’t understand it, it smelled of decay, of freedom, of insanity (128). In this sense, Ana is reminiscent of the character of Hipólita, the lame and frigid yet self-possessed prostitute who, through her escape from Buenos Aires in the company of a castrated revolutionary prophet at the conclusion to Roberto Arlt’s Los lanzallamas (The Flamethrowers, 1931) seems to gesture toward an anti-bourgeois utopia somehow beyond both discipline and desire. Tizziani does not share Arlt’s revolutionary sensibility, and he does endow the character of Ana with sexual desire, but in other respects his characters incarnate an Arltian resistance to bourgeois capitalist regimes of labor and sexuality.

Other Arltian elements in Tizziani’s hard-boiled narrative include the themes of forgery, the frank depiction of police torture, and the detailed and unvarnished depiction of the material environments of lower class domesticity. In contrast with Arlt’s sometimes-haphazard composition and his idiosyncratically heterogeneous narrative language, however, Tizziani relies on a tightly organized plot and a more unadulterated narrative discourse grounded in lunfardo. In conventional panoptical realist fashion (to recall D. A. Miller’s terms), Tizziani’s narrative posits a perspective of super-vision over the subjective experience of individual characters, but the effective evocation of those individual subjectivities in
indirect free style is due in no small measure to a skillful handling of *lunfardo* in passages such as the following. In the first, Tizziani’s anonymous narrator reports Cairo’s recovery of his hidden loot and in the second his recollection of innumerable conversations with other inmates during his years in jail.

Le temblaba la mano al oprimir el cierre: cerca de sesenta millones de mangos, la mitad de lo que se había llevado con Natale. Un bagallo de plata, aunque hubiera perdido una parte de su valor mientras estuvo en cana. La inflación comiéndole su guita, sin que pudiera hacer nada desde la gayola.

(82)

His hand shook as he pushed open the clasp: almost sixty million clams, half of what he and Natale had made off with. A pile of cash, even if it had lost part of its value since he’d been inside. Inflation eating away at his dough and him in the slammer, unable to do anything about it.

[E]stá viviendo una situación repetida, un ritual practicado sin asco durante sus diez años de gayola: dos chorros estirados en la catrera, a oscuras, contándose historias en voz baja; cosas de cuando eran malandras en serio y no unos pobres presos: los afanos hechos, los mangos gastados a rolete, las minas perdidas, las alcahueterías y las biabas. Y cosas que estaban más en el pasado todavía, cuando el punto que acabaría en cana hablando boludeces era un pendejo prometedor, con toda la vida por delante, como decían.... En el fondo historias de chorros macaneadores. (13)

He was replaying a familiar scene, a ritual practiced patiently during his ten years in the slammer: two thieves stretched out on their bunks in the dark, quietly telling each other stories; things about when they were serious bad guys and not pathetic prisoners: the scores they pulled off, the money they pissed away, the broads they lost, the rats who squealed on them and the beatings they took. And things from even further back, from when the very poor sap who would end up in jail talking crap was still a promising kid with his whole life in front of him, as they used to say. . . . Ultimately, bullshit swapped between thieves.

Here and throughout the novel, Tizziani employs *lunfardo* vocabulary originating in various Italian languages (*bagallo, biaba, cana, mina*), Portuguese (*gayola, mango*), and Castilian and caló (*afano, alcahuetería, chorro, guita, malandra*), and this usage lends specificity and richness to the evocation of a local criminal culture rooted in the immigrant metropolis.

The final respect in which *Noches sin lunas ni soles* merits consideration here is in the intensity of its sensual evocation of the urban environment
of Buenos Aires. As soon as he is freed at the beginning of the novel, Cairo gravitates toward the city center as his surest refuge, and as he goes he rediscovers the city’s intoxicating stimuli after more than two years of sensory deprivation. The protagonist’s return to his territory (30) thus reads as a tour for the reader, as the narrative registers Cairo’s recognition of places and sensations and his inner reflection on the city’s meaning to him.

[It was] an irreplaceable hideout, the old feeling of being safe, protected, because all he needed to do in order to disappear was to turn a corner. . . . Buenos Aires began six or seven meters down and to the right: the train tracks, the station, the Vélez stadium in the distance. . . . True, it was only the beginning, the shell of what he’d been missing for so long, but even so it was his place in the world, the only one he had left and the only one where he could feel alive. (28–29)

The novel’s attentive inspection of the city is thus divided between the perspectives of the police investigator Maidana (el vigilante) and that of the aroused but anxious Cairo, who is obliged to move through the streets in a state of constant vigilance and acute attentiveness to movements, figures, inscriptions, and even textures (“la rugosidad de los muros” or roughness of the walls 78). Cairo’s hypersensitivity to the urban environment is further substantiated in longer passages narrating his reimmersion after long months of sensory deprivation in the sea of visual and verbal signs and bodies in friction. As he moves through the city center at rush hour as the narrator describes the quilombo vivo, an exciting and daunting effervescence of anonymous bodies, inviting gestures and unfamiliar signs (101). This vision of the city asquilombo, colloquially signifying ruckus but literally whorehouse, recalls Mario Mendoza’s more lurid invocation of Bogota on the first page of La ciudad de los umbrales (Bogota, city of night vision, poisoned by shadows and darkness that turn every house into a brothel. . . . Bogota, monstrous clitoris 11) and more generally to the idea of an urban erotics animating the novela negra. The city perceived by Cairo is the city of seductive signs, commerce and erotic desires sparked by the confluence of multitudinous bodies. It is, like the cityscape over which Mendoza’s character masturbates, a complex invaginated space, a labyrinth of receptive passages offering discrete refuge and pleasurable friction. A subtle semantic chain links “la rugosidad de los muros,” alluding to the texture of those brick walls that had always protected him (14) with the contraction of Cairo’s stomach as he gets his first glimpse of women walking the city’s streets (esa como
agitación que le arrugaba el estómago, the agitation that shrunk his stomach [32]) and again to the folds of Ana’s sex (los labios arrugados), parted in the passage already discussed to reveal the novel’s center of sensual plenitude. While this might not constitute a direct reiteration of Mendoza’s Bogota, monstrous clitoris, it does constitute an eloquent iteration of the figure of the city as a female body construed alternately as maternal refuge and as object of desire. In contrast to Maidana (el vigilante), whose aspiration toward a commanding urban discipline is symbolized by the exact but discolored city map that covers his office wall (111), Cairo’s is a city of folds, furrows, winks, hiding places, and undisciplined pleasures.

City of Assassins

As will have become evident in the foregoing discussion, the nature of the urban violence that concerned the writers of the Argentine novela negra of the 1970s was significantly different than that discussed in my previous chapters. In historical terms, Buenos Aires attained the status of metropolis during the period of massive European immigration that shaped the city’s so-called golden years between 1880 and 1930. By 1895 Buenos Aires had already attained a population that Bogota would not reach until 1951, and it was well on its way to becoming, in the words of geographer Charles S. Sargent, one of the world’s most attractive, vibrant, and sprawling cities (27). The relative strength of the Argentine economy allowed for the establishment of a broader and more stable middle class and for a more egalitarian social structure than in much of the rest of Latin America (Cerrutti and Grimson 75). Although Argentina’s relative position in the world economy deteriorated steadily throughout the twentieth century,15 Buenos Aires remained for many decades a relatively prosperous and livable urban center. In demographic terms, the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires grew steadily from a population of just over seven million in 1960 to some twelve million, representing fully 36 percent of the national population, in 1990 (Sargent 28). Buenos Aires remained Latin America’s third largest metropolitan area at the end of these years, although its expansion was modest in comparison to that of other Latin American capitals, such as Mexico City, as described in Chapter 2. Presumably as a consequence of relatively greater prosperity and a more equitable income distribution, Buenos Aires was also characterized by crime rates that were low in comparison with those of the region’s other metropolitan centers, although those rates began to rise dramatically during the 1990s in conjunction with what Cerrutti and
Grimson describe as a general process of social and political deterioration associated with the consolidation of neoliberal models first introduced in the later 1970s (97).

During the 1970s, the Argentine *novela negra* responded neither to a boom in organized crime nor to a general breakdown in public security resulting from the aggravation of extreme social equality, but rather to a crisis stemming from the debilitation and discrediting of institutions of governance. As is patent especially in the early novels of Martelli and Martini, the recurrence of military dictatorship, the appearance of left-Peronist guerrillas during the period of the Onganía regime and the persistence of armed struggle into the 1970s provided the immediate context for the first wave of the Argentine *novela negra*, and the military coup of March 1976 marked a break in the development of the genre and of Argentine narrative generally. The now infamous repression, extermination, and exile of opponents of the military government of the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional and the censorship of publications imposed at once an intensification of the traditional *novela negra* preoccupation with complicity between criminals and political authorities and an acute awareness of the impossibility of publishing direct denunciations of state crimes in Argentina until after the return to democracy in 1983. José Pablo Feinmann, the most notable contributor to the *novela negra* of the Proceso period, explains that Argentine novelists of the 1970s identified with the classic hard-boiled view of policemen as corrupt and violent and of crime not as an exception to a social norm but rather as a prevailing law. Feinmann adds that while inspired by Chandler and Hammett’s vision of corrupt police forces and the crime-ridden mean streets of Californian metropoli, Argentine novelists wrote with the additional awareness of a police state acting as a direct and primary perpetrator of criminal violence on the streets of Argentine cities (Estado policial 144 45).

Published, as Feinmann emphasizes, in the deepest doldrums of military dictatorship, *Últimos días de la víctima* (The Victim’s Last Days, 1979) constitutes perhaps the centerpiece in the canon of the Argentine *novela negra* due to the emblematic force and dramatic compression of its narrative. The novel’s plot is easily summarized: A highly reputed hitman named Mendizábal, about to turn fifty, is summoned and contracted by an anonymous client referred to only as the important man. He is assigned to kill a man named Külpe and, after receiving a file on his target, as well as a large preliminary payment, he sets off into Buenos Aires on the hunt. Külpe is easily located, but rather than attacking swiftly, Mendizábal takes a room in a boardinghouse facing Külpe’s
Mendizábal spies on Külpe as he leaves and returns home and trails him through the city, surreptitiously photographing and symbolically capturing him (30). Visits to Mendizábal’s home, which includes a photographic studio and archive of his previous victims, alert the reader to the methodical or compulsive nature of this practice. Although the important man is aware of the hitman’s meticulous procedures, he begins to pressure for resolution as the stakeout drags on.

In his campaign to subjugate his quarry through undetected surveillance, Mendizábal clearly seeks to occupy a position of panoptical superiority, an idea reinforced by the location of his photo archive in the attic of his house. A telephoto lens attached to his Pentax enables him to capture from a distance detailed images that he later blows up in order to study disaggregated features of Külpe’s face, and particularly his eyes. In one repeated scene, Külpe meets with a woman in a park while Mendizábal watches and photographs them from a bench: [He] observed them from there. From the top of the hill: it was as if he dominated them (60). The narrator presents Mendizábal as motivated by a desire to get as close to his victim and to learn as much as possible about him without being detected. He wanted to be near Külpe, to surrender to the exciting and secret celebration of knowing what he didn’t know, of observing him, of feeling him live, all the while knowing himself the absolver owner of his fate (19). For most of the novel Mendizábal pursues Külpe unimpeded except for occasional impatient inquiries regarding his progress, but the desired sense of mastery becomes increasingly troubled by personal challenges from Peña, a hostile thug serving as messenger for the important man, as well as by occasional intuitions of a less than complete power over the victim. The reader is made increasingly anxious by Mendizábal’s excessive and irrational preparations for a murder that he delays even after receiving revised instructions to finish the job immediately. Mounting pressure finally provokes recognition from Mendizábal that he is experiencing mental complications unencountered in previous jobs. Two of the most apparent of these are his intoxication with the excitement of drawing ever nearer to Külpe and his divided attraction to Külpe’s women: on one hand, the proper mother and schoolteacher Amanda, and on the other the indecent Cecilia, who is inferred to have been a stripper and a prostitute before taking up with Külpe.

Judged according to the norms of the novela negra, Últimos días de la víctima benefits greatly from Feinmann’s adept management of suspense and his talent for hard-boiled dialogue, as demonstrated in the series of
memorably tense confrontations between Mendizábal and Peña. Feinmann relies heavily on the subgenre’s standard plot mechanisms of investigation, surveillance, and pursuit, and his prose is terse and dynamic, although less colloquially marked than, for example, that of Tizziani. Equally skillful, however, is Feinmann’s strategy for evoking the climate of a terrorized society in terms so vague as to appear at first glance politically noncommittal. Últimos días contains no explicit reference to politics or to any government, and the only time frame is provided by the dating of Mendizábal’s files on his past contracts, which extend up through December 1974. We are also told that Mendizábal has been idle for some time before receiving the contract on Külpe, but the novel makes no more explicit allusion to the extraordinary political circumstances of the period. In the course of the narrative, Mendizábal recalls two of his previous employers as figures from the criminal underworld, but the important man is identified only in suggestively vague terms as a powerful but subordinate figure in the organization and as just another element in an inextricable network of powers and subpowers (12-13). Proud to work as a private contractor to the organization, rather than as the henchman, like Peña, of a patrón, Mendizábal nevertheless enjoys knowing himself to be a cog on which depends the infallible functioning of the machinery run by the important man (and also the functioning of other machineries controlling that one, run by men even more important and arrogant) (66-67).

The most substantial suggestion in Últimos días of a link between the organization and the security forces arises from the specific urban geography of the narrative. When Mendizábal proposes to meet Peña at a restaurant near the office of the important man, the location he specifies (Lacroze y Cabildo) is one readers familiar with Buenos Aires might easily recognize as situated in close proximity to one of the city’s largest military installations, home to regiments of Grenadiers and infantry as well as a military hospital and the Instituto Geográfico Militar. The likely significance of such a subtle reference is confirmed by Feinmann’s subsequent comments with regard to reinforcements of this association in a 1982 film version of the novel. Additional political resonance is provided by the protagonist’s reflections, reported early in the novel, on the connotations of the Luger pistol that is his preferred professional instrument.

Mendizábal, an arms expert, was used to imagining it in the hands of some young and implacable Prussian official. How many lives had it already extinguished? How many moans, curses and futile pleas had it heard? How many solitary, defeated men in dark and narrow rooms (perhaps that same
Prussian official once the war was done) had ended their days feeling its pitiless coldness against their temples? (20)

The Luger thus recalls not only the weaponry of the Third Reich but also the strong historical influence of the Prussian system on the organization of the Argentine military. Although the novel does not present Mendizábal simply or unambiguously as an agent of police-state terror, it does tie him subtly with authoritarian elements of Argentine military culture, in keeping with what María José Punte has called the novel’s critique of Fascist criminality. 17

Feinmann, who belonged to the socialist faction of the Juventud Peronista, has reflected extensively in published essays on the radical escalation of political confrontation that rendered Argentine political space violent and lethal by the mid-1970s. As Feinmann recalls in his essay Política y verdad (Politics and Truth), the insurgent activities of the revolutionary left-Peronist Montoneros, along with those of the initially Trotskyite and later Guevarist Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo, were answered by the organization from within the Peronist state of death squads of the Alianza Anticomunista Argentina or Triple A, overseen by Perón’s minister of social welfare, José López Rega. Feinmann’s critique of the contribution of the Peronist left to the breakdown of democratic institutions centers on the currency on the notion of politics as war, a notion shared by both the guerrillas and the military regime that ultimately crushed leftist militancy. The most violent elements of the revolutionary Peronist and Communist left thus provoked economic and military elites into canceling the possibility of political negotiation: an arrogant and solitary guerrilla movement provided the National Security regime with a framework of justification for resorting to maximum violence and for transforming politics into unrestrained war, annihilating any possible dissent (91). In Feinmann’s historical view, the Proceso was only the most recent and most intensely violent manifestation of the Argentine bourgeoisie’s unwavering opposition to truly democratic governance (92), but its immediate trigger was the rejection by extremist minorities on both the left and right of Peronism of a true politics based on dialogue, persuasion, and respect for political opponents (93).

The climate of terror resulting from the suspension of constitutional guarantees and the state’s systematic implementation of extralegal methods of repression is evoked in Últimos días, as I have indicated, through the story of a single hitman stalking a single target for purely mercenary motives. His indifference toward the reasons for the killings he commits is explained in the novel in terms that echo the indifference of agents of
the police state and much of the general public toward legal procedures and guarantees for alleged subversives.

His experience in the business had taught Mendizábal something: no one condemned to die was innocent. And not because he had done something bad, since good and bad had nothing to do with these things, but simply because he had acted. *It was that simple: every man acted against another; every man, therefore, ended up becoming a condemned man for that other man, just as the other man was for him. The only way to escape this game was by transforming yourself into a lethal instrument located at the end of the actions of others. But, in order to do so, it was first necessary that you not act, not interfere. If you didn’t do anything to anybody, who would be able to condemn you?* (53 54)

In the novel’s conclusion, Mendizábal’s theory fails as he discovers himself to be the titular victim. The hitman is surprised and killed by his intended target, Külpe, and the final page informs us that, four days after the killing, Mendizábal’s landlady reported him to the police as *desaparecido* (259). While the character of Mendizábal, a remorseless professional criminal, is certainly not designed to correspond to the common profiles of the real victims of political disappearances and murders during the Proceso, the startling circumstances of his death provide a potent parable of insecurity in the climate of police terror. Feinmann unnerves the reader by revealing his protagonist as trapped by a campaign of surveillance more sophisticated than his own and using identical techniques. Upon entering Külpe’s apartment, Mendizábal is stunned to encounter photographs of himself engaged in the activities of pursuit that he had imagined as surreptitious and that the narrative had so depicted up until that point. By telling the story of the pursuit of Külpe from a limited third-person narrative perspective focalized close to the subjectivity of Mendizábal, Feinmann invites the reader to share in the fantasy of panoptical power through undetected surveillance that so excites the protagonist but finally demolishes that fantasy, resituating the reader uncomfortably in the position of the unsuspecting object of surveillance.

This final reversal is Feinmann’s most powerful fictional evocation of what he has called, in the context of comments on Martini’s *El cerco*, a city and a nation besieged by death. In his 1991 essay *Estado policial y novela negra argentina*, the anecdote that Feinmann invokes to illustrate the significance of Martini’s unexplained siege seems equally relevant to the denouement of *Últimos días.*
On a certain occasion the Uruguayan guerrilla organization Tupamaros took a revealing picture. The picture showed the vulnerability of the person in it and the shrewdness, the infinite transgressive capability of the guerrillas. The man who appeared in the picture was the Uruguayan president [Jorge] Pacheco Areco [1967–72]. He was in his bathroom, shaving. Who had transgressed that intimacy? Who, how, when, had they gotten so obscenely close? Wasn’t Pacheco Areco an infinitely protected man? The picture said no. The picture said: no one is protected. . . . In sum: Pacheco Areco’s whole security system was shattered and with it the concept of state security. Who could now trust a state incapable of protecting its own president? (146)

During the years that elapsed between the writing of El cerco in 1975 and that of Últimos días in 1978, the militarized Argentine state had decisively reclaimed the prerogative of surveillance and lethal violence, and it is this reversion that makes the final entrapment of Mendizábal read so differently than that of Martini’s protagonist. In a period of such unprecedented criminalization of state power, it is impossible to interpret the infinitely powerful organization employing and then dispensing of Mendizábal except in relation to the alliance of military and business interests that sustained the military dictatorship. Despite its superficially apolitical appearance, Feinmann’s plot evaded the attention of censors while communicating one of the most enduring fables of a society in which violence had replaced politics as the dominant language of power and in which surveillance by a lawless security apparatus proved far more threatening to public security than even the shrewdest Tupamaro photographer.18

The Mechanism of Power

Like most of the other novelists who participated in the initial boom of the Argentine novela negra during the 1970s, Feinmann has not continued to publish exclusively in the subgenre, and none of his subsequent novels deal so directly with Buenos Aires as a scenario of urban criminality. Of the novels Feinmann has published since Últimos días, only Ni el tiro del final (Not Even the Last Shot), written in 1980 and published the following year, is conceived as a straightforward novela negra. Set in the coastal resort city of Mar del Plata and in the era of the dictatorship, Ni el tiro tells the story of an embittered piano player and failed novelist persuaded by a friend to take part in an attempt to blackmail a well-connected nightclub owner. When the blackmail plot fails, the would-be blackmailer, an unsuccessful lawyer and private detective, ends up shot in
the head and the nightclub owner is revealed to be a major drug trafficker protected by marriage to the daughter of a prestigious family and by friendship with members of the business and military elite. At a party in the house of the drug trafficker that constitutes the climax of the novel, Feinmann introduces the guests by their professions, describing first bankers, then models, doctors, architects, and journalists, as well as vacationing writers and show-business celebrities (214–15). Just as the host turns conversation to the topic of contemporary politics for the second time in the novel, Feinmann introduces one more notable guest: a military officer who concurs enthusiastically when the host declares the need for a true governing class in Argentina (224). The officer speaks in favor of a definition of social hierarchies, prodding the host to repeat his denunciation of democracy as a Western vice and as synonymous in Argentina with the dreaded blight of populism. The reaction of the select party guests to this mention of populism concludes the most politically explicit passage in Feinmann’s early fiction. God deliver us, please. . . . Rather the holocaust than that (225). By the time Feinmann wrote this passage in 1980, the disappearance and mass murder of thousands of alleged subversives was, of course, substantially accomplished by an authoritarian regime whose supporters, in social terms, rather closely resembled the guests assembled at this party.

_Ni el tiro_ projects a vision of a society decisively divided between heirs and non-heirs. In the novel, non-heirs who overstep their bounds end up with a bullet in the head, while major criminals are guaranteed impunity as long as they remain affiliated with financial and political elites (situated in the exact mesh of Power, 259). Although guerrillas can no longer be invoked as a counterforce as in Martelli’s _Los tigres de la memoria_, the gist of Feinmann’s denunciation of state criminality is close to that of Martini’s five years earlier. During the years of the dictatorship, no Argentine novelist was so bold as to send a private detective into a clandestine detention center in pursuit of police torturers, as did Chilean Ramón Díaz Eterovic in the novel mentioned briefly in Chapter 2, but Feinmann’s criminal-centered texts ultimately stand as more powerful testaments to the era of police terror precisely because of their refusal of improbably heroic fantasies of resistance. Critics were quick to recognize _Últimos días_ as the culmination of a series of hard-boiled texts that communicated more through suggestive allusion than through declarative denunciation. As early as 1982, Oscar Bosetti wrote:

They allude elliptically to an unspoken reality, allowing the traces of an unrestrained violence to show through for those who know or want to see
or discover them. . . . If during this peculiar period . . . the text was defi-
antly conceived as a sign or a gesture of a tragic circumstance, the story of
Raúl Mendizábal refers to another story, to other events that are not
explicitly mentioned but that inevitably betray the worries and the omino-
ous anxieties suffered by Argentines during recent years. (31)

This interpretation is in keeping with Feinmann’s own fundamental view
of the significance of the subgenre as a parable of political reality in the
tumultuous context of the 1970s and early ’80s ( Estado policial 152).
The profound resonance of Feinmann’s parables in the novels previously
discussed is attested not only by their multiple editions in Buenos Aires
and Barcelona but also by the multiple film versions they have generated.19

Through the early 1980s, Argentina had yet to generate an equivalent
to Belascoarán Shayne, a detective protagonist pitted directly against el
monstruo del Estado del capital. In fact, the relative prominence of
criminal protagonists in novels such as those I have discussed led
Feinmann to declare that the essential characteristic of the Argentine nov-
ela negra was precisely its lack of police and detective protagonists
( Estado policial 143). In defending this assertion, which was later
echoed by Piglia ( Prólogo 14), Feinmann overlooks at least one contra-
dicting example the character of Solís in El agua en los pulmones and
also qualifies his assertion by recognizing that when the police do appear
in such novels as Alberto Laiseca’s Su turno para morir (His Turn to Die,
1976) and Tizziani’s Noches sin lunas ni soles, they are coherently located:
they belong to the mechanism of Power, that Power that overlaps with
violence, torture and death ( Estado policial 148). Feinmann dismisses
another novelist’s attempt to portray an honest police chief as improbable
and irrelevant to the context of the police state of the Proceso, which in
his view dictates that any fiction aspiring to verisimilitude must portray
police characters as villains (149). He also dismisses the more playful and
parodic detectives of Soriano and Juan Sasturain as purely fictional cre-
ations that bear no relation to the real police (149). While the history of
the Proceso certainly lends ample evidence in support of Feinmann’s con-
demnation of what he calls the policía-Institución, I will take issue here
with his categorical dismissal of detective-centered fiction as effectively
nonexistent in the Argentine tradition of the novela negra. In contrast
with harder-boiled exercises, such as those of Feinmann and Sergio Sinay,
Soriano’s freewheeling appropriation of Philip Marlowe stands at an
unmistakably greater fictional remove from the worries of contemporary
Argentine readers, but in a novel serialized during the year of Argentina’s
return to democracy, Sasturain introduced a detective protagonist who is
as much a product of the country’s recent history as an investigator of it. Sasturain’s Etchenique is the most distinctive Buenos Aires detective to have appeared in print since Isidro Parodi more than forty years before, and he stands as the primary Argentine champion of the ethics and aesthetics of the neopoliciaco.

**Lessons for Losers**

Some of the distinctiveness of Sasturain’s *Manual de perdedores* (Loser’s Manual) undoubtedly relates to its preparation for serial publication in a Buenos Aires newspaper in 1983. If *Muertos incómodos*, the only other serial novel discussed in this study, seemed fatally burdened by the expansive rhetoric of Subcomandante Marcos in his all-too-well prepared biweekly installments, *Manual*, in contrast, succeeds admirably in gauging the limitations and potential of the one-chapter-per-day publication format. Sasturain dutifully satisfies the serial novel’s implicit promise of suspenseful intrigue, frequent plot twists, and high-intensity action delivered in very small narrative units, but he simultaneously offers a clever reflection on the well-worn conventions of the novela negra and on the long-standing problem of the transposition of detective codes to an Argentine context. A total of 162 chapters, each running about two pages in length, constitute the two linked narrative sequences of *Manual*, and the action and dialogue filling these brief chapters is classically hard-boiled. Fights, shoot-outs, kidnappings, escapes, chases, and murders abound, and Sasturain’s private detective is as much of a glutton for physical punishment as all his classical predecessors. However, two amusing idiosyncrasies distinguish Etchenique from the stereotype. First, he is a widowed retiree who has adopted the detective vocation late in life and who thus operates at a considerable disadvantage in the novel’s frequent physical struggles. Second, his vocation is directly inspired by the consumption of thousands of crime novels and noir films whose detective heroes he consciously strives to emulate.

By now this last statement might elicit only a muffled echo in the memory of my patient reader, so I should confirm that Etchenique’s explicitly literary and cinematic vocation closely parallels that of Belascoarán Shayne in the novels discussed in Chapter 2. Sasturain is as forthright as Taibo in acknowledging the incongruity of the classic hard-boiled detective in a contemporary Latin American metropolitan setting, and he also parallels Taibo in balancing the realistic aspirations of the narrative with self-referential humor. Sasturain endows his characters with an ample awareness of foreign genre precedents, but he also invokes,
more insistently than Taibo, a Cervantine precedent for his protagonist’s incautious emulation of exotic fiction. References to Etchenique’s extensive readings and his mimicry of actors and characters are abundant in *Manual*, but the nature of his enterprise is well-summarized in the following exchange between the detective and a masked thug who kidnaps him. In this exchange, as throughout the novel, the spelling of the detective’s name varies, as he attempts to impose an Anglicized variant of his surname as his professional moniker.

I don’t get you, Etchenique. I just don’t get you. Are you serious? . . . You’re fucking with us, right?

I’m not fucking with you. That’s who I am: Etchenike, private investigator.

But that doesn’t exist, old man. It’s just something the yanquis made up, pure literature, movies and TV series . . . Or do you think that guys like Marlowe or Lew Archer and Sam Spade really existed? What happened to you? Did you crack up like Don Quixote and start believing you could live out what you read in the books? . . . You even got yourself a Sancho Panza: an illiterate Galician who believes you and follows you around.

The masked man was being cruel now. You even got an old car, almost a relic, just so you can feel like Bogart. (168)

Like Belascoarán Shayne, Etchenique does indeed studiously adopt the expressions, mannerisms, and wardrobe of Bogart and the vocation of Marlowe, and *Manual* also provides a very close equivalent to Taibo’s account of the genesis of his Mexican independent detective in *Días de combate*. Whereas Belascoarán Shayne was transformed by the accidental alchemy of *They Might Be Giants*, a bolero and a murder story reported in the *nota roja*, Etchenique emerges, as mentioned in Chapter 1, on the first page of *Manual* from a movie theater where he has attended a three-day detective noir retrospective. An obsessive reader of the *nota roja*, he retains twenty years of tabloid back issues from which he has derived an encyclopedic knowledge of the criminal underworld of Buenos Aires, and, perhaps most decisively, he is a passionate connoisseur of tango. Belascoarán’s musical references reflected his formation during the 1960s, but the veteran Etchenique is the product of another era, and tango is the primary local ingredient with which Sasturain blends the imported aesthetics of the hard-boiled detective noir.

 Begun, by Sasturain’s account, well before the Proceso and completed after it, *Manual* contains a pair of linked investigations centering on two of the most permanent concerns of the Latin American novela negra. In the first section of *Manual*, Sasturain’s detective befriends a once famous
but now ruined and drug-addicted tango singer who dies attempting to
exact revenge on a gang of drug dealers who killed his son years earlier. In
the novel’s second part, a wealthy industrialist who is about to be named
Minister of Industrial Development by the military government hires
Etchenique to investigate the whereabouts of his missing son, and the
investigation leads back to the same narcotrafficking organization, whose
leaders turn out to be closely related to the industrialist. Although
Etchenique collaborates to a limited extent with a police investigator who
is an old acquaintance, his private investigation competes with the effort
of the police to entrap the narcotraffickers, as well as those of a group of
revolutionaries who are also investigating the narcotraffickers in order to
extort money from them. Sasturain portrays the revolutionaries as radi-
calized students carrying out clandestine operations in Buenos Aires, and
although he identifies them only as la pesada (the heavies), they are clearly
identifiable as Montoneros fleeing the attention of clandestine military
commandos. The relationship of the private detective with the official
police is complicated in Manual by personal and political history.
Sasturain characterizes Etchenique as a former policeman who quit the
force after seeing his fellow officers torture a Peronist prisoner under an
earlier dictatorship, and he maintains a collaborative relationship with
Macías, the police detective who saves him from being framed for a mur-
der in the first part of the novel and then from execution by a drug dealer
in the second. Yet when driving with a leader of la pesada, he actively flees
a police checkpoint in order to avoid her arrest. When the security forces
finally abduct her later in the novel, Etchenique pressures Macías to inter-
vene on her behalf but learns that his friend can do nothing to restrain
those in charge of dealing with political subversives (484).

Like many classic hard-boiled private eyes, Sasturain’s detective thus
maintains an ambivalent relationship with the police, collaborating at
times in the detention of criminals who, by the logic of the narrative,
deserve legal sanction but also employing illegal methods in his personal
pursuit of justice. Manual de perdedores concludes with a conventionally
hard-boiled paroxysm of violent retribution in which Etchenique serves
less as executioner than facilitator. In the course of his investigation,
Etchenique learns not only that the corrupt industrialist’s missing son is
a member of la pesada, but also that he is, in true serial-novel fashion, actu-
ally the son of the industrialist’s wife and the Bolivian drug lord she
still loves. In the novel’s climactic confrontation at an estate west of the
city, the young Montoneréro saves a captive Etchenique by killing his
pseudo-father, the industrialist. In the same confrontation, the lover of
the dead tango singer from the first part of the novel (bear with me here)
appears to kill the drug lord, culminating their campaign of vengeance for the murder of their own son years earlier. Etchenique in this case refuses to involve the police, and conceals the circumstances of the killings by abandoning the industrialist’s body in a desolate but most significant site: the dump in the northwestern suburb of José León Suárez where soldiers of the Revolución Libertadora dumped the bodies of summarily executed Peronist prisoners in the 1956 incident famously documented by Rodolfo Walsh’s Operación masacre. In Manual, Etchenique does not go so far as to break off relations with policemen, nor does he declare approval of the revolutionary activities of la pesada, but he does commit himself to destroying the perversely extended family representing a convergence of the forces most abominable to the novela negra: corrupt corporate capitalism (the dirty dealings of the industrialist); dictatorship (the military regime set to appoint the industrialist to a cabinet post); oligarchy (the industrialist’s treacherous wife, daughter of rural landowners); and modern organized crime (an international cocaine trafficking organization founded by the wife’s lover and her cousin).

As my overheated summary indicates, the mapping of urban geography is extremely prominent in Sasturain’s novel as in other versions of the neopoliocia. If the novela negra can be considered a narrative machine for the production of a certain fiction of justice, I would emphasize that Etchenique deposits this novel’s primary symbolic product (the cadaver of the industrialist) in a suburban site sharply inscribed with a history of state violence. In general, the crossing and definition of urban territories is as energetic and thorough in Manual as in the Belascoarán Shayne novels discussed in Chapter 2, and Etchenique not only traverses the city proper (the Distrito Federal) but also ventures into the southern, northern, and western zones of the metropolitan periphery. In addition to the famous dump in José León Suárez, Etchenique visits a shirt factory in the northern suburb of Munro and a metallurgical plant in the southern industrial zone of Avellaneda, as well as chalets and estates in the posh residential suburbs of Adrogué (Almirante Brown) and Francisco Álvarez (Moreno). Within the city limits, he roams from affluent Belgrano in the north to the gritty southern extremes of Barracas and La Boca, and from the western Villa Luro to the city’s busy eastern edge. In the novel’s opening pages, Etchenique assumes his detective vocation by selling his house in the middle-class Flores neighborhood and renting an office in the very heart of downtown on the Avenida de Mayo, the thoroughfare that connects Argentina’s foundational Plaza de Mayo with the Plaza del Congreso. Etchenique’s office, which also serves as his residence, is thus located on one of the best known and most architecturally distinctive
streets of the metropolis, four blocks from the landmark that represents kilometer zero on all road signs in the country, and even closer to downtown’s central north-south artery, the Avenida 9 de Julio.

During his numerous excursions forth from his office on the Avenida de Mayo, the novel continues to locate Etchenique with respect to some of the city’s most recognizable monuments. The Plaza del Congreso, the Palermo planetarium, and La Boca’s Caminito are among the sites that feature prominently in the action of the novel, and the urban image acquires finer detail through numerous references to bars and cafes both central and far-flung. Sasturain attests further to the novel’s compulsion for urban mapping when he recalls that the first scene he wrote in 1972, long before discovering where the story would eventually lead, was one that eventually served as the narrative hinge between the two parts of Manual (499). In this utterly conventional episode, the detective visits the industrialist for the first time in his office in a high-rise building located at the eastern end of another of Buenos Aires’s most emblematic thoroughfares, the Avenida Corrientes. On the wall of the corporate office hangs a map of Buenos Aires (199), and from the window the magnate commands a view of the port and of Corrientes itself, recalling similar views enjoyed from the Torre Latinoamericana in Muertos incómodos or the Hotel Esmeralda in Perder es cuestión de método. Although installed on the third floor in his building on the Avenida de Mayo, Etchenique for the most part assumes no such commanding view, and in the course of the narrative his adversaries repeatedly conspire to impede his spatial orientation and visual perception, for example by knocking him unconscious, kidnapping, and transporting him, and then donning masks before interrogating him in a secret location. Given the abundance of literary and cinematic references invoked in the portrayal of Etchenique, it is also fitting that he should begin and end the novel with outings along Corrientes, famed above all for its bookstores, cinemas, theaters, and nightspots. Manual begins, as I have mentioned, as the detective emerges from a film noir retrospective at what may be the Centro Cultural San Martín before walking to Bar Ramos to recruit an assistant there, and the novel ends with a return to Bar Ramos, followed by a visit to the nearby milonga at the Salón La Argentina, one of the most illustrious venues in the history of tango.

Sasturain invokes tango throughout the novel as the soundtrack of hard-boiled Buenos Aires. In the first part of Manual, Etchenique reminisces with the ruined tango singer about the glory days of the 1940s before the singer is killed and dumped in the Riachuelo, the river marking the southern border of the Distrito Federal. The novel’s first killing
takes place while the singer attempts to communicate a message to the detective using tango lyrics during a performance in a seedy nightspot in La Boca. Elsewhere, tango plays on radios and songs are recalled time and again as Sasturain integrates a local urban mythology of nostalgia, erotic disappointment, and masculine violence as a complement to the hard-boiled noir sensibility derived from U.S. novels and films. As in earlier novels by Tizziani and others, the hard-boiled mode is again localized in Manual through ample recourse to lunfardo, a language variant closely associated with the tango. Many scenes in the novel transpire in classical hard-boiled loci such as police stations, a morgue, and a detective’s office that, while located on the Avenida de Mayo, was almost a literary parody, the set from a 1940s movie. Others take place in more local variants of the very shabby urban margins singled out by Jameson as the realm of the hard-boiled: the tourist trap in La Boca, a run-down tenement or conventillo where Etchenique is held prisoner, the dreary homes of a ruined singer and a former prizefighter. The novel alternates textured descriptions of recognizable Buenos Aires environments with frequent references to literary precedents and to its own formulaic procedures, resulting in a constant interplay between realistic mapping and metanarrative subversion of the reality effect.

A metageneric component of Sasturain’s narrative discourse is figured both in the movie theater from which Etchenique first emerges and in the library of detective novels he keeps in his office. The scene establishing the existence of this library reveals the complexity of Sasturain’s play with genre throughout Manual, as the detective is shadowed by an aspiring writer named Giangreco who hangs around his office taking notes in hopes of producing a detective novel set in Buenos Aires. In a discussion of the project, which he considers a potentially appealing novelty, Giangreco asks Etchenique if he has read the recent novels by Argentinean authors (Tizziani, Sinay, Martini, Urbanyi, Battista, Feinmann, Soriano), but Etchenique responds that he gave up reading novels in favor of living the life of the detective. Giangreco doesn’t believe him. Don’t bullshit me, I saw the little library you’ve got back there and you’ve got it all: the first hundred installments of Séptimo Círculo, two shelves of Rastros, Serie Naranja, Club del Misterio. You’ve even got Mister Reeder, Etchenique (90). In other passages of the novel, Etchenique confirms Giangreco’s allegation not only by continuing to relate his own detective activities to the literary models but also by actively rereading Dashiell Hammett’s The Dain Curse when inspiration for his own investigation flags (231).
tradition of detective writing, having appeared as early as 1946 in *Los que aman, odian* (Those Who Love, Hate), and it would be fair to say that even in his energetic travels across an imagined Buenos Aires, Sasturain’s detective never fully leaves his library since he derives from it the structures of meaning that define his own experience.

At various moments in the narrative, Etchenique and other characters reflect on his performance of a literarily prescribed role and relate the progress of events in relation to set genre norms. In the most forceful of these acknowledgments of genre-constructedness, the narrative bluntly disavows the reality effect it cultivates elsewhere, as when a confused Etchenique sits down at a bar to review his notes on the investigation and produces an information chart that looks like a plan for a novel and strikes Etchenique a mere simulacrum (414). Even as he visits real places and investigates crimes related to real social problems, such as corporate corruption and the spread of narcotrafficking, Etchenique operates with a persistent awareness of the unreality of his pursuit: he felt that it was all like a dream or like one of the thousands of detective novels he’d read (84). This transparency of simulation (commonly characterized as postmodern but, from another perspective, no less modern than Unamuno, Pirandello, and Arlt) also finds expression in *Manual* through Etchenique’s recurrent sense of déjà vu, as when he discovers the former boxer unconscious in his bathroom and recognizes the episode. This is Chandler. . . . A scene from *The High Window* replayed in La Boca . . . I already read this (344). In addition to acknowledging the enduring problem of cultural importation, this stream of knowing allusions call our attention more generally to the willful credulity exercised by all devout consumers of genre texts and the measured pleasures of recognition, which are their reward.

Among the Argentine novelists who have adopted the codes of the *novela negra*, it is Sasturain who best exemplifies the aesthetics of the *neopolicíaco* or what Ana María Amar Sánchez calls ‘a creole version’ [of the detective novel] that plays permanently with intertextual allusion and that treats the clichés of the code humorously even as it politicizes the form (48 49). In a reading that juxtaposes *Manual* with novels by Taibo and Rubem Fonseca, Amar Sánchez writes as follows with regard to the tension in their novels between the self-conscious appropriation of a foreign model and the use of that model to map local realities.

The whole of *Manual* searches painstakingly, to the point of exasperation, for national places, drinks and gestures suitable for translating the space and customs of the U.S. detective novel. We find the same in the other
novels that represent very recognizable spaces characteristic of the hard-boiled. The tension between a supposedly realistic notation and the strong codification of the genre is a quotation of the tradition but also signals the territorial difference. In the novels of Taibo and Fonseca, detectives traverse Mexico City and Rio de Janeiro, they walk through known streets, they eat typical dishes in specific restaurants. In this way, the reader can follow the protagonist across the national space. (54)

As I have described, Sasturain’s definition of a local urban space is accomplished not only through careful designation of recognizable and broadly distributed places but also through multiple references to the discourse of tango and the use of *lunfardo*, particularly in dialogue. The other major nationalizing operation undertaken by Sasturain relates, as Amar Sánchez suggests, to politics, as the novel portrays a city patrolled by security forces engaged in their dirty war against clandestine militants. Etchenique initially investigates violent conflicts stemming from narcotrafficking, but as we have seen, politics enters heavily in the second part of *Manual* through the family of the industrialist. Of the multiple kidnappings committed in the novel, the most significant is the public disappearance of a political militant by covert police agents, and the activities of the security forces are present throughout as a backdrop to the detective’s personal travails: [H]e was so lost in thought that he paid no attention to the assault vehicles parked on Callao or the squad cars wailing down Pueyrredón toward Once (252). Although he collaborates with the police in their pursuit of narcotraffickers, Sasturain’s detective also stakes political positions by abandoning the body of the industrialist at the site of the extrajudicial executions made famous by Rodolfo Walsh and by attempting to intervene to save the militant disappeared by the security forces.

First serialized during the final months of the Proceso, Sasturain’s *Manual* contradicts Feinmann’s denial of the existence of Argentine detectives, but it may not be said to have spawned much of a legacy. Etchenique returned as the protagonist of Sasturain’s 1989 *Arena en los zapatos* (Sand in the Shoes), which is set outside Buenos Aires in a seaside resort town, and as a minor character in his 2002 *La lucha continúa* (The Struggle Goes On), but the mainstream of the *novela negra* in the 1980s and 1990s flowed largely along the course described by Feinmann and Piglia. Novels such as Martelli’s *La muerte de un hombrecito* (The Death of a Little Man, 1992) and Vicente Battista’s *Sucesos argentinos* (Argentine Events, 1995) have continued to explore the interface between criminal underworlds and political power, but they seem increasingly distant from
the playful sensibility introduced by Soriano and perpetuated by Sasturain. As Jorge B. Rivera writes in Asesinos de papel, the Argentine novela negra of the 1970s was distinguished from its predecessors by a particular emphasis on distancing, intellectualization, homage, allusion to pre-textual or inter-textual codes, parody and even re-writing (89), and after Manual de perdedores few other texts seem to conform so closely to Rivera’s description of what he called the new wave of intellectualized novels.

the novelists who took up the hard-boiled genre throughout the 1970s accentuate a parodic line, ornamenting their texts with tics, conventions, mannerisms, styles and languages that demand, above all, a readership trained in the deciphering and enjoyment of a certain type of codes derived from film noir, comic books, Hollywood, the eroticism of pin up girls, the mythology of jazz [as well as tango], the cult of the antihero, the [U.S.] hard-boiled novel, the gestures of Humphrey Bogart, fashions of the 1940s, etc. (94)

Rather than promoting further play with self-referentiality and mixing of aesthetic codes, the return to democracy and the pursuit of economic reform during the 1980s and ’90s seems to have occasioned a settling of the novela negra form or, if you will, a boiling-down of hard-boiled discourse. Although the period of state terror effectively concludes in Argentina in 1982 with the discrediting of the dictatorship by the Falkland Islands War (investigations, trials, and pardons for past crimes notwithstanding), Argentina’s post-neopoliciaco would build on the achievements of texts such as Martini’s El cerco and Feinmann’s Últimos días de la víctima. Jorge Lafforgue, who considered these two of the best Argentine novels of the decade, found lasting merit in their distinctive representation of social violence: rather than treating violence as a discreet phenomenon, they make it an elusive, threatening, unavoidable and total social presence (La narrativa argentina 162). The strong resonance here with Sánchez-Prado’s assessment of the inscription of violence in Eduardo Antonio Parra’s Nostalgia de la sombra (a consistent presence that becomes a constitutive part of the social tapestry . . . a social code that enters the urban environment as a strategy of social relationships and as a component of subjectivity) anticipates continuities between the novela negra of the dictatorship and that of the neoliberal era.

The Privatization of Violence

In addressing the corpus of what I will call the Argentine post-neopoliciaco, I must begin by reiterating acknowledgment of very substantial differences
between the urban histories and the material, economic, and social realities of the metropoli under consideration here. In empirical terms, Buenos Aires has been far less violent since the return to democracy than Mexico City, Bogota, and most other Latin American capitals. To return only briefly to statistical measures cited earlier, studies comparing national homicide rate per one hundred thousand inhabitants calculate Argentina’s rate at 3.5 in 1980, 5.7 in 1990 and 4.8 in 1996, in contrast with much higher rates for Mexico (19.9/17.2/17.1) and much, much higher ones for Colombia (37.2/68.7/60.8) in roughly the same years (Mesquita Neto). As recently as 1998, Buenos Aires’s recorded homicide rate of 6.4 per one hundred thousand compared very favorably with that of other metropoli including Mexico City (19.6 in 1995) and Bogota (49.2 in 1997), but also Lima (25 in 1995), São Paulo (55.8 in 1998), and Caracas (76 in 1995, Mesquita Neto). Even taking into account the grave economic and political crisis of 2001-02, relatively stable and now swiftly recovering Argentina might not seem a likely ground for literary visions as black as those of Parra or Mendoza. As I shall explain shortly, a major divergence with respect to the trajectory of the development of crime fiction in Mexico and Colombia are indeed evident in Argentina, but equally notable is a vigorous Argentine manifestation of the post-neopoliaco turn I have described in the preceding chapters.

In a pertinent 2002 article, Beatriz Sarlo has studied a rise in Buenos Aires’s comparatively low rates of urban violence in conjunction with its apparently disproportionate impact on the social imaginary. As she writes, media reports of more frequent incidents of violent crime have familiarized Buenos Aires residents with previously infrequent forms of violent criminality. The list of cases of urban violence is practically infinite. It feeds a sense of collective insecurity that has become a passion: the passion of fear as an organizer of our relation to public space (206). Recalling formulations such as Monsiváis’s ecology of fear and Susana Rotker’s citizenship of fear, this passion grows, by Sarlo’s account, despite the relatively milder increments of the growth of violent criminality in her city:

[N]either Buenos Aires nor the zones surrounding it are homogeneously violent territories, like Caracas, Bogota, Mexico City or São Paulo. . . . Buenos Aires is still reasonably safe. Nevertheless, violence has increased, and although this is not quantifiable, the sensation of insecurity has increased as much as violence. . . . Violence is read in relation to expectations of security. (206)
In the study to which I have already referred, Cerrutti and Grimson document a steep decline in living standards in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area during the lost 1980s and the period of neoliberal adjustments during 1990s, with poverty peaking at 42.3 percent of the population in 2002 (93) and unemployment rising from 2.8 percent in 1980 to 20.1 percent in 2001 (91). Though homicide rates remained low in comparison with other Latin American metropolises, Cerrutti and Grimson associate the economic deterioration and increasing inequality in the distribution of wealth with a very significant rise in crime and especially in crimes against property, which more than quadrupled in Buenos Aires between 1991 and 2001 according to official statistics (98). Cerrutti and Grimson also confirm that, as in other Latin American cities, crime became not only more prevalent but also more violent, with perpetrators killing less discriminately during commission of crimes (100).

Sarlo disputes neither the reality of a deterioration of public safety during the 1980s and '90s nor the significance of a public perception of unprecedented crisis, but she does observe that this perception depends to some degree on a non-recollection of the thousands of political murders committed secretly between 1975 and 1982. For a variety of reasons, continues Sarlo, the city of the democratic transition, the city of the last almost twenty years, is perceived as more insecure than the city controlled by a terrorist state. (206). In many respects, Sarlo’s analysis echoes those of Robert Follari and other scholars quoted in previous chapters with regard to the social and economic impact of neoliberal reforms on Latin American societies. She refers to the widening gap between beneficiaries of the new economic model and those excluded from it, corresponding in the social geography of Buenos Aires to a hardening of the traditional boundaries between an affluent north and an impoverished south, and she sees increases in violent criminality as symptomatic of a general breakdown of the tissue of social relations (207). In an article published a year earlier, Argentine sociologist Ana Wortman analyzed the impact of the neoliberal model on Argentina in nearly the same terms.

[A] new pragmatic and instrumental economist discourse was configured, producing a new type of society. Social exclusion, social anomie, social atomization and weakening of bonds, disintegration, crisis of identities, inequitable income distribution, discrediting of democracies in light of their inability to resolve problems, corruption of political institutions, increase in forms of delinquency these are the characteristics that define social processes in Latin American in recent decades and that have expressed themselves with tragic intensity in our country. (135)
In this sobering light, the persistence of the novela negra in post-dictatorship Argentina is no more surprising than its obedience to the regional trend of criminal ascendancy within the subgenre.

From the perspective of national literary history, the Argentine post-neopoliciaco is as much a return as a turn. As I have indicated, criminal protagonists attain prominence in the Argentine novel negra as early as the 1950s in works by Adolfo Jasca, Roger Pla, and others, and major writers of the 1970s continued to construct their narratives around criminals both sympathetic (Tizziani) and unsympathetic (Feinmann). The novelist who perhaps best defines this line of production over recent decades is also the one that has published most extensively on the history of the hard-boiled genre. During the nine years he lived in exile in Mexico, Mempo Giardinelli published not only the first monographic study of the novela negra by an Argentine writer (El género negro, 1984) but also one of the most successful of all Argentine crime novels. Giardinelli’s Luna caliente (Sultry Moon) won the Premio Nacional de Novela in Mexico in 1973, in the year of its first edition in Mexico, before becoming a long-running best-seller in Argentina in its first Buenos Aires edition, published the following year. Luna caliente has since received multiple reeditions in Spanish, not only in Buenos Aires and Mexico City but also in San Salvador, Quito, Madrid, and Barcelona, and translations have appeared in thirteen languages, including English, French, Italian, Portuguese, Dutch, German, Russian, and Hebrew. Giardinelli’s novel also shares with those of Feinmann the rare distinction of having been filmed more than once (first in a 1985 Mexico-Argentina co-production directed by Roberto Denis and co-written by Feinmann, and then for Brazilian television in 1999). Set in late 1977 in and around Giardinelli’s native city of Resistencia in the northern province of Chaco, Luna caliente reads as a hard-boiled subtropical reworking of Nabokov’s Lolita with shades of Camus’s L’Étranger and the paranoid parables of Martini and Feinmann. Giardinelli’s protagonist is a doctor of jurisprudence who, upon returning from years of study in France, impulsively rapes a thirteen-year-old girl and leaves her for dead before deciding to kill her father, a family friend, in order to cover up his crime. Most of Luna caliente is devoted to the protagonist’s attempts to evade not only the police but also the demonically compliant and resilient girl. Giardinelli’s enthusiastic interest in the novela negra as an instrument for the denunciation of corruption is evident in his representation of police officials, who seek to prove the protagonist’s guilt not in order to jail him, but rather in order to coerce him into collaborating with the local arm of the military regime.
Since his return to Argentina in 1984, Giardinelli has produced two additional novels closely comparable to *Luna caliente*, although set after the dictatorship. In the first of these, *El décimo infierno* (*The Tenth Circle*, 1999), Giardinelli sends a middle-aged, middle-class couple on a killing spree, again in Resistencia. In this story, savage violence results from little more than accumulated tedium and a capriciously indulged desire for excitement. The narrator is a successful real estate developer who is sleeping with his partner’s wife, and the novel opens with a decision by the lovers to kill the partner and flee with money from a land deal. Killing leads to killing and betrayal to betrayal as the couple flees for the border, in a narrative design that owes much to the novels of Jim Thompson and James M. Cain, two writers often cited and highly praised by Giardinelli. In classic hard-boiled fashion, Giardinelli concentrates narrative attention on the mechanics of the killings and on the complications of the escape, but passing reference in the narrative to the unscrupulous business practices of the narrator and to the inveterate corruption of local Peronist officials stand out as significant when juxtaposed with Giardinelli’s explanation of the political significance of his violent fable in a 1999 interview.

*The Tenth Circle* is a Menemist novel or, if you prefer, a novel of Menemism. It expresses what this government has been: a form of irrational violence, an absolute corruption of values, a form of hopelessness and a vertigo of heedless action. . . . I’ve been very interested in something I’ve written about almost daily as a journalist, in exploring the reasons for the violent transformation of a society under democracy. In Argentina we’ve undergone fifteen years of pacification, a lot of things have changed (no doubt for the better), and nevertheless, at the same time, there are other forms of violence that have developed in a very perverse way. This has been the theme of my recent books, a true literary obsession, but in this latest product there is a kind of paroxysm, of insanity, of absolute irrationality that I present without irony. (Mi libro refleja)

As the president who completed the neoliberal transformation of the Argentine economy that began during the Proceso, Carlos Menem (1989–99) is now widely reviled for having paved the road to economic collapse in 2001, and Giardinelli here reaffirms the profound correspondence between the discourse of the post-*neopoliciacono* and the social deterioration described by Sarlo, Wortman, and others.

Prolific, commercially successful, and extremely effusive in his promotion of the *novela negra*, Giardinelli will receive relatively short shrift in this chapter only because he has written little of Buenos Aires. The third of Giardinelli’s skillfully wrought crime novels, *Cuestiones interiores*
(Internal Matters, 2003), again centers on a killer, and although this time the protagonist spends most of the novel locked in a jail cell in Buenos Aires, he has relatively little to say about the city. Much of the novel’s discourse consists of recollections by the protagonist and reflections on his crime as he mentally prepares to address a judge at the conclusion of his trial, and many of his memories correspond to other places. A native of Resistencia, the protagonist has lived in the capital and worked as a professor at the Universidad de Buenos Aires, but he recounts few experiences in the city and makes scant reference to urban geography. Giardinelli begins the narrative with recollection of a crime again rendered as gratuitous and unpremeditated: after urinating in a restroom at the international airport, the protagonist cedes to an unexplained impulse to strike an old man standing at the next urinal, and the man dies from the blow. The eccentric and public aspect of the airport bathroom corresponds to Marc Augé’s idea of the non-place, and confirms Giardinelli’s disinterest in specific urban geographies and in realistic depictions of organized criminality. Dated as having been written between October 2001 and December 2002, Cuestiones interiores makes repeated reference to the crisis that unfolded during those months. The narrator reflects bitterly on a moment in which whoever doesn’t emigrate commits suicide (86), and he declares that in Argentina now everything is mediocre, second rate... no decency, no truth, no ethical stance and no good work go unpunished (110). Without recognizing his crime as a metaphor for the treachery that may be supposed to have led to such decadence, Giardinelli’s killer adds: this country’s been destroyed and what used to be a nation is now just a multitude of wretches plodding on aimlessly (129). As Giardinelli emphasizes through references to Kafka, Camus, and Cain, Cuestiones interiores considers violence less in its concrete, local, urban manifestations than as a transcendent symptom of national collapse.

Panoptical Delusions

Of the hard-boiled crime novels published in Argentina during the 1990s, almost certainly the most widely read was a semi-documentary text by a writer who has long been associated with the novela negra without ever writing squarely in the genre. Ricardo Piglia’s Plata quemada (Money to Burn), winner of the Premio Planeta in the year of its publication (1997), reconstructs the story of a sensational 1965 robbery in which a gang of thieves stole over seven million pesos in a northern suburb of Buenos Aires before fleeing to Montevideo, where they engaged in a sixteen-hour battle with hundreds of policemen. Plata quemada strongly evokes hard-boiled
narrative aesthetics first in its blunt and graphic descriptions of the killings perpetrated by the thieves. The inspector’s face was erased by the firepower as if it had exploded from inside his mouth and ripped the flesh outwards, leaving only a bloody hole behind (155). Secondly, the novel follows Argentine hard-boiled convention in placing great emphasis in the compenetration of the criminal underworld and institutions of law enforcement. The gang of thieves perform the robbery as something like subcontractors of a group of corrupt municipal officials and police officers who generate the idea for the robbery and agree to let it happen in exchange for half the booty (we go fifty fifty with the cops 59). The plan goes awry when the thieves decide to escape without handing over any of the money to the officials, and a massive police hunt is undertaken as much to silence the thieves and prevent them from denouncing the implicated officials as to recover the stolen money (140 41). While the novel makes repeated reference to police techniques of detection and surveillance (fingerprinting, Identikit sketches, wiretapping, etc.), Piglia’s narrator also emphasizes that the most decisive methods employed by the chief police investigator are considerably cruder. Police Commissioner Silva, from Robberies and Larceny, didn’t believe in investigating, he simply went for torture and denunciation as his chosen methods (49). Although the robbery took place seven months before military coup of 1966, the narrator indicates that perceived collaboration between common criminals and the most violent elements of the Peronist resistance had already inspired Silva to form death squads on the Brazilian model and to undertake a campaign of extermination (50) in the suburbs of Buenos Aires.

As Joanna Page observes, Piglia adopts hard-boiled conventions (action, sparse and violent dialogue, and an apparent transparency of representation, 27) in order to investigate phenomena entirely in keeping with his previously cited theory of the novela negra. What is under investigation here, writes Page, is not the motive or identity of the criminal but the complex relations between criminality, capitalist society, and the mass media (28). As Page and all attentive critics of Plata quemada have observed, the novel’s hard-boiled discourse is ultimately considerably less transparent and more complex than it may first appear, and Piglia is clearly interested not only in the reconstruction of a spectacularly violent criminal episode, but also in their potential to denounce, as Adriana Rodríguez Pérsico writes, the illegality of all legal systems (113). In Piglia’s careful reconstruction of the genealogy of the robbery scheme, an interim president of the San Fernando town council, identified as an avid Peronist supporter, elected to represent the wealthy Zona Norte (11) learned the details of the payroll delivery and shared them with his
son, a Public Works inspector with a few shady sidelines: he was a man of influence, someone given to granting favours in the borough, a typical example of a local politician who flirted on the brink of illegal activity. In another situation, he would have been a mafioso (69). Through a cousin who is a tango singer ruined by drug abuse (another classic Argentine hard-boiled profile), the younger Peronist puntero arranges the robbery with the professional thieves.

Along with police corruption, this interface between organized criminality and political power is, of course, one of the most densely worked territories in the hard-boiled tradition from Hammett’s Red Harvest through Taibo’s No habrá final feliz, and into this classical hard-boiled matrix Piglia introduces characteristically postmodern reflections on the limitations of literary representation and on the spectacularization of violence in mass-media culture. In comparison to Piglia’s previous novels, Plata quemada features a far more dynamic and conventionally structured plot, but the absence of explicit metanarrative discourse, as Julio Premat has observed (133), belies the subtle complexity of a narrative mechanism that subverts its own truth-telling authority, returning the reader to contemplation of the most permanent of questions raised in Piglia’s fiction: What does it mean today to tell a story? . . . What is the truth, for whom, and in what context? (Díaz-Quiñones vii, xiii) The novel’s archival structure purports to incorporate police and psychiatric reports, legal dossiers, news chronicles, eyewitness testimony and transcriptions of surveillance tapes, in the service of telling a faithful story of real events, as an implicitly authorial voice insists in the novel’s epilogue. However, the veracity of this documentary referentiality is strongly undermined by the novel’s frequent play with literary intertexts, the most evident involving the novel’s positioning of Emilio Renzi, a character very familiar from Piglia’s previous fiction, as the primary chronicler of events as they unfold during the story’s climax in November 1965. As a clearly fictional introduction in an otherwise avowedly and apparently documentary text, the appearance of Piglia’s alter-ego as a pseudo-chronicler triggers doubt that cannot but corrupt the entire text, alerting the reader to what Premat calls the author’s incompliance of a realist pact (127).28 As in García Márquez’s Crónica de una muerte anunciada, the construction of an elaborate narrative polyphony serves in Plata quemada not to approximate a solidly truthful totality, but rather to call attention to the infinite interaction of micronarratives generated by self-interested subjects. In his fluid reconstruction of violent events, Piglia skillfully shifts narrative perspective between characters, but in so doing he again reveals the imaginary supplementation of documentary reality, and avowals of documentary
fidelity notwithstanding, the novel subtly asserts its own panoptical capability while problematizing it through insistence on the narrative’s complicity with police surveillance and with the morbid spectacularization facilitated by the mass media (in this case, through live television coverage of the bloody police siege).

In both Buenos Aires and Montevideo, *Plata quemada* complies with its documentary pretense by specifying the locations of major incidents and tracing the escape routes of the fugitives. With respect to the hard-boiled mapping practices already discussed, the most interesting of these locales may be the Buenos Aires apartment in which the thieves plan their assault and to which they return immediately afterward. As cover, they pose as affluent ranchers and rent a luxurious apartment in an affluent Barrio Norte neighborhood, and after their identities are discovered, journalists interview merchants who testify as to the criminals’ extravagant consumption of food, drink, and stereo equipment. The stereo installer describes for journalists the most luxurious apartment you ever saw (72). Twice in this paragraph Piglia cites the location of the apartment as Arenales al 3300, an address that in the present of the novel’s publication in 1997 connotes one of the city’s primary temples of neoliberal consumerism, Alto Palermo Shopping. Whether the location is historically accurate or not, this association does not seem insignificant in light of the criminals’ reckless hedonism and their unrestrained appetite for wine, drugs, *pollo al spiedo*, home electronics, and transgressive sex (uncontrolled libido notes the psychiatrist in his diagnosis of Dorda). This mode of hyperconsumption attains its ultimate and nihilistic extreme in the novel’s climactic incineration of the stolen money, an act that places the doomed criminals, as the enraged spectators immediately perceive and as the narrator explains, in total defiance of their society and beyond the logic of the capitalist order. In her previously cited article on the depiction of monosexual and suicidal male worlds in this and other novels of the 1990s, Mary Louise Pratt has suggested that the story Piglia failed to write in 1970 became narratable only after the advent of the neoliberal order, which implied a precipitous breakdown in what she calls the sexual and social contracts (97). I would venture to add that the ethos of Menemist neoliberalism lent a similar narratability to the orgiastic and ultimately nihilistic hyperconsumption practiced by the San Fernando thieves.

**The Margin Approaches the Center**

In *Puerto Apache* (Port Apache, 2002), Juan Martini imagines an equivalent to the den of iniquitous consumption that Piglia locates in 1965 on
Avenida Arenales, but he does so in the context of an urban geography updated to the twenty-first century. I will close this chapter by addressing briefly this return to the novela negra by one of the contributors to the annus mirabilis of 1973. Following the publication of El cerco in 1977, Martini ceased to write in the subgenre despite working as editor of the Serie Novela Negra for Bruguera during the years of his exile in Barcelona (1975–84). Not until the year 2000, in his novel El autor intelectual (The Mastermind), did Martini reactivate certain hard-boiled codes in a narrative centering on the disappearance of a young journalist and conceived, according to Martini, as a reexamination of the urban environment of Buenos Aires in the period of neoliberal globalization. More interesting and fully realized in this respect is Puerto Apache, a novel set primarily in a new squatter settlement in the Reserva Ecológica Costanera Sur, very near the upscale downtown redevelopment project of Puerto Madero on the eastern edge of the city. As in other post-neopoliaca works discussed here, the only investigation in Puerto Apache is that undertaken by the criminal protagonist, here a messenger for drug dealers who narrates his attempts to survive a violent power struggle within the drug dealing organization. Martini’s narrator, nicknamed Rata, resembles less the Chandlerian hard-boiled private eye featured in El agua en los pulmones than the provincial Argentine pícaro of Roberto J. Payró’s El casamiento de Laucha (Laucha’s Wedding, 1906), a parallel reinforced by the resemblance of the protagonists’ nicknames, as first noted by Vicente Battista in his review of Martini’s novel. Rata does comply effectively with the shared picaresque and hard-boiled mandate of traversing urban boundaries and suturing, through the narration of his movements, sharply disparate social environments. As he moves, for example, between the squatter settlement in the Reserva Ecológica and the luxurious new apartments and restaurants of the contiguous Puerto Madero, Rata observes both the extreme and increasing disparity between haves and have-nots, and also the intensified policing of the urban borders that segregate the factions.

As in other novels previously mentioned, drug commerce serves as one of the primary forces binding the urban underworld to elite society. Rata’s association with drug money grants him limited access to exclusive social environments, such as glamorous restaurants owned or patronized by dealers and the Puerto Madero apartment of the dealer’s girlfriend, who was formerly Rata’s girlfriend. Martini’s description of this apartment recalls Piglia’s depiction of the thieves’ refuge on Arenales in Plata quemada, and its significance has been noted by Natalia Jacovkis in a recent article on Martini’s rendering of the neoliberal city:
The picture that Rata paints of Maru’s apartment is an example of the sharp social fragmentation that the neoliberal economic project brought to Argentina. With a language grounded in the *lunfardo* of lower-class Buenos Aires, Rata describes, from the point of view of one of those excluded from the system, the apartment of someone adept in the cultural codes that lend social status in the 90s.

A restaurant in Puerto Madero is described by Martini’s narrator as a neoliberal Argentine paradise, full of shameless bastards, former officials, a few TV producers, guys grown rich at the expense of all of us, cokeheads and multiple species and varieties of freeloaders (97). As Jacovkis notes, Puerto Madero as an enterprise symbolizes, like few other spaces, the development policies of the Menem era, and Rata’s transgression of this and other spaces of privilege allow him to describe the cultural codes prescribing marks of distinction through consumption and aesthetics. The *novela negra*’s analysis of occult structures of power are, of course, inseparable from its mapping of the city, and in this respect the spaces associated with the prime instigator in the novel’s criminal power struggle are equally worthy of mention.

*Puerto Apache*’s most sinister character is Walter Monti, a provincial politician who decides to stop buying large quantities of drugs through Rata’s boss in order to become a distributor himself. Rata first confronts Monti in a floating casino anchored at Dársena Sur, and later learns the hidden story of the coup from Monti’s secretary in a meeting staged in a rooftop garden atop the stately Recoleta hotel where Monti resides. Monti is not present in the hotel during this meeting since he has traveled abroad to meet with other narcotraffickers, and his absence reinforces his association with deracinated spaces and the transnational dimension of the new organized criminality. Although he no longer holds office, Monti is repeatedly characterized as a politician. His secretary, who speaks the neoliberal language of free-market economics, strikes Rata as someone who could just as easily be employed as a partisan provocateur (piquetero trucho, 169) a clear reference to the murky protest politics that returned the Peronists to power following the crisis of 2001. (*Puerto Apache* is set in October 2001, and it was published in August 2002.) El Negro Sosa, a character responsible for organizing a parallel coup against the leaders of Puerto Apache in order to consolidate a new criminal network there, is also identified as a former piquetero expelled from the movement for unspecified reasons (Perro Santillán ran him out of Jujuy 70). In general, Martini situates his criminal characters on the opaque margins of political power, where violence decides conflicts and where
political connections order criminal hierarchies (he made the big money with the politicians, 27). As Jakovkis notes, the interactions of criminal and political organizations recalls cultural codes recognizable from the Menem administration, plagued by accusations of corruption, grants of impunity for perpetrators of the Dirty War, and Mafia scandals, such as the murder of journalist José Luis Cabezas—an incident Martini emphasized in his previous novel.

Beyond the apartments, hotels, and restaurants of the Buenos Aires elite, Martini paints a grim portrait of a fraying urban society on the verge of catastrophic collapse, and his descriptions recall those of Fadanelli and Mendoza. Wandering through the city center, Rata remarks on the filth and misery he encounters on Lavalle and elsewhere. The street is full of Koreans and Kosovars, whores, dodgy characters, dealers and wasted kids. The street is full of bags of garbage, food scraps, cans, grime (71). Rata also refers repeatedly to wealth obtained by a small minority at the nation’s expense (a handful of nobodies who’ve robbed us blind, 100), and in conversation with a friend, he considers the fate of the city and the country in light of current trends. Rata asks Toti whether he thinks Puerto Madero will end up like Recoleta, full of indigents, thieves, and prostitutes.

Yes, he says. It’s going to end up like that. Everything in this country is going to end up like that. Or worse.

And what are the rich people going to do?

What they always do. They’ll leave. Those who’ve already got it made will go to Miami. And those who still have bills to collect, dirty business, swindles in the works, they’ll go to gated communities, private cities, walled palaces with armies of security guards surrounding the walls, guarding their houses, their cars, their schools, their golf courses... When they’re done stealing, when there’s nothing left, absolutely nothing, then they’ll leave too. And there’ll be no one left in the gated communities, the inviolable cities, the walled palaces except the hairdressers, the personal trainers and the dealers. Then everywhere will be full of beggars, thieves, hookers and queens. (121 22)

In its darkest reaches, Martini’s metropolis approaches the extremes of abjection already glimpsed in Mendoza’s Bogota. Along with narcotrafficking, Puerto Apache depicts organized networks of beggars and prostitutes who also traverse the city, and one of their more perverse operations involves a form of sex tourism in which very young prostitutes lure older men into the Recoleta cemetery for trysts for on the tombs of Sarmiento, Rosas and
Eva Perón. Imagine, muses Toti. Sex in the classiest necropolis in the country (129). Such a business speaks eloquently of the fate of nationalist ideals in a hedonistic neoliberal economy of commodified pleasures.

While Puerto Apache does allow the reader to imagine the possibility of escape for characters such as Rata and Toti, the novel’s overall vision is of a city ruled violently by integrated political and criminal networks. As one thug remarks in explaining his decision to betray his old boss and go to work for Monti, What’s happening is that nowadays politics is everywhere, so if you don’t want to be left out you’ve got to get involved in politics (144). In classic hard-boiled fashion, certain limited acts of just retribution are overshadowed by a clinging pall of corruption, epitomized by the marriage of Rata’s beloved Maru to the vile Monti. In the final pages of the novel, the secretary’s revelation to Rata of the hidden truth of the struggle in which he has been unwittingly involved only causes him to question the reliability and the value of any such truth under the circumstances. That’s if truth exists, observes Rata sceptically. And if it doesn’t exist, you’ve got to realize that the secret of the story is what no one really wants to discover (172). In Martini’s hard-boiled neoliberal Buenos Aires, police guard the sanctuaries of the wealth while the new abject urban subjects of the Fourth World (cartoneros, street kids, drug addicts, illegal immigrants, transvestite prostitutes) struggle for survival in a social realm largely abandoned by the state and governed by other forces. In the words of Marcelo Cohen, Rata succeeds in finding a crack through which to escape the crime that clouds all his landscapes (15), but Martini projects little optimism with regard to the transformation of the urban landscape itself.

**Resurgence of Enigma?**

In Feinmann’s previously quoted 1991 essay on the relationship between the police state and the novela negra, he suggested that if at some future time an Argentine novelist writes a novel in which a policeman labored honestly in pursuit of justice, Argentina would have overcome much more than a literary impossibility (Estado policial 149). While this may not yet have come to pass, I will mention in closing an apparent resurgence of the classical problem novel, a variant of crime fiction that appeared nearly obsolete elsewhere in Latin America but whose tradition in Argentina is, as I have indicated, exceptionally strong. Among a handful of younger Argentine novelists who have contested the ascendency of the novela negra in the past decade, Pablo de Santis stands out as
the author of a series of novels that seemed to acknowledge the residual or anachronistic nature of the problem-novel formula by setting their mysteries in spaces emblematic of national decadence. De Santis’s La traducción (Translation, 1998) identifies itself strongly with the literary tradition of the Sur group by reworking, as I have argued elsewhere, Bioy Casares and Silvina Ocampo’s Los que aman, odian. La traducción is set in a half-built seaside resort hotel whose suspended construction unmistakably connotes economic stagnation, while De Santis’s Filosofía y letras (Philosophy and Letters, also from 1998) imagines an investigation in the ruinous archives of a crumbling building belonging to the Universidad de Buenos Aires. El teatro de la memoria (The Theater of Memory, 2000), incorporating elements of science fiction, also features a prominent element of documentary investigation, this time in the archive of a failing institute for neurological research. De Santis’s 2007 novel El enigma de París suggests an even sharper return to the origins of the genre, abandoning contemporary Argentina altogether in favor of the Paris of the 1889, where he convokes the world’s twelve greatest detectives to investigate a string of murders during the Universal Exposition.

While the Argentine novela negra has continued to thrive in such works as Guillermo Orsi’s Sueños de perro (Dog Dreams, 2004) as a medium for reflection on local urban realities, the awarding of a major publisher’s prize, the Premio Iberoamericano Planeta-Casa América de Narrativa, to El enigma de París may bode well for the prospects of a revival of the classical detective novel in Argentina, especially in conjunction with the considerable success of Guillermo Martínez’s Crímenes imperceptibles (Imperceptible Crimes, Premio Planeta Argentina 2003). Republished in Barcelona as Los crímenes de Oxford in 2004, Martínez’s novel has already appeared in translation in the United States and Great Britain as The Oxford Murders, and an English-language film adaptation directed by Álex de la Iglesia is released in 2008. While the narrator of Crímenes imperceptibles is an Argentine graduate student in mathematics, the setting of the murder mystery at Oxford University and the novel’s play with mathematical logic and Pythagorean signs again gestures heavily toward the Anglophile Sur tradition. Although Crímenes seems less heavily indebted to Borges than Martínez’s first novel, Acerca de Roderer (Regarding Roderer, 1992), it may be read, as Sergio Colautti has noted, as a rewriting of La muerte y la brújula, a story already rewritten in hard-boiled mode by Feinmann in Últimos días de la víctima. Like De Santis’s Parisian novel, which topped best-seller lists in Buenos Aires, Crímenes stands to benefit from the same blend of intellectual cosmopolitanism
and transnational genre mastery that allowed El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan to become the first of Borges’s stories to circulate in English translation when it appeared as The Garden of Forking Paths in the August 1948 issue of Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine.
Whereas the most specialized critics of Argentine detective fiction, including Jorge B. Rivera, Jorge Lafforgue, and Néstor Ponce, agree on the dating of their national tradition to 1877, no such agreement exists between Spanish critics. As indicated in Chapter 1, Patricia Hart and Ricardo Landeira disagree with José F. Colmeiro and Joan Ramon Resina in their characterization of nineteenth century texts such as Alarcón’s *El clavo* (*The Nail*), and no consensus has been established with regard to the existence, let alone the chronology, of a distinctively Spanish model of detective or crime fiction. As elsewhere, novelists and critics also dispute the exact definition of terms such as *novela negra*, with some, such as José R. Valles Calatrava, arguing for alternate terms, such as *novela criminal*. Despite the cultural implantation of the detective model at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as also discussed in Chapter 1, and the well-documented existence of a tradition of detective fiction written in Spain at least since the beginning of the twentieth century, obstacles to the assimilation and nationalization of the genre have been so formidable as to effectively prohibit, in Colmeiro’s estimation, non-ironic production in the classical ratiocinative mode. In Spain, writes Colmeiro, “What has almost never been produced is an authentic problem novel with serious literary aspirations and founded on rigorous scientific, positivist and rationalist principles, as was the intention of the classical detective novel (*La novela* 260). Recalling observations by Spanish American critics regarding their own national traditions, Colmeiro attributes Spain’s lack of a serious or authentic ratiocinative detective novel to the country’s late attainment of the historical conditions that subtended the development of the classical form in England, France, and the United States: a boom in positivism and scientificism in the intellectual order and the
ascendancy of the bourgeoisie in the economic order, giving rise to an advanced capitalist society, with the consequent installment and stabilization of a strong bourgeois rule of law in the legal-social order (La novela 261). In this view, by the time Spain began to attain the premises of the classical detective novel (the rule of law, a bourgeois legal concept of crime, a democratic system, confidence in the legal process, support for the police, La novela 262), the form itself had lost currency in international literary culture and thrived more as a denatured ingredient of postmodernist pastiche than as an ideologically earnest enterprise.

Some of the earliest Spanish detective novels, such as Joaquín Belda’s ¿Quién disparó? Husmeos y pesquisas de Gapy Bermúdez (Who Fired? Snoopings and Investigations of Gapy Bermúdez, 1909), Pardo Bazán’s La gota de sangre (The Drop of Blood, often dated 1911, although probably published in some form during the 1890s according to Renée Craig-Odders), and José Francés’s El misterio del Kursaal (The Kursaal Mystery, 1916), were published and set in Madrid, but from the beginning of the century popular Barcelona publishers such as Maucci, Sopena, F. Granada, and Gallach began to establish their hegemony in this literary market by issuing translations of authentic and apocryphal Sherlock Holmes novels and U.S. mystery-adventure pulps, such as the Nick Carter series, as already detailed in Chapter 1. During the first decade of the twentieth century, Sopena introduced Spain’s first series specializing in English detective fiction, La Novela Moderna and Holmes stories appeared in Catalan as well as Castilian (Vázquez de Parga, La novela policiaca 25, 26, 245–46). Like Colmeiro, Resina associates the lack of a consolidated and sustained detective novel tradition in Spain with the failure of the national bourgeoisie to attain political hegemony and to transform social ideology, but he observes that in the pre Civil War era it was Catalunya that came closest of all Spanish regions to achieving a modern social order in which an ascendant bourgeoisie would rationalize relations of production and preside over the emergence of an autonomous civil society (El cadáver 29). For this reason, Resina argues, Catalunya was the first part of Spain in which the detective novel took hold as something other than an exotic object of parody:

[It is in Catalunya that what may be considered an autochthonous detective novel was first configured . . . it is also there, in the heart of a culture not organized by public power, that the genre reappears following the lapse of the Civil War and the post-war period, and where the publishing industry and the reading public are conditioned in preparation for the detective novel boom of the 1980s. (El cadáver 31)
While Resina considers such early parodic exercises as Cèsar August Jordana’s *La collar de la Núria* (Nuria’s Necklace, 1927) and Mercè Rodoreda’s *Crim* (Crime, 1936) as confirmation of the inviability of the classical ratiocinative formula even in Spain’s leading industrial metropolis during this period, he follows Vázquez de Parga in acknowledging the historical significance of three contemporary novels by Julian Amich Bert, who published under the pseudonym E. C. Delmar. By Vázquez de Parga’s reckoning, Bert was one of Spain’s first three specialized detective writers, and his detective character, Barcelona police inspector Venancio Villabaja, was the first to appear in more than one novel, featuring in *El secreto del contador del gas* (The Secret of the Gas Meter, 1932), *Piojos grises* (Grey Lice, 1936), and *La tórtola de la puñalada* (Stab of the Turtledove, 1937).

The scarcity of locally set Spanish detective fiction produced during the first decades of Franquismo lends credence to arguments by Colmeiro, Resina, and many other critics that the detective genre, especially in its classical ratiocinative form, depends for its vitality on such extraliterary factors as the rule of law and public faith in the police, and a modern social order governed by an entrepreneurial bourgeoisie and comprising a comfortable and educated middle class. However, while translations and pseudotranslations of mystery-adventure fiction by Molino, Clíper, Bruguera, and other popular publishing houses far outnumbered locally produced and set investigative mystery novels during the 1940s and ’50s, Vázquez de Parga did unearth a number of detective novels set in Barcelona or featuring Barcelona-based detectives and published during the postwar period. These include Amando Osorio and Julio Zarraluqui’s *El secreto del Packard negro* (The Secret of the Black Packard, 1940), five novels by César de Montserrat featuring the Spanish Sherlock Holmes Arístides Crisol (1940–41), and at least two of the many titles published by José Mallorquí Figuerola in the *Biblioteca Oro* series under the pseudonym Juan Montero: *El ídolo azteca* (The Aztec Idol, 1942) and *El misterio del hermano fantasma* (The Mystery of the Ghost Brother, 1943) (Vázquez de Parga *La novela policiaca* 106, 109; Colmeiro 137). In addition to two novels by Pedro Guirao, Vázquez de Parga also recalls five stories published by Juan Enrich in 1952, centering on the character of a Barcelona police chief, and two novels by Raúl Sango and Ramón Coderch *13831 capicúa de la discordia* (13831, Palindrome of Discord, 1955) and *El cadáver da un paseo* (The Cadaver Takes a Walk, 1956) both also set in Barcelona (*La novela policiaca* 158, 174). According to Craig-Odders, the action of J. Lartsinim’s *Sencillamente una cinta de máquina* (Simply a Machine Tape, 1952), also
transpired in Barcelona, though its protagonist was a Dutch psychoanalyst-amateur detective (The Detective Novel 14).

In contrast with Spanish America, where multiple-novel, single-protagonist detective series are virtually unknown until the 1970s, Spanish detective series thus date back considerably further. By Resina’s account, the first detective series written and published in Catalan consisted of three short novels published by Rafael Tasis i Marca in 1955, 1956, and 1960. These featured a journalist named Francesc Caldes and a police inspector named Vilagut, whose verisimilitude as a detective hero depends, according to Resina, on the setting of the novels in the Republican Barcelona of the 1930s rather than in the time of their writing during Franquismo (Resina El cadáver 46–47). Resina singles out the last of these three novels, Un crim al Paralelo (A Crime on Avenida Paralelo), written in Paris in 1944, as initiating the literary construction of Barcelona’s Barrio Chino, also called Drassanes, which later became a prominent locale in the novela negra of the 1970s and ’80s (El cadáver 158). In this context, Pedro Guirao’s publication of El crimen del hotel Colón (The Crime at the Colón Hotel, 1945) and Sola frente a la policía (Alone Against the Police, 1946), featuring a private detective agency located on Barcelona’s Rambla de las Flores, constitutes an especially notable but not altogether isolated precedent for the Barcelona boom of the 1970s and ’80s.

As in Argentina, kiosk collections and film noir provided the primary vehicles for the introduction into Spain of hard-boiled detective narrative, and following the first appearance of a Dashiell Hammett novel in translation (The Maltese Falcon as El halcón del Rey de España in 1933, according to Colmeiro), hard-boiled formulas were integrated into the repertoire of styles practiced by pulp professionals, such as López Hipkiss and Mallorquí Figuerola. In the history of this hard-boiled turn, Manuel de Pedrolo is recognized as a founder of the novela negra not only in Catalunya but in all of Spain, having served both as director of La Cua de Palla and as pioneer of the transposition of the hard-boiled style to local environments. Although Pedrolo resisted assimilation into any Spanish national literary tradition, preferring to identify himself with the institution of Catalan letters (Hart 51), his impact on the general development of the novela negra in Spain is profound, as attested by comments such as those by Andreu Martín, cited in Chapter 1. While Pedrolo himself hesitated to classify all of the titles cited in Chapter 1 as belonging strictly to the novela negra subgenre, I agree with Resina’s designation of Pedrolo’s novels of the 1950s as the first set and written in Spain in the U.S. hard-boiled style. Despite my primary focus on Castilian-language narrative, the situation of
Pedrolo’s novels at the origin of the very strong tradition of hard-boiled crime writing in Barcelona merits some attention here.

**First Blood**

*Es vessa una sang fàcil* (Cheap Blood), dated by Pedrolo in 1952, was published the following year and enjoyed several subsequent editions during the 1960s and ’70s, although the Castilian translation *Sangre a bajo precio* from which I will cite here appeared only in 1988 as a consequence of the *novela negra* boom. In its sparse and taut plot, *Es vessa* resembles the pursuit narratives of Tizziani and Piglia discussed in Chapter 4, though Pedrolo’s narrative structure is somewhat more elaborate than Tizziani’s and a good deal less than Piglia’s. Making reference only once, in the novel’s first sentence, to newspaper chronicles as the possible source of his knowledge of events (9), Pedrolo’s extradiegetic narrator recounts the story of a gang of bank robbers who turn against one another when the protagonist, Joan Roig, disappears with the stolen money he was charged with transporting to an appointed rendezvous following the robbery.

*Es vessa* then centers on Roig’s attempt to evade his accomplices and flee to the French border, while the gang’s leader, Nero, pursues him in quasidetectivesque fashion. Although the gang meets to prepare the robbery at Nero’s villa in the tranquil western residential zone of Putxet, Roig and his girlfriend reside in the heart of the city on the Calle del Carmen in the central working-class neighborhood of the Raval, and there Pedrolo stages one of the novel’s most violent sequences. Surprising Roig’s girlfriend, Nero and another thief attempt to force her to reveal his whereabouts by stripping and viciously beating her before Nero relents and insists on treating her wounds. This key scene, drawn out over seventeen pages and constituting more than a tenth of the novel, thus initiates the Spanish *novela negra* with a stiff dose of hard-boiled porno-violence, its leering and sadistic misogyny only feebly attenuated by Pedrolo’s intermission of italicized passages revealing the mental process by which the victim distances herself from awareness of the excruciating corporal punishment. Throughout the novel, Pedrolo intercalates similar passages of interior monologue focalizing other characters as a means of carving small pockets of interiority into an otherwise flat and characteristically hard-boiled discourse emphasizing nervous dialogue and terse narration of dynamic action.

Although Nero’s pursuit of Roig leads out of Barcelona and toward the French border, Pedrolo’s interest in the hard-boiled vocation of urban mapping is evident in *Es vessa* and becomes more pronounced in his later
novels. Like Tizziani’s Cairo, the fugitive who surveys and studies the city that he knows to be his surest refuge, Pedrolo’s criminals are creatures of the metropolis and know that their survival depends on their knowledge of it. When confronted by the police, one of the bank robbers reflects in another of the intercalated passages: *Indispensable for people in our line of work to familiarize ourselves with the terrain. . . . That said, there’s one place we must know better than any other: the one we’re at every day. This house, for example, and its surroundings. Every street, every building, every doorway and every fence. . . . Any detail could be useful to us* (italics in original, 118–19). This passage distills the novela negra’s commitment to the detailed observation of urban environment, although with motives clearly distant from those of the classical detective novel’s romance of detail in civilization, as defined by Chesterton. With the police nearly absent from Pedrolo’s narrative, the city is inspected, not by a detective but rather by criminals whose perceptions are honed by fear. Theories of the inviability of detective paradigm under dictatorship are reinforced not only by the marginal role accorded the police in Pedrolo’s pursuit drama but also by his backdating of fictional events to June 1935 through inclusion of newspaper headlines early in the narrative (15–16).

Pedrolo followed *Es vessa* with *L’inspector fa tard* (*El inspector llega tarde*, or The Inspector Arrives Late), another novel centering on a robbery and also written in 1952, though not published until 1960. More interesting in the context of the present study is Pedrolo’s *Joc Brut* (Foul Play), a novel that appeared in Catalan in 1965 and in Castilian translation in 1972 as *Juego sucio*, before being adapted into a film directed by Juan Antonio Bardem in 1975 (*El poder del deseo*). Considered by Resina as one of the best crime novels written in Spain (*El cadáver* 49), *Joc Brut* depends for much of its effect on the evocation of a distinctively urban experience and the social geography of 1960s-era Barcelona. In the course of the novel, the narrator, Xavier Rius, recounts the story of his self-destructive passion for a deceitful and ambitious woman who calls herself Juna, and the novel begins with the couple’s chance meeting at a bus stop on the Avenida Diagonal, Barcelona’s broadest and straightest transurban axis. Rius reflects on the accidental and therefore precarious nature of their subsequent relationship when he later describes himself and Juna as two passers-by whom chance has united one moment and will separate the next (36). Since the narrator is humbly employed as a market researcher and lives on the city’s ragged and remote northwestern periphery, in Horta, their courtship takes place in public spaces close to the Diagonal and in the western district of Les Corts, where Juna lives with a man she says is her uncle. Rius’s pursuit of Juna is linked to the crossing
and claiming of urban space from their first conversation, which takes place on a crosstown bus, and subsequent encounters in streets, stations, plazas, and parks (We saw each other. Each day in a different place: on the street, in a café, on the Metro, 19).

The relation between socioeconomic position, erotic life, and urban space is highlighted during Juna’s only visit to the kitchenless two-room apartment that Rius shares with his mother and that they have struggled to afford. Juna agrees to meet Rius at the apartment in Horta while his mother is at work, but after arriving and undressing, she rebuffs Rius, indicating that she feels too dismayed by the misery of the apartment to consummate their relationship as planned. A decisive moment occurs, as Juna obliges Rius to look at the room through her unsatisfied eyes:

For a few moments we both examined it. It wasn’t a bedroom, but rather a dining room. There was a table at the other end. The walls had never been painted, we could still see the blots of color left by the painter who used to have his studio here, the dampness stains . . . As if unintentionally, she murmured:

It’s sordid.
It’s all I’ve got, I replied.
She waved her hand over her face and pushed back the unruly hair that had fallen on her forehead.
I couldn’t live in a place like this. I couldn’t, Xavier . . .
It’s all I’ve got, I repeated. (43 44)

This rejection is eventually revealed as part of an elaborate campaign of deception intended to seduce the narrator and to manipulate him into killing the supposed uncle, from whom Juna claims she will inherit enough money to enable them to live decently and comfortably. Though calculating and dishonest in her relations with Rius, Juna is also sincere in her disdain for the cramped and dingy space of the hard-earned apartment located in a remote district populated by postwar immigrants to the city, a population to which both characters belong. Her sexual ban symbolizes her refusal, as explained to the narrator, to toil in decent poverty beside a husband who struggles to maintain his tenuous place on the margin of urban society.

In Joc Brut, the narrator descends into criminality when he succumbs to the allure of the conniving and ambitious femme fatale, who defies the regime of labor, domesticity, and sexual reproduction. What exactly are you proposing? she protests. To lock me in the kitchen, load me down with children, look at me once in a while thinking, boy, how she’s changed!? (38). In order, he believes, to win the right to marry Juna,
Rius agrees to accelerate her inheritance, and in order to do so, he must transgress the law and trespass in the domestic space of a superior class. Rius creeps into a house in Les Corts and shoots the man Juna identified as her uncle, and although Rius easily escapes and the crime is reported as an apparent suicide, Juna disappears without reestablishing contact and the narrator spends the later chapters of the novel attempting to locate her. Following months of urban tracking, Rius finally locates Juna in Badalona, a newly developing suburb beyond Barcelona’s northern geographical boundary of the Besos River. Though Badalona is inhabited, like Horta, by recent immigrants from other regions of Spain, new construction is plentiful, and Juna has established herself there in a comfortable house bought with the inheritance, though it turned out to be less than anticipated. In the novel’s climactic confrontation, the narrator attacks the treacherous Juna in an interior space that contrasts sharply with that of his own apartment: he dragged her toward the back, toward a new and comfortable dining area with a large couch perched on top of a white fur rug (110). The place Juna has claimed for herself at the expense of others symbolizes the desiderata of the consumerist ethos that penetrated Spanish culture during the 1960s: comfort, luxury, privacy, and leisure.

In this and his next *novela negra*, Pedrolo’s protagonists are explicitly critical of Spanish assimilation of the ideology of consumer capitalism. In *Joc Brut*, Rius travels the city interviewing housewives in working class neighborhoods as to their purchasing preferences, and he identifies the agency founded by his boss as one of the few yet devoted to the American science of market research. As Rius travels door-to-door testing consumer opinion in order to research the market; he describes his activity as a part of a grotesque game he must play in order to survive (34). He later mentions that his boss prospers without being obliged to pay benefits to workers who are still unregulated due to the novelty of the business: He didn’t have us insured, we didn’t have any benefits, since he preferred to think of us as freelancers working practically on commission; in sum, a still unregulated job. (99) Rius also describes his mother’s arrival in Barcelona as a destitute war widow and her tireless efforts to procure decent living conditions and opportunities for her son.3 She worked for years as a washerwoman to save enough to build a house, only to have her savings stolen by an unscrupulous developer who took payment for a house he never built and who was punished with only a few years in jail (18).

Juna’s intransigent demands force Rius to acknowledge the reality of his miserable living conditions and dim prospects for advancement, and as he prepares to kill for her, he recognizes within himself an individual at odds with society:
[T]he individual who in spite of all the conditioning he’s been subjected to doesn’t feel at ease in the type of society he happens to live in, who’s intelligent enough to observe that he’s fallen into a trap prepared before he was even born and in which he’s going to die, a trap that condemns him to misery, to the routine, and that limits his horizons and turns him into a being burdened with debts and possessing no rights. (56–57)

Just as Rius’s market research enriches the agency’s owner and the agency’s corporate clients with scarce benefit to him, Rius realizes that he’s been duped into doing someone else’s murderous dirty work (97). After police intervene and arrest Rius at the novel’s end to stop him from killing Juna, Rius learns that she was in fact the wife of the man he murdered, and he derives scant consolation from learning that the inheritance was diminished by the murdered husband’s luckless stock market speculation. Pedrolo places notable emphasis not only on questions of work and unearned profit, but also on the importance of aesthetics in the new ideological regime of consumer capitalism. Beauty exerts a considerable power throughout the course of the novel, as it is Juna’s beautiful physique and sexual allure that captivates Rius on the first page of the novel and renders him pliable to her destructive designs.

In conjunction with Rius’s description of the tedious nature of his work and his poor prospects for advancement, repeated references to Juna’s overpowering physical beauty provide the primary explanation for his criminal turn. Aesthetics are also a central concern of the scientific marketing that Barcelona manufacturers are attempting to adopt, as Rius remarks in the novel’s opening pages, when he is sent to survey reactions to the design of detergent packages. It seemed silly, but it wasn’t: experience had shown us repeatedly that customers often buy because they’re attracted by appearance when there are no marked differences between products. The dimensions, the lines, certain colors or drawings or a name often make the difference between commercial success and failure (12). In light of subsequent events, the passage generates unmistakable echoes of Rius’s own fascination with the form of Juna’s body and even with her unusual name, which turns out to be false, in keeping with the novela negra’s characteristic preoccupation with gaudy surfaces and ugly interiors.

In addition to the aspects already described, Joc Brut declares its genre affiliation in its presentation of a plot rather strongly reminiscent of James M. Cain’s 1936 Double Indemnity, very widely known through the classic film noir adaptation of 1944. One remarkable contrast between Pedrolo’s 1965 novel and the Spanish American novela negra studied in previous chapters, however, is its final representation of the police as
intelligent and capable. Suggesting a strong parallel with Spanish America, Patricia Hart stated that police corruption is probably the single most important [theme] in all of Spanish detective fiction (24), but here Pedrolo ends the novel with an opportune intervention by police who are revealed to have been shrewdly watching the narrator even as he was watching Juna. The police emerge in the novel’s final explicatory chapter as the unseen seers, the agents of super-surveillance, and as the administrators of justice, preventing Rius from killing Juna and detaining her for the crime they suspected all along. Hart suggests that in Joc Brut the role of the police as oppressors lurks just below the surface (56), but while Pedrolo mentions that they were able manipulate the press into disseminating misinformation useful to their investigation, the novel does dispute the justice of the narrator’s fate. The novel ends tidily with his trip back into the city for incarceration, and while one policeman strikes the narrator in response to his perceived insolence, the police also provide the duped protagonist with more truths about Juna, including her real name, and it is understood that she will also face deserved punishment as the instigator of the murder. Thus, although Joc Brut, like Es vessa, takes the perspective of a criminal protagonist, the narrative on the whole proves respectful toward rational legal authority while linking criminal violence to the frustrations and perverse desires aggravated by the introduction of a consumer capitalist ethos in a sharply stratified urban society.

**Industrial Espionage**

Pedrolo’s criticism of capitalist culture in the context of Spain’s industrial boom of the 1960s is consolidated in his 1968 Mossegar-se la cua (Biting One’s Own Tail), the last of his novels that I will discuss. Published in Castilian in 1975 as Morderse la cola, this narrative centers directly on an incident of corporate crime, as the head of a Barcelona electronics manufacturing firm organizes the kidnapping of an engineer from a rival firm in order to prevent the competitor from bringing a new technology to market first. In Mossegar-se Pedrolo introduces for the first time in his fiction a private detective as protagonist and narrator, but since the state prohibits any involvement by licensed private detectives in criminal matters, most of this detective’s work consists of running background checks on prospective employees for Barcelona corporations. The corporate manager who initiates the novel’s intrigue by hiring the protagonist to investigate the burial of an unknown body under his name eventually emerges as the culprit responsible for related crimes, including the kidnapping of the engineer and the subsequent killing of a woman who had
worked for the manager as an industrial spy and who had organized the kidnapping for him. In contrast to the manager, who is condemned as a ruthless hypocrite, the underlings who carry out the kidnapping are treated by the narrative as less guilty, since they are motivated by the desire to overcome socioeconomic disadvantage. The least malicious of the three kidnappers is a poor medical student who agrees to take part in the kidnapping only in order to pay his tuition, and who voluntarily returns his part of the ransom when the kidnapped engineer dies unexpectedly of an apoplexy. The detective interrogates the student, who relates his crime to the frustration of his noble ambitions by an unjust system: a man has a right to be allowed to be what he wants. Even if he’s poor (110). After taping his confession, the detective releases him and orders him to finish his studies, with the understanding that by practicing medicine he will redeem himself through social service. The detective admits that he has skirted the law, but considers the student a victim who, if he obtained his medical certificate, as he undoubtedly would, would return good for bad to the society that had corralled him with unthinking cruelty because he was poor (147).

Pedrolo ascribes a similar motivation to the character of Berta Llonc, the industrial spy who, in collaboration with her lover and the medical student, executed the kidnapping that allowed her secret employer to preempt a rival firm in obtaining a patent. Toward the end of the novel, the detective locates and reviews a report summarizing Llonc’s ascent from very low social origins to the position of industrial spy: born illegitimate, raised in the Raval and impregnated while still a teenager by her mother’s boyfriend, Llonc worked overtime in a factory while studying business at night. With enormous effort she obtained the lucrative, though duplicitous, position that allowed her to live in an expensive neighborhood in Putget-Farró and pay to educate her daughter and half-brothers. Specific topographical references map this trajectory of social mobility onto the social geography of Barcelona, and the detective remarks on the great difficulty of Llonc’s achievement: she’s done well for herself. It’s a long way from the cramped rooms of Calle Reina Amalia to the apartments of Calle Padua (141). Though not quite so disadvantageous, the origins of Llonc’s lover are also figured in terms of social geography when the detective visits his home in Horta, where the protagonist of Es vessa also lived. Having not visited Horta in a number of years, the detective remarks on its precipitous transformation:

[N]ow a union group was putting up a swarm of buildings, beyond which I could make out a few trees and some gardens that looked due for a visit
from the excavator. I felt a strange sensation as I moved through this half-
rustic, half-urban landscape that had lost the beauties of nature as it took
on an artificial aspect characteristic of the vanguard of what we call civi-
лизation. (89)

As in the previous novel, Horta represents an unstable urban periphery
transformed by immigration, and Pedrolo provides another glimpse of
this periphery when he situates the kidnapper’s hideout in a working-class
neighborhood of Sant Andreu, where Galician and Andalusian accents
predominate: [T]his brand-new neighborhood, urbanized only on
paper, full of uneven streets and potholes, neither countryside nor city,
but rather a suburb that had lost its old personality without yet acquir-
ing the one it desired (13 14).

The house rented by the kidnappers in Sant Andreu provides the cen-
ter of criminal action in Mossegar-se, but a second and equally interesting
pole is established when the Llonc’s boss, the corporate manager, opts to
kill her in order to prevent the story of the kidnapping from coming to
light. The manager strangles Llonc and dumps her body in the outer east-
ern zone of the city, in a brushy area located behind the Palacio of
Pedralbes (141), a building that served as a summer residence for
Francisco Franco until his death in 1975, although this is not mentioned
in the novel. Immediately following the establishment of this location in
the narrative, the detective bursts into the corporate manager’s vast office
to confront him with knowledge of his crimes. The staging of this scene
of accusation and condemnation echoes countless others in the novela
negra canon, as the outraged detective refuses further payment from his
former client and denounces him for taking advantage of Llonc before
killing her: she was a girl without many scruples who could be very use-
ful to you: easily bought, intelligent. . . . A girl with two small brothers
and an illegitimate daughter who fought desperately to escape her misery
(143). The detective identifies himself directly with the murdered woman
when he admits to sharing her resentment of their common patron, the
natural antipathy we feel toward those who use us, those who exploit our
needs or our weaknesses (144). The detective continues for several pages
in this high-sounding manner, denouncing the manager for resorting to
corruption and violence in the pursuit of superfluous profit and for arro-
gating a prestige that your underpaid and anonymous slaves earn for
you, a prestige that you raise on top of the ruins of personal dignity, on
top of everything that’s noble in human kind (146). Even taking into
account the relaxation of Spanish censorship in 1966, this scene, con-
cluding with the manager’s narratively justified suicide, stands as a
notably unrestrained denunciation of the illiberal, authoritarian capitalist society and ethics promoted by Franco.

In comparison with many of his predecessors in the hard-boiled canon, Pedrolo’s private detective is unusually peaceful, and his novels generally contain more tracking and investigation than physical struggle or spectacular violence. In other respects, however, Pedrolo’s novels recuperate some of the fundamental concerns of hard-boiled urban fiction, and his detective’s specialization in verifying identity and moral character reflects the permanent urban problem of knowledge of others in a multitude. The detective’s practice may also be said to reflect the contradictions of Franquismo, as he is frequently contracted to evaluate the moral character of job applicants in a society where anachronistic social stigma, such as those borne by Berta Llonc, might negate an individual’s productive potential. The manager’s decision to employ Llonc in an illicit capacity despite a negative report on her moral character confirms not only his hypocrisy (140) but also, given Llonc’s evident usefulness, the irrelevance of such moral qualms to the logic of capital. In the novels discussed here, Pedrolo clearly incorporates a good deal of his personal experience as a sometime medical student, a market researcher, and a private detective, but perhaps equally relevant to the interpretation of these novels is an ideological continuity with Pedrolo’s youthful career as a militant in the anarchist Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores, a soldier in the Republican army and a prisoner in Franco’s postwar concentration camps. Although Castilian-language writing eclipsed Catalan in the novela negra boom of subsequent decades, the bitter anticapitalist critique articulated by the mature Pedrolo in these and other novels institutes the novela negra in Spain as an instrument of opposition to the violence of capital.4

In an article that examines a different selection of Pedrolo’s crime novels than the one I have made here, Jose F. Colmeiro observes Pedrolo’s tendency to focus on ordinary people who live miserably with few prospects for improvement until they are drawn into crime through unusual circumstances. According to Colmeiro, Pedrolo’s narrative focuses on the human being and his tragedy, emphasizing the overwhelming social and psychological motivations which have led him to transgress society’s rules and which will ultimately determine the outcome of the conflict (Stretching the Limits 64). In Pedrolo’s representation, Colmeiro concludes, the real cause of criminal activity is the social system against which alienated individuals rebel (65). I would add that this view of crime is entirely consistent with the classical anarchist view of crime in capitalist society, and that Pedrolo’s dissident ethics
become increasingly explicit from his earliest tale of treachery among politically undefined bank-robbers through the introduction in Algú que no hi havia de ser (Someone Who Shouldn’t Have Been There, 1972) of another bank-robber following loosely in the Spanish tradition of anarchist outlaws, such as Buenaventura Durruti, who stole to finance revolution. As Colmeiro observes, the protagonist of Algú is an idealist who wants to help the unjustly persecuted and who believes in the possibility of creating a more just society where compassion will prevail over greed, and so donates stolen money to fund medical research (Stretching 65). The protagonist’s employment history again parallels Pedrolo’s, as he is said to have worked translating detective novels into Catalan before turning to crime, providing a particularly acute example of the genre self-reflexivity that is subtly present in Pedrolo’s previous novels and that will become another major feature of the Spanish as of the Spanish American novela negra.

Transition and Instability

As is evident, the novela negra emerged in Spain under political conditions significantly different than those prevailing in Mexico, Colombia, or Argentina during the same period. During the period of the novela negra’s implantation and its subsequent boom, the waning of Franquismo and the transition to democracy was accompanied by an increase in crime rates, but levels of social violence never approached those endured by many Latin American countries during the same decades. Statistics published by the Spanish government indicate a steady increase over the last five decades in criminal convictions in Spain, from very low national rates in the late 1950s and early ’60s (91 per 100,000 inhabitants annually between 1956 and 1965) to rates three times higher in the late ’90s (273 per 100,000 between 1996 and 1998, as compiled by Avilés Farré, 128). Despite the overall increase in criminal activity during the post-Franco years, however, homicide in Spain remained infrequent, increasing slightly during the late 1970s and 1980s but declining again during the 1990s to levels low even in comparison with the rest of Western Europe and very low in the global context (Avilés Farré 134). The Gabinete Técnico of the Guardia Civil calculated a rate of .9 homicides per one hundred thousand inhabitants annually between 1990 and 1996, when the European average was 1.6.

While muggings were considerably more frequent in Spain than in other parts of Europe during these same years, rates of homicide and overall criminality were, as of 2000, the lowest among large countries in Western Europe (Díez Ripollés 2), and the relative inaccessibility of
firearms in Spain and the national trends of meaningful democratization and increasing national prosperity allowed the Spanish *novela negra* to develop in a social environment far more stable and peaceful than those described in previous chapters. One final gauge of dramatic differences between national contexts are the most recent national homicide rates published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which reflect the crisis in public security described in previous chapters. In 2000, according to the UNODC, Mexico suffered 14.11 homicides per one hundred thousand inhabitants, Colombia 62.74, Argentina 7.17, and Spain a mere 1.25. In contrast with the acute security crisis in many parts of the Americas, the evolution in Spanish crime rates in the second half of the twentieth century consisted of a steady rise from initially very low rates, in accordance with broader international trends, with a marked rise occurring during the 1980s but relenting at the turn of the century.\(^6\) Later studies suggest the resumption of a moderate increase in overall criminality between 1995 and 2005, though with no increase in the homicide rate (Díez Ripollés 5–7). Victimization surveys indicate that crime rates in Barcelona conformed to the national trend, with relatively high rates reported during the later 1980s and much lower ones during the following decade (Avilés Farré 135).

While Barcelona’s *novela negra* differs, as we shall see, in a number of important respects from that of the Spanish American capitals, it also registers some of the same concerns with the fragmentation and distension of the cityscape and of urban society. In demographic terms, the contrast in scale between Barcelona and the Spanish American megalopolises is notable. The most recent census put the official population of the Metropolitan Region of Barcelona at nearly 4.4 million, with just over 1.5 million residing within the bounds of Barcelona proper (Martori, Hoberg and Surinach). This contrasts with populations estimated at approximately twelve million for Greater Buenos Aires (1990), nearly eight million for Greater Bogota (2003), and over eighteen million for Mexico City Metropolitan Area (2001). However, as the novels of Pedrolo begin to indicate, the demographic and cultural transformation of Barcelona by postwar immigration from other regions of Spain and the potent growth of the city’s industrial belt provoked concerns regarding the integrity of the city that were not unrelated to those examined in previous chapters. In the most celebrated novel in Vázquez Montalbán’s detective series, the recurring character of an urban informant is heard to exclaim: Once I could know everything that happened in Barcelona just from the hundreded square yards around here. That’s impossible now. Anyone coming from Santa Coloma is like a foreigner (Southern Seas
166). Barcelona novelists rarely project the sense of catastrophic crisis that haunts the Spanish American novela negra at its blackest, but they do display a comparable concern for the preservation of popular urban history and a comparable determination to resist the most socially deleterious effects of an urban modernization driven by the interests of capital.

In the 1970s, the earliest and most direct continuer of Pedrolo’s initiative of the novela negra in Catalan was Jaume Fuster, whose work as a translator included the Castilian version of Joc Brut from which I have cited. In 1972 Fuster published the facilely formulaic De mica en mica s’omple la pica (Crumb by Crumb), later translated as El procedimiento, in which an amoral protagonist smuggles cash to Switzerland on behalf of a powerful Barcelona industrialist, only to find himself obliged to investigate the industrialist’s shady dealings as a way of extracting a promised payment. Although the protagonist is contracted by intermediaries in downtown Barcelona at the Plaza de Catalunya, pursuit of the industrialist himself requires repeated trips, as in Sasturain’s Manual de perdedores, to a suburban metallurgical plant in Hospitalet de Llobregat and the industrialist’s luxurious residences in Vallvidrera and in the coastal town of Calella de Palafrugell. Fuster’s protagonist works like a conventional hard-boiled protagonist, risking his life as he uncovers evidence of the industrialist’s illegal financial transactions and his ties to Barcelona’s criminal underworld, but unlike classical hard-boiled detectives, he finally accepts a payoff in exchange for his services once convinced of the impunity enjoyed by the wealthy. For critics, the most interesting of Fuster’s several subsequent variations on the novela negra has been Tarda, sessio contínua, 3,45 (Continuous Showings, 1976), a novel comparable to contemporaneous fiction by Puig and Soriano in that it presents a narrative divided between, on one hand, an imaginary Hollywood detective noir film that stars Bogart and reworks the plot of Red Harvest, and, on the other, the life of a boy watching the film in a Barcelona cinema. Following Fuster, a number of other Catalan-language writers, such as Maria-Antònia Oliver, have contributed to the sustenance of the novela negra in Catalan, but given the subsequent flourishing of the novela negra in Castilian, I will restrict my efforts in what follows to examining the treatment of Barcelona by the major Castilian-language novelists, foremost among them being Vázquez Montalbán.

The Map of Memory

When the prolific journalist, poet, and novelist Manuel Vázquez Montalbán initiated his now very well-known series of detective novels in 1974, there
were nearly as few national precedents for sustained literary production in the *novela negra* genre as there were for Taibo in Mexico. Vázquez Montalbán unleashed his bloodhound, Pepe Carvalho, into a metropolis with perhaps only one tenth the population of the Mexican capital, but which did face some comparable concerns in the period that Eduardo Mendoza labeled *preposfranquismo*. As Colmeiro has established, the accelerated economic and cultural transformation of Spain into an advanced capitalist society despite the persistence of dictatorship during the 1960s and early 1970s, provided the general context for the emergence of the Spanish *novela negra*, and Colmeiro goes on to suggest a historical parallel between the unsettled Spain of the post-1975 transition and the United States during the years of *Black Mask*. In Colmeiro’s view, the post-Franco Spain and the Prohibition-era United States shared an unprecedented and sustained situation of crisis and acute instability that shook the entire social system (La novela 211).

While this parallel might seem less pronounced than the one I suggest in Chapter 2 with respect to Mexico, Colmeiro supports the analogy by recalling Spain’s transition as a period of social and political instability resulting from the crumbling of longstanding authoritarian institutions, as well as economic tumult stemming from the global oil crisis of 1973 and the legacy of outdated Franquist development policies. These general crises gave rise to a series of worrisome social conflicts that would prove persistent in Spain’s new urban and postindustrial society:

[U]nemployment that reaches extraordinary levels and the massive and unprecedented phenomenon of drugs; these new problems translate into an alarming increase in crime rates, the appearance of both small- and large-scale organized crime, and a palpable deterioration of public security. At the same time, other serious problems previously ignored begin to surface, increasing the collective feeling of crisis: unrestrained speculation in housing, corruption of police and administrators, the irregular actions of security forces and armed groups seeking political destabilization, both on the extreme right and on the extreme left. (La novela 212)

As many critics have by now observed, the twenty-two volumes of Vázquez Montalbán’s Carvalho series constitute a monumental literary chronicle of Spain’s transition and return to democracy over a period of thirty years, beginning with the publication of *Tatuaje* (Tattoo) in 1974 and ending with that of *Milenio Carvalho* (Carvalho Millenium), in 2004, several months after the author’s death. In contrast with the dwindling and exhaustion of Taibo’s Belascoarán Shayne series, begun two years later, the Carvalho series endured and evolved to become not only
the most longevous and prolific series of detective novels in Spanish, but also the most popular and, in terms of sheer volume, the most substantial, with *Milenio Carvalho* appearing in two parts, each more than four hundred pages long, and in first editions of 100,000 copies.

Before maturing into one of the best-known literary expressions of the widely discussed culture of disenchantment with the Spanish transition, Vázquez Montalbán’s narrative invention emerged in part as a retort to what he perceived as the suffocating predominance of subjectivist, intimist or high modernist aesthetics among Spanish novelists at that time. Since producing *Tatuaje*, as legend would have it, in fifteen days and on a dare, Vázquez Montalbán continued to exploit the hard-boiled formula as a medium capable of recording his running critique of the transition and especially of social conflicts accompanying Barcelona’s postmodern and postindustrial transformations. Vázquez Montalbán’s novels are structured by his commitments as a lifelong socialist, a former prisoner of Franco’s jails, a son of the non-Catalan immigrant working class, and as a devout student of urban history. The appearance of a tattooed cadaver on a beach just outside Barcelona at the beginning of the first novel of the series inaugurates a dynamic by which evidence discovered at the margins of the metropolis leads inward toward the heart of the city.

 Appropriately, the series opens with a delimitation of the city, tracing the arc of what we could call the criminal playing field. Although death may surprise its victims on the outskirts or in satellite settlements, the significant elements, the keys to the crime, fall inside the ideal perimeter of the city, a city with a recognizable face and with limits available to the eye: the coastline and the look-out of Mount Tibidabo, poles of Carvalho’s daily life. (Resina El cadáver 159)

Ten pages into the first novel, Carvalho is located at home in Vallvidrera, an outlying residential colony overlooking Barcelona from the north from its perch on Mount Tibidabo, which Vázquez Montalbán elsewhere describes as the city’s best vantage point, only 542 metres high, but so positioned that it dominates the city horizon (*Barcelonas* 15). In this lofty locale, the detective rents a modest *torre*, a word meaning not only chalet or villa but also tower, and his shutters open to reveal a view of green horizons to the east and north and a panoramic view of the city and the port, the horizon of the city’s urban geometry at the foot of the mountain (*Tatuaje* 20). His affluent neighborhood is said to have been built when some black marketeers who got rich after the war had moved to the mountain in search of a fortunate place from which
to look out over the scenario of their fortunate business (19). Carvalho’s business is certainly less favored by fortune than those of his predecessors, but he stakes his claim to the supreme overlook that has long been a site and source of public pleasure for day-tripping workers and summering bourgeois, but which is in the process of being privatized by the commercial development of Vallvidrera.

Among the analogies already suggested in this study for the role of the literary detective, you will recall those of the plumber, the pícaro, and the voyeur. Vázquez Montalbán suggests others by marking his detective protagonist not only as a former Communist and former CIA agent, but also as a former professor of the Sociology of Literature in a Midwestern U.S. university (perhaps not unlike my own). This aspect of the character’s fictional genesis emphasizes both the literary and the sociological aspects of the detective’s work. As an investigator of urban populations, his job is to observe, locate, identify, and document, and Vázquez Montalbán deploys his protagonist as a disaffected yet persistent voyeur (mirón desganado).

In keeping with tradition, Vázquez Montalbán’s private investigator functions primarily as a body propelled through the streets, a vulnerable but vigilant body with eyes surveying the city, recording and processing it for us, again, like a remote mobile camera. Pepe Carvalho’s espionage background accounts for his expertise in all varieties of surveillance, and the Carvalho novels are full of scenes situating the detective in positions that emphasize his commanding view of urban space. In Desde los tejados (From the Rooftops), a story from Historias de padres e hijos (Stories of Fathers and Sons, 1987), Vázquez Montalbán recalls Sherlock Holmes’s dream of a transparent city when he sends his detective up to the flat roofs of his childhood neighborhood of Raval. Like a voyeur, Carvalho jumps from roof to roof and repeats the operation for two or three days to establish the changes in behavior in the fixed landscape (35).

Later, the detective reflects: I’ve never seen so much as when I went up to the roofs of these houses and had at my disposal all of our private lives. The farthest horizon was Montjuïc or the sea or Mount Tibidabo. What more do you want? (Historias 44). Although most of Carvalho’s investigation takes place at street level, this passage strongly invokes the fantasy of urban surveillance that is central not only to the classical Anglo-American detective tradition, but also, as Jacques Barzum and Wendell Taylor observed, to a work such as Luis Vélez de Guevara’s pseudo-picaresque El diablo cojuelo (The Crippled Devil, 1641): In the Spanish tradition, the Devil occasionally offered one of his favorites the entertainment of looking into all the houses of a town by taking the roofs off (quoted in Colmeiro, La novela 71). As Colmeiro remarks in quoting
this passage, both *picaro* and detective contribute to the processes of discovery and critical denudation. Along with the removal of rooftops, the *novela negra* finds its own colloquial figure of discovery in the recurring presence of strippers and prostitutes like Carvalho’s companion Charo. The discovery and exhibition of the female body, a conventional figure of truth, corresponds unmistakably to the private detective’s production of discovery and narrative production of a truth for money.

It seems sometimes paradoxical that Vázquez Montalbán employs a private detective, a mercenary private eye, to explore precisely the transformation of the Barcelona cityscape, and urban social life, by what are denounced as the irrational depredations of private capital. While many Spanish readers were well aware of the novelist’s longstanding affiliation with the Partido Socialista Unificado Catalán, or at least with his general political perspective through his very prolific journalism, the Carvalho character is defined (at least in principle) as a political skeptic, in keeping with the dictates of the individualist, although implicitly populist, hard-boiled ethic. The private detective is again situated beyond politics, *de vuelta de todo*, in order that he may circulate more freely in all enclaves of urban society. The private detective’s principle theoretical obligation is to discover the truth and report it to his client in exchange for a healthy fee. Carvalho’s adherence to this professional code, as well as his discriminating palate, qualify him to interact with politicians, aristocrats, and other private entrepreneurs much more powerful than himself. While various of the social crises afflicting post-Franquist Spain and Barcelona are featured in the series (economic stagnation, unemployment, drug trafficking, organized prostitution, Socialist political scandals, neo-fascist violence), it is my perception that the most constant concern of the Carvalho novels is with reckless urban development driven by private commercial interests to the detriment of public life and urban memory.

**Barcelona from Above and Below**

Like Taibo’s detective fiction, the Carvalho novels are animated by the tensions between this nostalgic totalizing and binding impulse, figured in the proprietary gaze from above, and the awareness of the accelerated fragmentation and incoherence of the postmodern cityscape (desconcierto visual). Literary contemplation of the city from above is often frustrated by a screen of pollution, and increasingly by the incursion of property development on the slopes of Tibidabo and elsewhere. The detective agent acts, again, by visiting or revisiting urban territories whose historical differentiation is constantly diminished or altogether erased by the
deterritorializing, pasteurizing dynamics of neoliberal urbanization. Like Belascoarán and Etchenique, Carvalho works out of a modest office situated in a center of urban activity, in this case on the Ramblas, a thoroughfare where Barcelonans and visitors have flocked for centuries to enjoy the concentrated pleasures of urban sociability and commerce. Elsewhere, Vázquez Montalbán characterizes the Ramblas as Barcelona’s urban backbone and emblematic promenade (Barcelonas 55).

Although Carvalho sleeps in Vallvidrera, he works at the heart of city center in what is described at the beginning of Tatuaje as that small office of a small neighborhood business, similar to any small office of any small neighborhood business (14). Though not nearly as cramped as Belascoarán Shayne’s shared quarters, Carvalho’s is again an undistinguished professional space surrounded by a number of similarly dubious commercial ventures. A description in The Angst-Ridden Executive (La soledad del manager, 1977), reads as follows.

[Carvalho] went up the wooden steps two at a time. The house that had once been a brothel run by a Madam Petula was now divided into a maze of offices belonging to a variety of small enterprises: wholesalers of eau de cologne, solicitors catering for small-time crooks, a commercial agent, a journalist bent on plumbing the depths of the Barrio Chino with a view to writing an urban realist novel, an ageing lady chiropodist, a dressmaker, a hairdresser’s with faithful clients who had been going there since the 1929 Exposition, and a few flats occupied by pelota players from the Colon club and girls from the Barcelona by Night troupe. Carvalho’s premises consisted of a small apartment measuring about thirty-five square yards. The office proper was painted green, and had a selection of nineteen-forties office furniture. There was also a tiny kitchen, with a fridge and a small toilet. (30 31)

The office window overlooking the Rambla de Santa Mónica affords us a view of traffic on the city’s most colorful artery, and it frames our literary consumption of the spectacles of post-Franquist urban life, including pedestrian traffic, prostitution, drug dealing, new wave beggars, transvestite parades, and clashes between protesters and riot police in the tumultuous early days of the transition. The detective operates on the frontier of lumpen Barcelona, but also only blocks from the traditional administrative center, the Placa Sant Jaume. Carvalho’s frequent rambles down the Ramblas and through the Barrio Chino and the Raval constitute something like the mortar of these novels. The following passage from Tatuaje is an early example of Vázquez Montalbán’s rich evocation
of the sensations and spectacle of the city center from the perspective of a strongly emplaced detective.

He followed the Calle del Carmen back to the Ramblas. The gray passage led up to the baroque splendor of the Iglesia de Belén and the refreshing view of the flower stalls along the central walkway. He merged into the river of cars flowing toward the port. The slowness of the traffic jam allowed him to get a second look at girls passed in sudden accelerations, and like a voyeur ready to flee, he enjoyed the swimming of the cool shadows that blotted the Ramblas with nocturnality. It was a complete universe that began at the port and ended in the enormous mediocrity of the Plaza de Catalunya. The Ramblas had retained the wise whimsy of the descending waters in which they originated. Theirs was the will of water running to its destination, like the people who walked along them at all hours of the day, taking morose leave of the bananas, of the polychromatic kiosks, of the capricious commerce in parrots and macaques, of the mercenary garden of the flower stalls, of the archeology of the buildings marking three centuries in the history of a city with history. Carvalho loved that avenue as he loved his own life, because for him it was irreplaceable. (140)11

Although the investigation of crimes frequently leads us to the edges of the urban map, the office’s proximity to what Vázquez Montalbán proudly calls the loins of the city (Sabotaje olímpico 13) provides a concentrated imaginary pool of delinquency easily exploited for hard-boiled narrative ends. Many of Carvalho’s walks in the early novels lead to the apartment of his lover Charo, a prostitute whose profession seems theoretically compatible with Carvalho’s, and who provides some of his most important contacts with the criminal underworld.

**Journey to the Satellite City**

Since Vázquez Montalbán published more than twenty volumes in the Carvalho series, I have no intention of describing their narrative scope, but I would like to comment briefly on the one that perhaps most fully expresses the concerns I have outlined.12 Los mares del Sur (Southern Seas), the fourth Carvalho novel, was published in 1979, and when it won the Premio Planeta that year and then an International Prize for Detective Literature in Paris in 1981, it defined one of the moments of maximum visibility not only for Vázquez Montalbán personally but also for detective literature written in Spanish. Los mares del sur closely resembles the previous novels in the series in narrative formula: discovery of a cadaver in a remote zone of the city; a private investigation commissioned by the
widow of the victim and leading the detective into remote urban territories and restricted social spaces; and, in the reconstruction of events leading up to the murder, the revelation of more significant crimes involving the collaboration of elite capitalists and political officials to profit at the expense of the city’s working class population. As is the norm in the Carvalho series and in many other manifestations of the *novela negra*, detective investigation, even when resulting in more or less complete narrative reconstruction of specific crimes, does not lead to legal prosecution and punishment. In this respect, a novel such as *Joc Brut* is exceptional, and we are reminded of the logic of limited justice in post-authoritarian transitions in many countries where impunity has been accepted as the price and condition of knowledge of past violence.

*Los mares del sur* presents themes of urban development and social atomization both in the nature of the mystery investigated and in the detective’s subsequent travels across the cityscape. Carvalho is hired to determine what became of Stuart Pedrell, a wealthy industrialist and developer, during the year between his disappearance from Barcelona and the discovery of his murdered body at a construction site in the outer northern neighborhood of La Trinitat. The victim, who had long been fascinated by Paul Gauguin’s escape to the South Pacific, was thought to have followed in the painter’s footsteps, yet the investigation reveals that he in fact set sail on the Metro and began a new life under an assumed name in a working-class satellite city built from the ground up by his own construction company during the same Francist-era construction boom depicted by Pedrolo. Critics of *Los mares del sur* have noted the resemblance of this plot to an incidental anecdote about a man named Flitcroft in one of Raymond Chandler’s best known works, but what is surely more interesting to Vázquez Montalbán and to Spanish readers in 1979 is the by now conventional but no less striking juxtaposition of urban extremes. We are shown, on one hand, the dazzling offices, homes, and meeting places of the elite business class of developers, builders, and manufacturers who remade the city to their own benefit in the postwar period and, on the other, the shoddy, ugly, and insufficient accommodations those businessmen created to house and contain the burgeoning immigrant worker population.

Carvalho tracks between his own office in the heart of the city’s oldest popular district, the new proletarian margin, Barcelona’s industrial belt, and the luxurious residences and offices of the victim’s associates in wealthy neighborhoods of Tres Torres, Sarrià, and Putxet. As in prototypical hard-boiled novels such as Hammett’s *The Dain Curse* (1929) and Chandler’s *The Big Sleep* (1939), the material paraphernalia of wealth is
an object of fascination in the hard-boiled text, as in the following passage in which the detective visits the Marquess of Munt, an investor and former partner of the victim.

The taxi dropped him on a street in Tres Torres, an old residential district whose family houses had been pulled down to make way for bright, low-rise blocks, nicely set back from the pavement to allow a growth of dwarf cypresses, myrtles, a well-protected banana tree, palms and oleanders. An entrance hall, which would not have disgraced the New York Sheraton, served as a vast backdrop for the bustling of a musical-comedy porter, who registered the name Marquess of Munt with more respect than Carvalho had shown in uttering it. He opened the door to the lift and got in with Carvalho. . . . Carvalho was shown into a reception room, thirty metres square, decorated in a Japanese style that predated Madame Butterfly. A mulatto servant dressed in white and pink took charge of the detective and led him into a bizarre stage-setting. A vast space of eighty square metres, carpeted white throughout. The only furniture was a [light pink grand] piano and, at the far end, designer seating fastened to floor and wall. On the white carpet, the only foreign body was a metal cone which tapered up from the floor to an ultra-fine point, in an apparently vain attempt to reach the ceiling. The Marquess of Munt was relaxing on a sofa, with a perfectly composed air of gravity. Seventy years of snobbish living were condensed in the thin frame of a fair-skinned, smartly dressed old man. (Southern Seas 55 56)

The aesthetic refinement conveyed by the detail of this passage and elaborated in the subsequent conversation between the detective and the Marquess gains significance when contrasted with the similarly detailed descriptions of the material qualities of the working-class housing development built by the disappeared construction magnate but financed by the Marquess, whose pink and white splendor is presumably financed by the returns on such investments. Carvalho learns that progressive political ideas and romantic whims led the Marquess’s partner, the magnate Stuart Pedrell, to renounce this paraphernalia and the other benefits of his success and to cross the urban frontier separating abundance from want and inherited privilege from inherited defeat. His death comes as the indirect result of this transgression, when he runs afoul of the violent, rural popular law imported by non-Catalan immigrants to the margins of the metropolis and perpetuated there by their frustrated and unemployed sons.

Carvalho’s investigation of the murder in Los mares del sur is also an explicit investigation of urban history. The detective is obliged to consult
a map of the city (a street map of the city, that he kept for his more sordid investigations, *Southern Seas* 99) in order draw the cadaver’s trajectory from one extreme of the city to the other. He also reads to himself and to us from what appears to be a manual of urban planning summarizing the history of the development of the satellite city under the policy of speculative expansion authorized by Mayor Josep Maria de Porcióles (1957–73) in the late 1950s. In a chapter located at the very center of the novel, Carvalho seeks to reconstruct the victim’s escape from the bourgeois city by travelling on the Metro to San Magín, the fictional satellite city built by Stuart Pedrell and his partners on the periphery of Barcelona. In *Barcelona*, Vázquez Montalbán spoke of similar developments built by private initiative under the laissez-faire Porcióles administration as monuments to bad taste and bare-faced contempt for the popular classes (157), and Carvalho’s trip to San Magín is an investigation into the consequences of speculative and predatory urban development (183). Since he usually travels on foot or by car, Carvalho’s descent into the metro triggers memories of his travels by Metro decades earlier, when he felt aloof from the crowds of commuting workers. However, like Tizziani’s protagonist on the Buenos Aires subway and like Belascoarán on the Mexico City Metro, Carvalho no longer feels superior to the passengers he once disdained as a gathered mass of submissive, cattle-like humanity. As he rides, the detective reflects on the ugliness of the stations and the tedium of the routines of travel and labor that he senses in those around him (their faces tinged by utilitarian lighting and their bodies gently rocking with the rhythmic motion of the brutish machine, *Southern Seas* 102). Pondering the evidence of other passengers’ poverty and discouragement, Carvalho now feels solidarity, a word that is emphasized through repetition, as well as a fear that he perceives as shared by those traveling alongside him: The fear on all their faces, of being the victims of a banal, irreversible journey from poverty into nothingness (103). A possible political response to the sadness and frustration sensed on the Metro is suggested by Carvalho’s observation, as he leaves the metro, of leftist electoral posters competing with those of the ruling party: *Make your voice heard. Vote Communist. Vote PSUC. Socialism has answers* (103).

In this sequence of the novel, Carvalho experiences a certain return to his origins through the awakening of memory and feelings of class solidarity. His destination stands in stark contrast both to the elite Tres Torres and to the central working-class district of the Raval. Carvalho’s customary strolls through the Raval and the Barrio Gótico usually evoke rich recollections of the dense and often sordid popular history invested
in the city’s heart (or loins). Here, in contrast, he enters the Franquist satellite city as an intruder, and at first does not even seem to speak the language of the residents he has come to canvas. Even the sky with its color of cheap forged metal seems to announce the urban periphery as a place of oppressive industrialization. The ultimate concern of this chapter is with the social implications and the aesthetics of the San Magín development, as reflected in Carvalho’s observations on the quality of the material environment from the moment he leaves the Metro station: The posters did not quite obscure walls of prematurely aged brick and flaking plaster (103). The detective’s snapshot impression of San Magín encapsulates the critique of urbanism under Porcioles and after.

San Magín rose at the end of a street of irregular buildings, where the weatherbeaten functionalism of 1950s-style housing for the poor co-existed with the prefabricated beehives of more recent years. San Magín itself presented a symmetrical horizon of identical blocks of flats that advanced towards Carvalho and promised a labyrinth. The skyborne announcement added: A new town for a better life. The satellite town of San Magín was inaugurated by His Excellency the Head of State on 24 June 1966. The inscription stone was in the centre of an obelisk which had seemingly been placed there [along with twelve identical blocks of buildings] by a prodigious feat of strength on the part of some Herculean crane. The sharp concrete edges hurt the eyes, and were not softened by the humanizing presence of women in padded nylon housecoats. . . . Each frontage was like a face, complete with square, pupil-less eyes darkened by an advancing leprosy. (Southern Seas 103 04)

As he looks at buildings, reads graffiti and electoral propaganda, registers non-Catalan voices, and learns of infinite complaints about the poor construction of the buildings, Carvalho here works in classic hard-boiled fashion to survey alien territory and to show us, as the novel puts it, the other face of the moon (99).

**The Critics Speak**

Behind Carvalho’s dense and voluminous urban observation and commentary lies, as Eugenia Afinoguénova has argued, a consistent theory of urban space developed by Vázquez Montalbán prior to the Carvalho series and partially in response to the New Urbanism advocated by heterodox Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre during the 1960s. Rooted, like Lefebvre’s more optimistic and utopian theory, in the rejection of the technocratic functionalism and rigid rationalism symbolized by the
straight line (the painful sharp concrete edges), Vázquez Montalbán’s urban thought never loses sight of the fact that the present space is and will remain alienated as long as the order established by capitalist organization of time and space endures (Afinoguénova 32). Refuting the potential for collective action that Lefebvre saw in popular festivities, Vázquez Montalbán saw the modern and postmodern city as a space of built-in alienation, and his own proposal for resistance answered the organizing capitalist logic of need and profit with an affirmation of desire and memory, values evident both in the Carvalho series and elsewhere in his writing.

In following Lefebvre in his approach to the city, Vázquez Montalbán also found there an inalienable space whose meaning was impossible to define in a functionalist manner. It wasn’t the potential for celebratory or useless action, the festival or play, that animated Lefebvre’s New Urbanism, but rather the experience of what Lefebvre would later call the lived space of individual memory that constitutes the keystone of Vázquez Montalbán’s philosophical construct. His city is a potentially liberating space when it harbors non-functional and interiorizable functions: memory and desire. (Afinoguénova 38)

Of the many critics who have written on the Carvalho series, few have failed to note its commitment to the preservation of urban memory as a basis of personal and collective identity. An inveterate critic of the deterrioralizing processes of transnational capitalism, Vázquez Montalbán constructs Carvalho as memorious subject capable of evoking the postwar history inscribed in the urban spaces he traverses and thus resisting the dehistoricizing and delocalizing tendencies of postmodern culture, or what Colmeiro calls the general denaturalization of consumer society and the massive uniformity of neocolonialism of multinational corporations (La novela 187). Resina suggests Vázquez Montalbán’s practice of an urban mapping of high topographical and historical definition exemplifies a general tendency toward local emplacement the Spanish urban novel of the 1980s, reflecting a critical skepticism in with regard to the theoretical flotation of the postmodern city, emptied of its historical ballast (El cadáver 167).

In one of the most thoughtful reflections yet published on the imagination of urban space in the Carvalho series, Caragh Wells has proposed the notion of urban dialectics to describe the processes through which the detective’s phenomenological relationship with the urban environment is constructed and how this, in turn, is inextricably linked to wider historical processes (83). In Wells’s view, Vázquez Montalbán’s narrative
thrives on the interaction between the ongoing material processes of
Barcelona’s metamorphosis into a postmodern city and the subjective
responses of the critical, nostalgic, and, in at least one sense, conservative
detective. She suggests that through Carvalho’s detailed urban percep-
tions and embedded recollections, the novels undertake to defend the his-
tory of the Raval’s working class population, to which Carvalho’s parents
belonged.

The history of this community, which Carvalho fears is under threat due
to urban reform programmes and political changes, is represented
throughout the novels through the insertion of dialectical images. These
images are placed in the texts to stimulate readers to view urban space as a
repository of historical epochs which extend their presence into the present
moment. . . . Through the use of these images, Vazquez Montalban
employs the detective to uncover what Benjamin’s English translators refer
to as the ur-historical: time which lies embedded in urban spaces and
which can be recovered momentarily in order to throw light on the pres-
ent. . . . The detective retrieves the ur-historical through the recollection of
fragmentary moments of working-class history which are usually stimu-
lated by images of a particular urban space and are filtered through
Carvalho’s subjective recollections. (84, 89)

Wells finds that, especially in the early novels of the series, Vazquez
Montalban constructs the Raval as Carvalho’s genius loci, a type of space
which [Edward] Relph defines as ‘a source of self-knowledge and a point
of reference... a centre of personal stability and significance’ (86).
Through frequent walks on the Ramblas and neighboring streets and vis-
its to favorite bars and restaurants, Carvalho stakes out and appropriates
personal territory whose historical depth, established by the flow of
dialectical images, contrasts sharply with the barren and historically
unmarked space of San Magin.

In another of the most insightful reflections on urban space in the
Carvalho novels, Resina noted a decisive shift in narrative aesthetics in
the two novels Vazquez Montalban devoted to the transformation of
Barcelona for the 1992 Olympics, El laberinto griego (An Olympic Death,
1991) and Sabotaje olimpico (Olympic Sabotage), which was serialized in
El Pais during the games before appearing in book form in 1993. As
Barcelona submits to the sweeping transformation in preparation for the
massive media event of the games (the world’s biggest spectacle,
Sabotaje 9), the referential realism of the series seems to come unhinged,
and Carvalho himself acts increasingly disoriented as long-standing
points of urban reference are erased or resignified. Although the Ramblas
seem to Carvalho one of the few areas of the city center spared the Olympic pickaxe, *Sabotaje olímpico* depicts them as overrun by international television crews (13) while the rest of Carvalho’s native Barrio Chino is whitewashed for the benefit of visitors. The neighborhood had been pasteurized. The pickaxe had begun to level whole blocks and the stray uncollared prostitutes had no facades on which to rest their asses during the long waits for their economically and psychologically deprived clients. . . . It was like walking through a neighborhood condemned to the pickaxe and to non-existence (72). The constant advance of the pickaxe and of a postmodern culture of forgetting aggravate in Carvalho a latent sensation of foreignness in his own territory (11).

In a crisis recalling Kevin Lynch’s theory of the value of imageability in urban environments, the detective drifts dejectedly in the frenetic tides of urban renewal, suddenly unable to interpret the signs that led his investigation. Faced with a proliferation of new urban objects and reconfigured spaces that perturb memory, Carvalho exhibits nostalgia for the legibility of the modern city as it disappears before his eyes (Resina, *El cadáver* 185). At its most extreme in *Sabotaje olímpico*, Carvalho’s incursion into the realm of simulacra results in a novel that veers away from urban realism into postmodern farce. As Wells observes, Vázquez Montalbán’s deployment of dialectical images gradually diminishes as the series progresses, . . . as memory spaces are removed . . . the postmodern landscape of 1990s Barcelona appears to prohibit Carvalho from reading the city through his dialectical vision (91). Another aspect of the detective’s exile from the real is his awareness of the accumulated weight of his own fictional past in the sixteen volumes that preceded *Sabotaje olímpico* in the Carvalho series. The intertextual referentiality and metageneric self-consciousness that characterize the series from the earliest novels reach a particular intensity in *Sabotaje*, where Carvalho recognizes himself as an eclectic and preconstructed literary hero (160). The celebrity he attained through previous novels now allows the detective to fraternize with a plethora of other celebrities, including entertainers and world politicians. George H. W. Bush recognizes Carvalho as the assassin of Kennedy, while Boutros Boutros-Ghalí prevails on him to clarify a recipe from *Los mares del sur*.

Although the Carvalho novels published subsequent to *Sabotaje* retreat from farce to recover something of their realistic grounding, one apparent reaction to what Wells calls the erosion of the detective’s *genius loci* and that of his *barrio* (92) is a more frequent recourse to travels outside Barcelona, as Carvalho’s investigations lead him to Damascus and Madrid in *Roldán, ni vivo ni muerto* (Roldán, Neither Dead Nor Alive,
1994), to Madrid again in *El premio* (The Prize, 1996) and to Argentina in *Quinteto de Buenos Aires* (*The Buenos Aires Quintet*, 1997), before closing out the series with a long-anticipated world tour in *Milenio Carvalho*. Early in *El hombre de mi vida* (*The Man of My Life*, 2000), the last of the Carvalho novels set principally in Barcelona, the detective is reminded by fax that he has not escaped the realm of simulacra (*su vida ha penetrado en las dimensiones del simulacro* in the original Spanish text, 28), yet he still struggles to hold his place in a pasteurized post-Olympic city from which the patina or grime of history has been cleansed (*The Man of My Life* 216). As he visits a nude beach on the redeveloped waterfront of the Port Olímpic, present perceptions again trigger memories of childhood, in one of the last of the series’s eloquent dialectical evocations of an urban space that erases history as it regenerates itself.

What interested him more [than the beach] was trying to understand this new city, this urban extention knowing at the instinct for survival shown by the enclosed and romantic cemetery that was Poblenou, with its sprawling cubes of houses recycled thanks to the plastic surgery of simulation culture, its despairing chimneys reduced to giving obsolete testimony to what had once been a mixture of Manchester and Icaria, as other previously cheap, protected, badly-built shacks were reduced to a raucous Harlem thrown up next to Malibu, housing for the poor miraculously built on the most expensive land in the city. What was the link between his imagined Barcelona and this Atlantis suddenly rising from the seas? A flight from itself, or a new city open once and for all, a safe, pasteurized city where pickaxes were attacking the groin of the Barrio Chino and the phantasmal barricades of the memory of the city of rage and the idea of subversion, of the city under Franco, the city on its knees, Lord, before the Cathedral Chapel, where all that was left of love and truth was kept. Perhaps the link was nothing more than the smell of prawns, the revenge of the odour of rancid oil, a foul stench that contrasted with the cleanest of Mediterranean cities, a dense oil full of memories of post-war days, of defeat. (*The Man of My Life* 27 28)

The conclusion of this passage exemplifies Carvalho’s well-documented celebration of gastronomy as an enduring repository of authentic cultural identity, and although he shares in the public pleasures of beach, with its air of libertarian hedonism (*una especial acracia* in the original text), his enjoyment of the new city cannot suppress remorse over the loss of the old one, the city of his ghosts: He felt refreshed, happy, reconciled to his city event though he suddenly felt like crying because he would never find his way home again, and anyway had no clear idea of what
home he could not find, as if it were nothing more than a white wall where memory sketched the shadows of the dead whom only he remembered (The Man of My Life 28). Continuing the logic of the series, El hombre centers on the immediate present of the novel’s composition in 1999, and the plot reflects contemporary discussions of globalization and the role of nations without states in a new international order. Carvalho’s investigation involves the proliferation of millennial cults and an international conspiracy by financial elites to establish Barcelona, Toulouse, and Milan as vertices in a postnational corporate territory called Region Plus. Just as Tatuaje opened with what Resina recognized as a delimitation of the city at seaside, it is fitting that El hombre should culminate with a return to the ocean, as Carvalho summons his adversary to a confrontation on the breakwater of the port of Barcelona, before shooting him at the water’s edge. This killing, unusual in the context of the series, seems to reinforce the finality of the moment and to finish the urban map drawn so carefully over the course of the series.

As Resina has incisively argued, the realism of Vázquez Montalbán’s saga was constantly restricted by the ideological tenets underlying it. At their most predictable, Carvalho’s novels could seem like unrelenting denunciations of the venality of the Catalan bourgeoisie, a social group that seems almost literally and perhaps ironically demonized by their association with satanic cults in El hombre. While the fictional conflicts devised by Vázquez Montalbán dramatized significant cultural tensions and the resentments of the postwar immigrant working class to which both Vázquez Montalbán’s family and his detective’s belonged, I find convincing Resina’s criticism that the novelist’s oft-affirmed project of providing a realistic chronicle of the transition is inhibited by the habitual allotment of criminal guilt and moral blame to characters such as the Marquess of Munt, who are marked not only by their wealth but also by their Catalan identity. More pertinent to my concerns here is Resina’s related observation that, just as Vázquez Montalbán tends to allot guilt along binary class lines, so too does his urban mapping tend toward binary division: defeated city / triumphant city, immigrant zone / autochthonous zone, poverty / wealth, victims / criminals. This system of correlations conceals the complex permutability of these elements in the praxis of the city. (El cadáver 173). In spite of all Carvalho’s attentive transcription and interpretation of detail, Resina accuses Vázquez Montalbán of producing a schematic and discontinuous reduction of urban space by concentrating on social and geographical extremes while constructing such intermediate terrains as the tidily planned Eixample district either as negative space or as the accursed circle of bourgeois
Catalanism (El cadáver 177). While Vázquez Montalbán’s firmly held and theorized political ideology clearly contributes to the schematization Resina describes, the considerations presented in my preceding chapters suggest that such reductive mapping is also one of the fundamental operations defining the novela negra at least since Raymond Chandler. By transforming the originally individualist and populist discourse of U.S. hard-boiled fiction through the integration of a Marxist framework and collectivist values, Vázquez Montalbán also aligns himself with the Spanish American neopoliárico writers. Ultimately, despite Resina’s critical reservations, the major scholars of Spanish detective fiction agree on both the substantiality and ingenuity of Vázquez Montalbán’s urban chronicle and on his primacy in the hierarchy of the Spanish novela negra.

In the Shadow of Carvalho

As indicated by the foregoing glimpse at crime trends in recent decades, public security in Barcelona and in Spain generally did deteriorate during the first years of the transition and especially during the 1980s, although this deterioration halted during the early 1990s before resuming with less severity at the turn of the century. Despite the increased incidence and visibility of crime during the post-Franco period, at no time did violence in Spanish cities approach the intensities experienced in Mexican, Colombian, or even Argentine cities. As Díez Ripollés concludes in his 2006 survey of national crime data, Spain continued to maintain low crime rates in relation to the rest of Europe through the first years of this century. In his view, a persistent preoccupation with crime on the part of the Spanish public, almost certainly sustained by increased media coverage, is disproportionate in relation to the statistical reality of only moderate increases in lesser criminal activity and minimal variation in the frequency of the more violent crimes (17). The emergence and subsequent boom in the novela negra during the late 1970s and through the 1980s can be confidently associated with the economic and social crises to which Colmeiro and other critics have linked it, but no sustained sensibility of crisis can explain the healthy persistence of the subgenre into the present. In previous chapters, I suggest that the phenomenon of a criminal-centered post-neopoliárico may be interpreted as one cultural expression of an acute crisis of public security in Spanish American metropolises, and Barcelona provides, in this respect, an illuminating contrast. While a number of Barcelona writers have indeed produced very dark and detectiveless crime novels during the post-Franco years, the narrative institution of the detective and the industrial norm of the detective-centered
series has fared far better in Barcelona and the rest of Spain than anywhere in Spanish America.

In almost any other city in Spain or Spanish America, a writer who had written as abundantly and as knowledgeably as Francisco González Ledesma would be the preeminent local practitioner of the hard-boiled detective genre, but since González Ledesma writes about Barcelona, his own long-running and profoundly urban detective series has been somewhat overshadowed by the enormous success of the Carvalho novels. As mentioned in Chapter 1, González Ledesma’s career is extraordinary in that it spans both the novela negra boom of the post-Franco years and the earlier heyday of the Spanish popular novel, when he published about four hundred novels in fifteen years, writing under various pseudonyms and in various popular genres. From 1983, when he published Expediente Barcelona (Barcelona Dossier), the first of seven novels to date featuring Inspector Ricardo Méndez, through 2007, when he published La ciudad sin tiempo (The Timeless City) under the pseudonym Enrique Moriel, González Ledesma specializes, as his titles suggest, in criminal plots deeply rooted in the urban social fabric and vividly mapped onto an urban geography saturated with a lifetime of memories. González Ledesama summarized his approach to the genre when he declared in 1987 that, among the many more or less incontrovertible characteristics of the novela negra, there is one that is incontrovertible: it describes a specific urban society at a specific moment, generally through locales that are very well known by the author (La prehistoria 12). Like Carvalho, González Ledesma’s veteran detective Méndez breathes the air of a past that was never happy, the air of extinguished voices, of municipal dust, of faces sunk forever into the oblivion of Barcelona (Crónica sentimental en rojo 70), and the personal principles that Méndez declares in the same novel might well speak for all the hard-boiled detectives mentioned previously in this study: I believe in four malodorous and angelic things: a city, some streets, a certain urban culture, a certain logic of the night (224). Though more respectful of genre convention and far less prone to the metaliterary self-referentiality that Colmeiro identifies as constantly attenuating Vázquez Montalbán’s realism, González Ledesma does share Vázquez Montalbán’s general historical perspective as a child of Barcelona’s defeated Republican working-class, and his Inspector Méndez shares much of the disenchanted skepticism and nostalgia that defined Carvalho. Before and after his stint as an in-house novelist for Bruguera, González Ledesma also practiced law as a public defender and wrote as a journalist, rising to the position of editor-in-chief at Barcelona’s major daily newspaper, La Vanguardia. This varied experience is reflected in his
capable rendering of the subtleties of everyday interaction between policemen and citizens who live on the margin of the law.

Two other prominent Barcelona-based series of recent years have featured some of the first female detectives in the local tradition. The first of these consists of three novels published by Maria-Antònia Oliver in Catalan between 1985 and 1994, of which only the first is set wholly in Barcelona. Centering on a Majorcan-born private investigator named Lònia Guiu, Oliver’s staunchly feminist appropriation of the hard-boiled paradigm offers an urban mapping that, while desultory in comparison with the sometimes laborious detail of González Ledesma and Vázquez Montalbán, does reproduce generic conventions with regard to the treatment of space. For example, at the beginning of Estudi en lila, the first novel in the series (available in multiple English-language editions as Study in Lilac), Guiu promptly locates the professional quarters of a principle villain in the incredibly luxurious offices of an investment company located on the Avenida Diagonal (24). As Nancy Vosburg observes, Oliver falls within the mainstream of the Spanish novela negra to the extent that her detective fiction targets the rich as the source of evil (63), although issues of gender inequity also enter into the schematic allotment of guilt: Oliver’s male villains, unlike the female victims, are all drawn from the wealthy commercial/industrial upper class (64). This reliance on hard-boiled convention is challenged somewhat by Alicia Giménez Bartlett, in an ongoing Barcelona-based series that, since its introduction in 1996, has won a broad readership in Spain. In the context of the current study, the specifics of Giménez Bartlett’s urban representation are less interesting than her successful implementation of the police procedural formula, a mode of crime fiction that is rare in Spanish literary history and virtually unknown in Spanish America. In the six novels published in the series to date, Barcelona police inspector and former lawyer Petra Delicado recounts her investigation of cases involving serial rape, dog-fighting rings and violence perpetrated against the homeless.

The principal novelty of Giménez Bartlett’s novels, along with those of other police procedural series established in Spain during the 1990s, is their affirmation of faith in legal mechanisms of justice and the efficiency of the police. Across the novels, writes Nina L. Molinaro with regard to the Petra Delicado series, the deductive acumen and persistent police work’ of the two detectives inevitably lead to the criminal(s), the verbal reconstruction of the events leading to the crime(s), and the welcome restoration of the social order (61). If, as Colmeiro has suggested, the ratiocinative detective novel in the classical mold never took root in Spain for historical reasons, Spanish writers may also be said to have spurned
the police procedural throughout the Franco period and for years afterward due to widespread popular fear and resentment of a police force strongly associated with authoritarianism, as various critics suggest. In contrast to González Ledesma’s veteran Inspector Méndez, who also works for the Barcelona police force but whose popular sympathies and disregard for legal norms and procedures marks him as a classically hard-boiled protagonist, Giménez Bartlett’s detectives are in Molinaro’s words exemplary members of the police community and educated members of the upper-middle class scrupulously dedicated to imposing the rule of law (62, 64). In contrast to the previous emphasis of novela negra on what Vázquez Montalbán called society’s structural violence, Shelley Godsland suggests that Giménez Bartlett focuses on individual deviancy, or on crimes committed by small groups of individuals whose motive is personal gain following a pattern popularized in traditional Golden Age whodunits (90). Giménez Bartlett also retreats, according to Godsland, from Oliver’s combative feminism into a more conservative postfeminist posture symbolized spatially by the protagonist’s (re-)moval to a well tended domestic space, specifically, that of her comfortable suburban house (86–87). This displacement parallels confident resignification of the police station in this and other procedural series as a basis for the efficient administration of justice by legitimately empowered agents of the state.

**Barcelona by Night**

While the ascendancy of the police procedural format and the prominent establishment of female characters in investigative roles are notable tendencies of the most recent Spanish crime writing, Barcelona in particular continues to generate an unusual variety of generic variants. A number of other specialists such as José Luis Muñoz and Pedro Casals have also published numerous novels imagining the Barcelona cityscape as ground for criminal intrigue, but the most relentless of Barcelona’s genre specialists remains Andreu Martín who, since 1979, has published at a rate of more than a novel per year. In a 2005 article, Juan Miguel López Merino calculated Martín’s total narrative output of more than fifty books since 1979 in addition to numerous works of theater and scripts for film, television, and comic books written during the same period. It is also notable that, aside from a detective novel series for young adults, Martín has maintained this prolific output without recycling a single detective protagonist and familiar scenarios from one novel to the next.

Through a long series of novels that offer various combinations of police procedural content with elements of mystery and the blunt violence
of the classic *novela negra*, Martín creates only occasional continuity through the reuse of characters. An upstanding police detective from the Barcelona Homicide Brigade appeared as the protagonist of *A la vejez navajazos* (Knives for the Old, 1980, republished as *A navajazos* in 1988), before featuring in a minor role in *Prótesis* (Prosthesis, 1980) and a more substantial one in *Si es no es* (What Is Isn’t, 1983). Another principled police inspector named Paco Huertas, who fights ubiquitous mafia-related corruption in *Barcelona Connection* (1988) also features less prominently in other novels of the same period. However, despite the frequent inclusion of at least secondary police procedural plots in his novels, Martín is best known for his harrowing psychological portrayal of the professional criminals, sadists, and psychopaths who appear as protagonists of *Prótesis*, *La camisa al revés* (Shirt On Backwards, 1983), *El caballo y el mono* (The Horse and the Monkey, 1983), *El día menos pensado* (The Day You Least Expect It, 1986), *A martillazos* (Hammer Blows, 1988), and a number of later novels. In other works, Martín has employed investigator protagonists who are either amateurs motivated by their relationship to a victim, as in *Aprende y calla* (Shut Up and Learn, 1979), or professional private detectives, as in *La otra gota de agua* (The Other Drop, 1981), *Por amor al arte* (For the Love of Art, 1982), *Si es no es*, and *Amores que matan. ¿Y qué?* (Love Kills. So What? 1983), but Martín’s private investigators frequently prove to be as violent and venal as the criminals they pursue. After decades of working in a mutable personal variant of the *novela negra* that he dubbed urban terror, only recently has Martín moved toward establishing a lighter and more conventional private detective series for adults in two novels written in collaboration with Jaume Ribera: *Con los muertos no se juega* (You Don’t Play with the Dead, 2005) and *La clave de las llaves* (The Code of the Keys, 2006).

Most of Martín’s crime fiction is set in Barcelona and in variants of the contrasting high and low locales established in the prior fiction of Pedrolo, Fuster, and Vázquez Montalbán. The Barrio Chino is again prominent as a hotbed of urban criminal culture, and Martín generally presents a conventionally hard-boiled panorama of dive bars, cheap rooms, mean streets, dingy offices, and general urban decay. It is an urban vision less historicized and reflexive than that developed by Vázquez Montalbán over the course of the Carvalho series. In a predominantly procedural novel, such as *Si es no es*, which foregrounds urban geography by titling every scene with the name of a street, neighborhood, park, or place of business, a significant difference with regard to the Carvalho series is indicated by the recurrence of Vía Layetana (Jefatura de Policía) (Vía Layetana, Police Headquarters) as the most frequent
location and setting. This central police station also features significantly in the notoriously savage Prótesis, a novel usually recalled for its startling narration of hard-boiled violence.

In Prótesis, urban geography signifies primarily in relation to personal psychodrama, as when the two protagonists engage in a mutual pursuit that ends with a final confrontation in a wooded spot on the edge of the city where their violent rivalry began years earlier. Martín’s twin protagonists are a sadistic former police detective from the Franco era and a young criminal who lost his teeth when arrested and beaten by the detective, and so spent years plotting his revenge. The generally dark urban view of Martín’s crime fiction appears figured by the criminal’s first return to the isolated spot beside the Vallvidrera highway where he was arrested and a fellow gang member killed by the detective. After committing a carjacking similar to that which occasioned his original arrest and taking his victims back to the same spot, he looks out over the city from a vantage point similar to Carvalho’s.

Barcelona was dead. Dark. A big black block with dim lights that looked like blind eyes. At that moment, Miguel felt like the only living man in the world, the owner of that mishmash of houses. Or better yet, their guardian. Like God. He was keeping watch over the whole city, over all those people. It all belonged to him. (52)

While the duel with his torturer leads inexorably to a final confrontation at the original site of Miguel’s trauma, it is interesting to note that a final shift in Martín’s multiple narrative focalization privileges the view of a police inspector who has tracked the protagonist through much of the novel and who arrives late to the final confrontation. The car that leads the reader to the final scene is the inspector’s, and it is he who beholds the final panorama: The [inspector’s] old 850 passed through Sarrià, by the cable car station, and the U-curve that looked out over the overwhelming immensity of nocturnal Barcelona (189). Despite this final gesture toward a policing of the cityscape, however, Prótesis resembles most of Martín’s other novels of the 1980s and 1990s in leaving the reader with an impression of the city that is closer to Miguel’s vision of the gran bloque negro than to Carvalho’s diurnal view of a topography rendered intelligible through the praxis of social history. While Vázquez Montalbán positions Carvalho to gaze out on the flow of history from his office on the Ramblas, Martín’s conception of urban space as a theater for dramas of corruption, aggression, and psychosis is encapsulated by the image of Miguel as he waits for his nemesis throughout the final chapters.
of *Prótesis*, holed up in a befouled, dust-coated apartment by the port and gazing for days on end at a single stretch of sidewalk through a slit in a piece of cardboard he uses to block the window.

**Spanish Difference**

From a transatlantic perspective, differences between the various mappings undertaken by the principle practitioners of the *novela negra* in Barcelona and those of their Spanish American counterparts are less striking than differences in the general trend of development of the *novela negra*. As I have argued here, the *neopoliciaco* appears to have ceded predominance in Spanish America to, on the one hand, a more lawless and criminal-centered post-*neopoliciaco* and, on the other, a cosmopolitan and somewhat anachronistic neo-classical mystery novel as practiced by Jorge Volpi in Mexico and by Guillermo Martínez and Pablo De Santis in Argentina. Both of these variants persist in Spain to some extent, as the Spanish *novela negra* has evolved toward diversification and institutionalization within the contemporary literary market. The police procedural, which has obtained considerable commercial prominence through the novels of Giménez Bartlett, Lorenzo Silva, and others while remaining virtually unknown in Spanish America, may be said to reflect a recovery of public confidence in the police forces during Spain’s successful transition to democracy, but also an option of specialization and professionalization within variants of the *novela negra* genre that remains unavailable to Spanish American writers due to their smaller national literary markets and peripheral relationship to Barcelona as the capital of the most powerful transnational publishers for Spanish-language markets.

While I have opted to concentrate here on Barcelona as the preeminent setting and center of production for the *novela negra* in Spain, I will reiterate in closing that various subgenres of crime fiction continue to thrive in other regions of the country. The hard-boiled detective novels of Juan Madrid, set in the city whose name he shares, have been described by Craig-Odders as Spain’s most classically hard-boiled, and the capital city is also the setting for his workmanlike series of thirteen police procedural novels called the *Serie Brigada Central*. Juan Madrid concurs with Vázquez Montalbán and his peers in his view of the *novela negra* as a vehicle for exploring the metropolis, as he attested in explaining the title of his edited collection of hard-boiled crime stories, *Cuadernos de asfalto* (Asphalt Notebooks): Asphalt, the city, the urban is the intimate fiber of this literary enterprise (10). While unemployment, drug use, and various forms of discrimination contribute to a troublesome persistence of social
violence in Spanish cities, and while organized crime assumes new transnational forms in the context of capitalist globalization, the novela negra continues not only to articulate preoccupations regarding the security of a democratic and globalized society, but also to contain those preoccupations through the serial production and consumption of detective fiction. However jaded the detective and however imperfect the justice administered by the narrative, the very longevity and popular recognition of detectives such as Carvalho, Méndez, and Petra Delicado testifies to a certain confidence in the ultimate viability of urban community and in the imageability of the cityscape that is rarely sustained in the crime fiction of Mexico City, Bogota, or Buenos Aires. When considered in conjunction with the recurrence of police procedural elements in even his most sensationally violent fiction, Andreu Martín’s recent commitment to the market-friendly format of the private-investigator series also reads as a veritable vote of confidence in the rule of law and the project of democracy in Spain.

A less genre-oriented study than this might, of course, provide a less sanguine assessment of the contemporary state of Spanish cultural consciousness. In her 2002 study Cultura herida: literatura y cine en la España de la democracia, Cristina Moreiras Menor borrowed Mark Seltzer’s concept of wound culture to interpret the literary and cinematic narratives of post-Franco Spain as expressions of a traumatized culture displaying an open wound aggravated by historical amnesia. Moreiras Menor argues that on the artistic evidence, the Spanish citizen lives mired in the most absolute individuality, under the dominion of uncertainty and the logics of mass communications... and with no confidence in the state, considering himself a witness, either implicated or distant but always impotent, of important and new social processes... This notion of a traumatized and wounded post-dictatorial culture is at odds with the evidence presented by mainstream Spanish crime fiction alone that, when juxtaposed with contemporary Spanish American crime fiction, displays what Chesterton might have recognized as a blooming romance of the police force... While I believe Moreiras Menor correct in her diagnosis of the emergence in other literature of a subject dispossessed of affect and alienated by immersion in the logics of a spectacular reality... I would suggest that the symptoms she describes are also visible to significant extent in the cultures of other advanced industrial democracies such as that of the United States. Perhaps one could distinguish between the wound cultures of Spain or the United States and other sorts of wound cultures developing in Mexico and Colombia by observing that while citizens of the former seem situated primarily now as consumers of spectacles...
of violence in the global media economy, citizens of the latter are far more vulnerable to a real violence that feeds the economy of spectacle.

From this perspective, the prizes and promotion granted by Barcelona publishers to the novelas negras of Fadanelli, Mendoza, and Piglia recall a question once posed in a different context by Carlos Fuentes: is it Mexico’s destiny to provide the United States with beautiful and lasting images in violence and, above all, of death? (17) Substituting Latin America for Mexico and the wealthy industrial nations for the United States, we might conclude that at present the provision of images of violence and death is, if not a destiny, at least a viable enterprise with considerable prospects of growth in the near future. As a cultural commodity tailored for mobility in globalizing literary markets, crime fiction is subject in its circulation to the increasingly asymmetrical power dynamics that define our world. However imperfect or compromised, it is also a major narrative vehicle for understanding the urban violence that troubles and harms many millions of people. At the origin of modern crime fiction, in The Murders in the Rue Morgue, the only reference to things Hispanic came in the form of a delusion suffered by a Parisian gendarme who mistook the shrieks of an orangutan for the voice of a foreigner. Could not make out what was said, notes a reporter, but believed the language was Spanish (200). In the transatlantic conversation that Poe initiated, the Hispanic voices are now articulate and engaged.
Notes

Chapter 1

1. Demetrio Estébanez Calderón provides the following definition of novela negra: Name given to a narrative subgenre (related to the detective novel) that arises in the U.S. in the early 1920s, and in which authors attempt to reflect, with a critical consciousness, the world of gangsterism and organized crime, a product of the violence and corruption of the capitalist society of the time (760). In his excellent study of Spanish crime fiction, Joan Ramon Resina clarifies that novela negra, like the English language category crime novel, may include both detective-centered and criminal-centered narratives (El cadáver 109). In its broadest current usage, the novela negra is understood by contemporary novelist Santiago Gamboa as encompassing in American terms, all the varieties of crime fiction ( Secret Histories ). While my focus in this study is on the hard-boiled discourses that have predominated in the Spanish-speaking world in recent decades, my usage of the category crime fiction is in keeping with the parameters laid out by Stephen Knight in Crime Fiction, 1800–2000 (xii).

2. Among the most elaborate of such homages, we might recall the Catalan writer Maria Aurèlia Capmany’s 1972 novel El jaqué de la democracia (The Morning Coat of Democracy, or El chaqué de la democracia in Castilian translation) with its coded but prominent invocation of Dashiell Hammett, as well as appropriations of Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe character by Argentine Oswaldo Soriano in Triste, solitario y final (1973) and Uruguayan Hiber Conteris in El diez por ciento de vida: el test Chandler (Ten Percent of Life,1985). Paco Ignacio Taibo II offers one of his many such tributes with his short story Mi Amigo Moran. Notas para una novela de canallas y villistas escrita por Dash Hammett (My Friend Moran. Notes for a Novel about Scoundrels and Villistas Written by Dash Hammett), included in his 2006 collection Sólo tu sombra fatal (Only Your Fatal Shadow).

3. Readers interested in detailed critical commentary on the Spanish detective canon should consult the excellent studies by José F. Colmeiro (1994) and Joan Ramon Resina (1997), the latter of which focuses extensively on the novels of Manuel Vázquez Montalbán. In this introduction, I am indebted to Colmeiro and Resina as well as to historical surveys by José R. Valles
Calatrava (1991) and Salvador Vázquez de Parga (1993). In English, the pioneering study of Spanish detective fiction is by Patricia Hart (1987). While scholarship on Spanish American detective fiction is less plentiful, Jorge Lafforgue and Jorge B. Rivera (1996) and Hubert Pöppel (2001) provide useful overviews of the genre in Argentina and Colombia, respectively, while Ilan Stavans (1993, 1997 in English), Vicente Francisco Torres (2003), and Persephone Braham (2004) provide the most complete coverage of Mexico. Braham’s study also deals with Cuba, as do monographs by Leonardo Padura Fuentes (2000) and Stephen Wilkinson (2006). In 2003, Clemens A. Franken Kurzen published the first monographic study of contemporary Chilean detective fiction.

4. Julian Symons judges that He had read Vidocq, and it is right to say that if the Mémoires had never been published Poe would not have created his amateur detective (34). In The Murders in the Rue Morgue, Auguste Dupin passes judgment on his Parisian predecessor: Vidocq, for example, was a good guesser, and a persevering man. But, without educated thought, he erred continually by the very intensity of his investigations (204). A namesake of the Parisian detective, Francisco Vidoc, features as a morgue director in El día del hurón (Day of the Ferret), a 1997 novela negra by Mexican writer Ricardo Chávez Castañeda.

5. Valles Calatrava writes that Spanish crime literature shares the same basic genre traits; there are, then, no special differences in construction with respect to novels of this type written in other nations (86); and it is not possible to speak rigorously of the existence of a Spanish school of novela negra writers (114). Vázquez de Parga’s general assessment in the introduction to his 1993 study is as follows: in this field, as in many others, Spain has behaved up through the present as a cultural colony of the Anglo-Saxon countries and, to a lesser extent, of France . . . in Spain, although there exists a long tradition of readers and aficionados of the detective novel, there is no generalized praxis of writing. There are isolated, concrete specimens of the genre with widely varying intentions, specimens of every type and level spread throughout the course of twentieth century, but they have never constituted the nucleus of a Spanish detective novel (La novela policiaca 10). Novelist Vázquez Montalbán, for his part, was insistent and emphatic in denying the existence of any Spanish autonomy in interviews and essays such as Sobre la inexistencia de la novela policiaca en España (On the Non-Existence of the Detective Novel in Spain). Colmeiro, while acknowledging the discontinuity and heterogeneity of Spanish production, disagrees with Valles Calatrava and Vázquez Montalbán and asserts that it is possible to distinguish certain characteristics shared by different Spanish detective series (La novela 264 5).

6. Patricia Hart largely echoes Vázquez de Parga in her dismissive characterization of the imitative production of the early twentieth century: To find a genuine detective work of the time, one must look to the serials, the dime novels and theatrical productions . . . the vast majority of the works of
detection written in Spain in the early part of the twentieth century were set in places outside of Spain that the reading public found exotic, and the writers themselves frequently used English-sounding pseudonyms (22 23). She adds: During the forties, the few Spaniards who wrote detective novels, again usually under English-sounding names, set their tales outside Spain almost exclusively, finding that readers still preferred foreign locales for detectives. These books were aimed at the popular taste, were frequently little more than reworkings of American or English plots, and contributed little to the development of a truly Spanish detective novel (25).

7. Vázquez Montalbán is one of many who unequivocally denied the literary value of this production: The Spanish detective novel has no literate tradition. In the past it was a consumer literature: the famous kiosk novels, paralleling other serial novel collections. . . . In Spain there is no tradition of writers approaching the detective story with dignity or assimilating the Anglo-Saxon puzzle novel of a certain quality, like that of Holmes, or French novel of the criminal underworld. There are no Spanish writers devoted to this literature, and Spanish literary culture has remained impervious to those influences, considering them a lesser genre literature (Sobre la inexistencia 50).

8. González Ledesma vindicates the largely forgotten producers of the Spanish popular novel as having contributed untold millions of dollars to the national economy through the exportation of books to America (La prehistoria 14).

9. The research of Lafforgue and Rivera suggests that Sherlock Holmes may have arrived in translation earlier in Argentina than in Spain. They cite the publication of three of Doyle’s Holmes tales by La Nación in 1898 and 1899 (119). An anecdote told by Donald Yates in an early article on Spanish American detective fiction suggests a relationship between the fervent Anglophilia of the Argentine cultural elite and the unusual prestige of the detective genre in Argentina. According to Yates, when a midwestern visitor to Victoria Ocampo’s house in the mid-1930s expressed surprise at finding an entire wall of English detective novels in her library, Ocampo responded, Of course. . . . The only language in which detective stories should be read is English! (228). Translated volumes of the Holmes novels, for the benefit of somewhat less cultured readers, also began to appear in Santiago de Chile as early as 1902.

10. Joan Ramon Resina considers Pedrolo’s Es vessa una sang fácil the first Spanish novel written in the U.S. hard-boiled style (48), but Pedrolo himself had this to say about the novel’s classification: It has a crime and all the amenities of the genre, yes, but it isn’t a detective novel in the usual sense. I was attracted by the possibility of introducing into a detective text all the apparently marginal elements that explain the characters in ultimately psychological terms (quoted in Fuster). In a 2003 interview, Colmeiro cites Fuster’s De mica en mica s’omple la pica (El procedimiento, 1972) and
Vázquez Montalbán’s *Tatuaje* (1974) as the first true *novelas negras* written in Spain (Diálogo).

11. Andreu Martín: I like to say that I learned to read (to read Catalan and to discover the emotion concealed in the pages of a book) with a formidable collection of detective novels published in Catalan in the 1960s, *La Cua de Palla*, edited by a magnificent writer named Manuel de Pedrolo (Interview).

12. Colmeiro suggests that the Spanish public became familiar with the aesthetics of the *novela negra* more through film noir than through the literature itself. He notes that film noir was also, however, subject to censorship and that films seen by Spanish audiences were often cut or deceptively dubbed (*La novela* 131 n.8). Valles Calatrava cites the reception of these films as one of three primary phenomena defining consumption and production in the detective genre in Spain between 1939 and 1975, which are firstly, the appearance of a popular literature with an acceptable technical and aesthetic level; secondly, the printing and reading of many translations of foreign crime stories; and, finally, the enormous influence of American film noir on our current writers (106). In a 2006 lecture, novelist José Luis Muñoz described 1950s-era film noir as the school of his generation: our culture was cinematic before it was literary. On the other side of the Atlantic, Juan Sasturain recalls that in 1947 Buenos Aires publisher Direzan decided to published translations of *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Big Sleep* in order to capitalize on the success of the film adaptations directed by John Huston (1941) and Howard Hawkes (1946).

13. The *Nota del autor* that precedes Taibo’s novel alludes to the frequent travels in which he has distinguished himself the primary international promoter of the *novela negra*: Originally, *Adiós, Madrid* was born as a program for Televisión Española, and later it became the ninth novel in the Héctor Belascoarán saga. It was written between 1990 and 1992, begun in Gijón, Spain, continued in Mexico City, Madrid, Acapulco, Havana, Madrid again and the Ranon airport, then rethought on a bus trip to Toluca using notes made on a Delta flight to New York, and falsely finished in Saltillo, Coahuila before being completed twice in Mexico City. Maybe this explains why it didn’t want to come out and why it’s so full of *nostalgia* and *distance* (italics in original, 11).

**Chapter 2**

1. In the article already cited in Chapter 1, Cole Swensen offers a reading of the detective tale as a cultural construct that successfully dealt with urban identity problems and particularly with the redefinition of the body by urban experience. She concludes that the city, as a language, recreates the human body by . . . adamantly foregrounding its surface. In this way, we have a new body that was not there before the city created it by being the perspective from which or context within which such a body is important,
is inevitable. Contemporary urban bodies are different than their non-urban predecessors, and an ongoing interest in the detective genre is an outgrowth of an attempt to find and inhabit this new body, as well as to mourn the passing of the old one (italics in original, 39 40).

2. The most useful studies dealing with Mexican detective fiction and available in English are Ilan Stavans’s *Antiheroes. Mexico and Its Detective Novel*, Amelia S. Simpson’s *Detective Fiction from Latin America*, and Persephone Braham’s *Crimes Against Persons, Crimes Against the State. Detective Fiction in Cuba and Mexico*.

3. According to Cynthia Duncan, pre-1960s Mexican detective writers generally imitated the narrative model of classical foreign detective fiction while ridiculing or at least mildly subverting its ideological premises. These texts, she writes, obviously do not defend the same values found in classic examples of North American and European detective fiction. They do little to assure their readers that all is well in the world. The individual cannot be sure that the law will protect him if he is innocent, nor that it will punish him if he is guilty. There is a randomness to the whole process of crime and punishment that is unsettling. The detective is not the infallible character he is in classical texts; he is, instead, incompetent, impotent, or disinterested in the abstract notion of justice. It is difficult to be sure that good triumphs over evil as these narratives draw to a close, for the boundaries between the two categories are often indistinct and arbitrary (206).

4. As Duncan and other critics note, the terms *policiaco* and *policial* are favored in Spanish over *detectivesco* to categorize crime novels in general, even in cases such as this in which policemen are routinely vilified. Where the police of the classic whodunit are frequently stupid or incompetent, states George Grella, the American police [in the hard-boiled novel] are brutal and degraded (111). Taibo, who is credited with having coined the term *neopolicíaco*, defines as one of its primary characteristics the characterization of the police as a force of chaos, of the barbaric system, willing to drown the citizens in violence (*La otra novela policiaca* 38).

5. José Sablich has observed that the *novela negra* was distinguished from the problem novel by its reliance on popular discourse and on short sentences, few adjectives and the minimum of description necessary to sustain the action (164). In *El género negro*, Mempo Giardinelli characterizes hard-boiled language simply as brutal and stark (13).

6. In an interview done during a walking tour of Mexico City, Taibo told Joyce Gregory Wyels: I have a very democratic view of the city. . . . I like it from the bottom. I like small people, small stories; I like common people very much (quoted in Wyels 26).

7. The standard U.S. private eye seeks to enforce his personal vision of moral justice by waging a solitary war against some sinister alliance of criminal, police, and government forces. The moral view is Manichaen. Chandler and Ross Macdonald have been particularly explicit in portraying their private eyes as romantic heroes adapted to the degraded metropolis of the
Naturalists and the muckrakers. In hard-boiled fiction, capitalists are so often blamed for pervasive social corruption that, in George Grella’s words, a quasi-Marxist distrust of the wealthy becomes a minor motif (111). Yet the class antagonism and the political disenchantment evident in hard-boiled fiction never resolved itself into a coherent challenge to prevailing cultural logic largely because, as Dennis Porter suggests, the ideology of the form prevented it. By adopting the mode of heroic adventure, Hammett and his successors committed themselves to the populist individualism implicit in it. Incompatible, for example, with the socialist collectivism of the Naturalists, heroic individualist narrative affirmed instead a radicalism of nostalgia for a mythical past (181). The basic ideology is still, as other critics have agreed, bourgeois, and the narrative formula has proved adaptable even to the ends of writers such as Mickey Spillane, whose politics Hammett would have abhorred.

8. Porter observes that Hammett established early on the model for the hard-boiled view of urban society. The cityscapes of his early writings are represented as perverted fiefdoms of the owners of capital and of those strong-arm men who support them and live off their greed. . . . The big house, that enduring symbol of social stability through hierarchical order in the British tradition, takes in Chandler the form of the Sternwood mansion (The Big Sleep) or the Grayle house (Farewell, My Lovely). That is to say, it is the outward manifestation of mere wealth without social responsibility or a prescribed social role. The ostentatious luxury of the decor serves chiefly to point up the ironic contrast with the moral corruption of the inhabitants (198).

9. The homage is obvious when we recall that Taibo had already quoted the closing sentence of La busca as an epigraph in the second Belascoarán novel, Cosa fácil (1977). La busca together with its sequel Mala hierba (Weeds) from the following year are credited by critic E. Inman Fox with providing the most realistic description of a city in all of Spanish literature (193). John Dos Passos praised them as the true Baedeker to that seething maze of rebellious, unkempt, louse-bitten, soaring life that was Madrid (73).

10. Chilean scholar Martín Hopenhayn presents his similar conclusions very eloquently in another article from 2002: Two specters are haunting the Latin American metropolis: drugs and violence. There is no shortage of reasons for this, given that Latin America has the fastest urban growth rates in the world of any region in the world, combined with dynamics that are easily associated with increases not only in drug abuse but also in violence: the worst income distribution on the planet, which doesn’t seem to have improved even during the economic reactivation of the 1990s; a young population that for the most part feels excluded from politics and employment and for whom the channels of social mobility are more uncertain than ever; the growing gap between increased image consumption and decreased consumption of material goods, which is to say, ever more empty hands and ever more eyes filled with advertised products; and a spreading ‘existential rootlessness,’ consisting of changes in values and territories and of the precariousness of employment, all of
which leads people to live with less ground to stand on and less future to behold (70).

11. My reliance in this book on homicide rates to compare levels of violence prevailing in various countries reflects the relatively greater accuracy of these statistics in comparison with measures of other forms of social violence. Spanish researcher Juan Avilés Farré states: International comparisons of known crimes are problematic due above all to the fact that the percentage that they represent in comparison to the number of crimes actually committed varies considerably from country to country. The same is not true in the specific case of homicide. Because of its gravity and the improbability of it going unnoticed, homicide is the best basis of comparison between countries and between historical periods (131).

12. In Todo lo que debería saber sobre el crimen organizado en México (Everything You Should Know About Organized Crime in Mexico), the Instituto Mexicano de Estudios de la Criminalidad Organizada offers an extensive and detailed substantiation of the thesis that the central cause of the explosive growth of delinquency [in recent decades] is that in Mexico crime has been organized, promoted and protected from within the state (16).

13. For a critique of Marcos’s contribution to the novel, see my article Muertos incómodos: the Monologic Polyphony of Subcomandante Marcos.

14. Vicente Francisco Torres recalls in particular the vivid urban portrait offered in Ensayo de un crimen, Rodolfo Usigli’s sui generis novel of 1944. Though classifiable neither as a classical mystery novel nor as hard-boiled, Usigli’s tale of an aristocratic would-be murderer stands as a testimony of life in Mexico City in the late 1930s and early 1940s... Despite the fact that critics have emphasized the novel’s depiction of such distinguished locales as the terrace of the Hotel Reforma, Lady Baltimore, El Patio, Sanborns de Madero, el Café París... it has gone unremarked that Usigli also registers less chic sites, such as a gay bar on Santa María la Redonda... a semi-clandestine dive on Correo Mayor where clients drank anisette and smoked from a narghileh, and, most impressively, the Leda cabaret... where artists went in search of excitement and inspiration [and where] elegant people mixed with workers, prostitutes and pimps (Torres 31). Though affinities between Usigli’s novel and the hard-boiled genre have been alleged, his mapping of the city lacks the latter’s programmatic interest in locating the occult bases of criminal power. For an original reading of Usigli’s novel in relation to the post-revolutionary Mexican culture, see Fernando Fabio Sánchez.

15. On the origin of this term and its adoption in Spanish, see Birkenmaier (491 92) and De Ferrari (33 34).

Chapter 3

1. In Delightful Murder, Marxist genre historian Ernest Mandel offers one of the clearest interpretations of classical detective fiction as the epitome of
bourgeois rationality in literature (25 26). By Mandel’s account, the common ideology of the original and classical detective story in Britain, the United States, and the countries of the European continent remains quintessentially bourgeois. Reified death; formalized crime-detection oriented toward proof acceptable in courts of justice operating according to strictly defined rules; the pursuit of the criminal by the hero depicted as a battle between brains; human beings reduced to ‘pure’ analytical intelligence; partial fragmented rationality elevated to the status of an absolute guiding principle of human behaviour; individual conflicts used as a generalized substitute for conflicts between social groups and layers—all this is bourgeois ideology *par excellence*, a striking synthesis of human alienation in bourgeois society (47).

2. For a thorough account of the historical relationship between the rise of organized crime and the origin of hard-boiled detective fiction in the U.S., see chapter 4 of Mandel’s *Delightful Murder*.

3. In his 1990 study, Hilfer proposes a categorical distinction between the detective story and the crime novel. By his account, the central and defining feature of the crime novel is that in it self and world, guilt and innocence are problematic (2). In the absence of a detective, Hilfer proposes, the crime novel relies on four alternative models of protagonist: the murderer, the guilty bystander, the individual falsely suspected of a crime, and the victim (3 6). The inclusion of both detective-centered and non-detective-centered variants within the Spanish-language category of the *novela negra* dictates the refusal of Hilfer’s distinction in this study.

4. Recent press reports advise of an ongoing surge in criminal violence in Central America. Fifteen years after peace accords put an end to civil war in El Salvador, it has become Latin America’s most violent country and one of the three most violent in the world (Dalton Cárceles). Salvadoran researcher Janeth Aguilar describes a state delegitimized by its inability to control crime and a society mired in anarchy and chaos (Dalton El Salvador). Similar trends in neighboring Guatemala led Rigoberta Menchú to declare during a recent unsuccessful presidential campaign that violence has us on our knees, and that organized crime, corruption and narcotrafficking are forces incrusted within the state. Yolanda Pérez Ruiz, former president of the Colegio de Abogados y Notarios de Guatemala concurs: “There is no longer any area of the Guatemalan state that is not penetrated by crime...the Guatemalan state is already a failed state. A state of near total impunity reigned in 2006, when of 5,885 homicides reported in a population of about twelve million, only 2 percent were investigated and only .5 percent ever brought to trial, with many of those tried acquitted for lack of valid evidence (Elías). Misha Kokotovic’s article *Neoliberal Noir* offers an overview of contemporary Central American Crime Fiction in light of this current crisis.

5. According to Juan Carlos Pérgolis, author of a monographic study on Latin American plazas, *The Plaza de Bolívar, the place of Bogota*, is a symbolic
space; it gives the current identity of the city, at the same time as it explains its history; it represents the Nation and its institutions, it is the Plaza of Colombia (italics in original 90).

6. Pérgolis distinguishes between three urban models that have marked the historical development of Latin American cities: the continuous city, characteristic of our settlements during the colonial period and the Republic, up until the early years of the Modern Movement in Architecture (in Colombia, approximately the 1930s); the discontinuous city, belonging to modern urbanism and valid, in many cases, up through the present, and the current tendency toward the fragmented city (9). Pérgolis associates the latter model with atomization of everything, multiplicity of images and the lack of an apparent cohesive structure [impeding] comprehension of any supposed totality (15). He proposes that any reading of the contemporary city requires adoption of the aesthetics of the fragment, valuing each element in itself (15), since the dispersive principle governing the functioning of the contemporary metropolis is the same as that governing postmodern cultural production in general: The utopia of totality, characteristic of modern thought, broke down, exploded into the heterotopy of fragments playing on top of unstable structures (39).

7. Although less iconic a figure than the hard-boiled private investigator, the hard-boiled investigative reporter has nearly as long a history. According to Rex Burns, the first hard-boiled story featuring a newspaper reporter as investigative protagonist appeared in Black Mask in 1934 (200).

8. This memorably awful tableau recalls comments by David Trotter regarding the prominence of death by drowning in hard-boiled sub-genre. Since hard-boiled novels try harder than their classic counterparts to make an inaugural mess, they frequently favor floaters to more effectively disrupt the conversion of matter into sign. They [drowning victims] are, as everyone must know by now, hard to fingerprint and thus to identify. They evade the very technique which first associated detection (and detective stories) with the romance of scientific reason, of power/knowledge (25).

9. Though I will not have occasion to consider it here, García Márquez’s Crónica de una muerte anunciada provides a very useful counterpoint to Perder and to Vallejo’s La virgen de los sicarios in its literary treatment of the corpse. My article Open Up a Few Corpses deals extensively with the role of the autopsied cadaver as a figure of the disintegrating social body and of the text itself.

10. In Powers of Horror, Julia Kristeva provides us with perhaps the most potent theoretical framework for understanding detective fiction’s deployment of the cadaver and its ritual containment of the threat it represents: that of utter indifferentiation, insignification, and the terminal suspension of subjectivity. Her study opens with a sweeping consideration of the threat of abjection of the subject by the cadaver, that border that has encroached upon everything. Kristeva writes: The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject.
It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us (3–4). It is, in this sense, detective fiction’s futile and thus incessant task to subdue the abject that, for Kristeva, simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject (5).

11. A comprehensive study of perceptions of Bogota directed by Armando Silva and published in 2003 confirms the broader research mentioned earlier in this chapter. The theme of insecurity is perhaps the strongest imaginary manifested in the cities of Latin America, and Bogota is no exception (Silva 84). When in the year 2000 social scientists asked city residents to name the feelings that Bogota inspired in them, fear was the most frequent response, and municipal studies during the same period found that almost no one considered the city safe (Silva 53, 87). Despite a sustained and considerable decline in crime rates, the perception of danger has not eased (Silva 87). Another study conducted by other researchers during the second half of the 1990s concluded that 73 percent of Bogota residents were afraid of the city (Silva 118).

12. In La ciudad de Mr. Hyde, Mendoza summarizes this notion already so prevalent in his novels. There is one city governed by the law, by reason, and another very different one governed by pleasure, instincts, vice and boredom with ourselves. One is the city of Dr. Jekyll, the solar city of freshly showered people leaving for work, and the other the city of desire, that of Mr. Hyde, the lunar city that conceals the greatest secrets and perversions. The people we live, work and socialize with are in reality many more than we know, each one multiplies herself, subdivides himself, proliferates and can only show one part of him or herself, a single being, perhaps the most predictable and dullest one. But the other beings are there, lurking, waiting for the opportunity to emerge and conquer a city that incites them, conceals them and shelters them in its seductive shadows. And although the city is designed to sustain an argument for identity, it is multiplicity that ends up imposing itself. As the following discussion will show, themes of psychic fragmentation, multiplicity of selves and otherness within are played out constantly on the urban geography of Mendoza’s novels.

13. I was interested to find that when Mendoza offered a personal summary of the memorable achievements of contemporary Latin American novelists in a 2003 conference paper titled Fuerzas centrífugas y centrípetas, (Centrifugal and Centripetal Forces) the first of twenty specific references he made was to Parra’s Nostalgia de la sombra. Supporting the perception of a strong affinity with his own characters, Mendoza professed enthusiasm for the spiritual exile of Eduardo Parra’s triggerman (132).

14. Silva explains that in the early 1990s El Cartucho was a zone of extreme social destitution where thousands of indigents gathered in a bleak scenario of crime and drugs (252). The area became well known as a center of drug and arms trafficking, as well as a gathering point for recyclers and gangs of thieves. In an interview, Mendoza recalls reading about conditions
that inspired him to spend months getting to know El Cartucho before writing *Scorpio City*. Around 1993 and 1994 I saw reports by non-governmental organizations that talked about 185 murders in the Calle del Cartucho, in other words 185 crimes in 100 yards, in hardly a block. That’s a record like all our records, a bloody one, a record of crime and injustice, and it seemed incredible to me that no one had written about it. . . . This was something that hadn’t happened anywhere else, and I told myself that I needed to write about it, to develop my contact with the leader of El Cartucho. . . . It was hard to enter the underworld, and I spent about a year and a half interacting with those people, getting to know what the conflicts in the zone were, immersing myself in preparation for a novel and warming up the motor for a story until one night in a conversation the perfect plot came to me. The dialogue that I narrate in the novel, it’s a conversation with the character of Celia. That’s how I heard about a policeman who tried to denounce social cleansing groups and got eliminated in a bad way. I thought that was a great plot, and it was just what I was waiting for (Interview Bernal).

15. Colombian journalist and novelist Laura Restrepo stated in an interview in 2001: The future is what we are living in Colombia . . . the worst things that are happening in Colombia are the result of the juxtaposition of certain atavistic cultures with the attempt to carry out a politics of globalization, of domineering capital in conflict with archaic structures. . . . Colombia is a laboratory of the future, the situation of Colombians will spread rapidly throughout the world unless the current dynamic changes, and I think that following the attack on the World Trade Center this is much more clearly understood. Fernando Vallejo, Colombia’s most vociferous herald of doom, heartily concurs: Colombia is the vanguard of disaster. The same thing will end up happening everywhere in the world (quoted in Hermoso).

16. Dashiell Hammett’s *The Dain Curse*, published the same year as *Red Harvest* (1929), involved a Californian religious cult. A Druze cult as well as zodiac signs feature as prominently in Las doce figuras del mundo, the first detective story coauthored by Borges and Bioy Casares and published under the pseudonym H. Bustos Domecq in *Sur* in 1941.

17. In interviews, Mendoza has recognized his affiliation with an aesthetics of the grotesque (Interview Acción) and a degraded realism, which some critics have also called dirty realism (Interview Bernal).

18. This is an argument I first presented in an essay titled The Detective is Dead. Long Live the Novela Negra!

19. The protagonist of Mendoza’s 2004 novel *Cobro de sangre* (Blood Vengeance) is a man whose Communist parents are killed by the Colombian army and who takes revenge years later by becoming an urban guerrilla and killing the general responsible in a bombing attack in Bogota. He then assumes a false identity and works for a year as a literature teacher, dedicating his free time to producing a sensorial map of Bogota that expands in
Borgesian fashion and begins to fill his whole apartment. When his true identity is discovered, he is jailed for seventeen years, and upon his release he lives briefly as a vagabond but is forced into a violent confrontation with his former comrades before the novel ends with a scene of Buddhist-inflected rebirth. A number of stories in Mendoza’s *Una escalera al cielo* (*A Stairway to Heaven*, 2004) also center on incidents of urban violence (*La fiesta*, *Historia en la habitación 804*, *Ésta es tu noche*, *La prueba*, *Cuento de navidad*, and *El bailarín*).

20. In his indispensable survey, Pöppel examines a number of other Colombian novelists who have worked in variants of the *novela negra* genre. Among the very few who have developed series featuring a single investigator protagonist are Gonzalo España, who writes about a federal prosecutor based in a fictional city called Alcandora, very reminiscent of Barrancabermeja. Other crime novels set in Bogota, which I find far less interesting than those examined in this chapter, include Juan Carlos Rubiano’s *Tres exóticas aventuras de Ray López—detective privado* (*Three Exotic Adventures of Ray López—Private Detective*, 1996), which alternates between horror fantasy and crude detective farce, and a hard-boiled novella by Rodrigo Argüello, *Trancón sobre el asfalto* (*Vida y obra de un asesino nato*) (*Traffic Jam on Asphalt [Life and Times of a Born Killer]* 1999). In this text, categorized somewhat grandly by the author as *picaresca negra*, a professional criminal narrates a relatively inconsequential adventure, and the narrative has little to offer beyond clichés, a few stray literary references, and a pair of pornographic set-pieces involving prostitutes. On the whole, Argüello traipses listlessly over the territory plowed by Mendoza, and the text’s only possible interest here is in its reiteration of certain hard-boiled features previously discussed, for example, the casually cruel infliction of male voyeurism on female bodies: I look at her shamelessly. I undress her with my gaze: I touch her, I excite her, she gets uncomfortable (39). In Argüello’s climax, his narrator commits a triple murder and finishes off a female victim, the girlfriend of a rival criminal, in a sequence recalling the misogynistic sadism of Mickey Spillane: the little lady who’s fallen on her ass on the asphalt looks at me in horror. Through the miniskirt and the blouse she’s wearing, I confirm that she’s got very nice thighs and great tits. I hope they’re not implants. I aim the revolver at her. She drags herself backward asking me not to kill her. I shoot her right between her two tits. Then I let her have one in each thigh (85). It would be hard to find a clearer example of the *macabre delight* in violence for which Abad Faciolince denounced Colombian crime fiction (*Entrevista*). Curiously, this passage closely parallels the climactic sequence in Emilio Maillé’s film *Rosario Tijeras*, which opts to play up the execution of the titular *sicaria*, despite Jorge Franco Ramos’s discrete omission of this incident in the novel. See my article *Rosario Tijeras: Femme Fatale* in Thrall, forthcoming in the *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos*.

21. As my previous comments have indicated, the denunciation of violence in Mendoza’s narrative seems inseparable from a considerable degree of fascination
with it and with a certain artistic pride in representing an extremely dan-
gerous city. In an interview published in 2007, Álvaro Antonio Bernal asked Mendoza what distinguished Bogota from other megacities, and Mendoza answered that it is the vertigo or adrenaline rush produced by proximity to death. Vertigo. Nowhere else in the world is death as close by as in Bogota, and the figures and statistics still show that we’re one of the most violent cities in the world, although the city has changed. . . . Only by reflecting on death can one understand the full dimension of what it is to be alive, so nowhere else in the world do people feel as alive as here. I think that’s the great lesson of living in Bogota. In La virgen de los sicarios, a novel I will discuss later in this chapter, Fernando Vallejo’s semi-autobiographical narrator describes feeling a comparable exhilaration and pride upon hearing news of a major political assassination while living abroad in Switzerland (a country that seems to be identified as the anti-Colombia in a certain Colombian imaginary). When they killed the candidate I told you about I was in Switzerland, in a hotel with lake and television. Kolombien’ they said on the TV and my heart skipped a beat. . . . The rumble on the dais went all round the world and caused the name of my country to ring out. I felt so very, very proud of Colombia . . . You,’ I said to the Swiss, are practically dead. Observe the images before you: that is life, pure life’ (Our Lady 40 41).

22. My view of La virgen de los sicarios is close to that expressed by Ana Serra in a 2003 article that reads the novel as a parody of the testimonial genre. Serra praises La virgen as ultimately a forceful denunciation of the violence in which Fernando is caught up: [T]he text manages to bring the sicarios near to the reader even as it mounts a devastating, although indirect, critique of violence. . . . Despite being literally enamored of the sicarios, Fernando/Vallejo comes to disapprove of their violence in the novel. . . . [T]he text’s parodic use of testimony and violence, which cannot be wholly digestible or explicable, reproduces the characteristics of the phenomenon of the sicariato more forcefully than any other text (66, 73, 74). This is also the view taken by Geoffrey Kantaris in his comments on the discomfort and moral panic inspired in the spectator by Barbet Schroeder’s film adaptation of the novel: the film operates desensitization as defetishization, an emptying out of our stock moral responses towards violence . . . the film is elaborating a radical critique of the systemic production of violence.

23. Fernando’s apparently ambivalent attitude toward violence, as evident in his tolerance of the actions of the sicarios and his recommendation of mass extermination as a solution of Colombia’s problems, has elicited less than favorable reactions from a number of critics. Jean Franco writes warily: Unless we read irony into the account, the viewpoint is misogynist and racist. . . . The question is whether he [the narrator] is deliberately forcing us to face the fascist within’ or whether he expects our complicity (225). Mario Correa Tascón characterizes La virgen both as a great work and as a racist treatise that compares well with Nazi prayerbooks, while Gabriela
Polit Dueñas evaluates Fernando’s discourse as laden with a profound neo-Fascism (133). Rory O’Bryen agrees that the narrator’s voice may legitimately said to be ‘fascist’ (201), and he cites Vallejo’s acknowledgments that Fernando’s voice is nearly indistinguishable from his own in order to conclude that in such a light one cannot help taking [the novel’s] fascistic discourses at face value (196). The release of Barbet Schroeder’s film provoked even more vociferous condemnation from Colombian journalists, such as Germán Santamaría and Martha Ligia Parra. The intensity and volume of critical labor already exerted both against La virgen and in defense of it seems to confirm Rossana Reguillo’s qualification of the novel as already canonical (42).

24. In her 2004 study Ciudades escritas, Luz Mary Giraldo offers a comprehensive survey of Colombian urban narrative in the second half of the twentieth century, contemplating the novela negra as one prominent component. A number of Giraldo’s conclusions with regard to the general trajectory of change in representations of the city prove complementary to those essayed here. At the end of this century, the city has been represented as an anomalous, disintegratory, destructuring, alienating and chaotic entity (58). Later in her study, Giraldo adds: As our century draws to a close and certain models dissolve, cities express the crisis of the subject, pulverization of [social] relations and the degradation of values. What was a solemn or desired place or a form of conceiving of culture comes to be seen in a conflictive and skeptical manner. . . . Life in the cities changes vertiginously, giving rise to heterogeneous places brimming with unanswered questions. The memory of an ideal past or the reference to a model is replaced by the relationship to the current world, which presents the most extreme forms of a civilization marked by massification, anonymity, quotidian violence, the immediatist communication favored by the media, capitalist consumerism and the new culture (131 32).

25. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Colombian novelist Héctor Abad Faciolince not only named the sicaresca but also speaks forcefully against it. He explains his own refusal to write about the sicarios as follows: For very vital and direct reasons, because my own most important relative was killed by sicarios, I’ve never felt any fascination with them. I’ve felt exactly the opposite. I’ve felt repulsion. It seems to me that Colombian literature developed a taste for these thugs and that some of the narratives partially justified them. It’s as though the victims were of no interest and the interest of Colombian literature had centered for a long time on the executioners, on the aggressors. The novel that I’m now finishing and that I hope to publish in October [El olvido que seremos 2006] is precisely the reverse of the picaresque novel; a novel about a victim of the sicarios, which seems to me a more interesting and valuable life (Interview Orrego).
CHAPTER 4

1. In Argentina 1880 represents not only a historical break, with the definitive establishment of the state, political and legal unification, and entry into the world market. It also represents a literary break, because it introduces a group of young writers (average age thirty five: President Julio A. Roca is thirty eight) who form something like the cultural coalition of the new Argentine state. They are not professional men of letters, but rather the first university writers in Argentina and at the same time state civil servants. The cultural and literary coalition of 1880 is thus a state coalition, perhaps the first (Ludmer 11).

2. Lafforgue and Rivera’s Asesinos de papel includes a good deal of information on Borges’s unfavorable assessment of the U.S. hard-boiled novel. In various interviews, Borges denounced the hard-boiled writers for their reliance on sadism, violence and pornography, for their sloppy narrative construction and for their vulgar pretention to realism (Lafforgue and Rivera 47–48, 126–27). Borges resolutely defends values such as narrative order and intellectual ingenuity on which the classical detective model was founded. Comments published in Borges oral in 1979 reiterated this criticism. At present, the detective genre is realistic and violent, a genre of sexual violence as well. In any case, it has disappeared. The intellectual origin of the detective story has been forgotten (79).

3. In Asesinos de papel, Lafforgue and Rivera identify a group of scarcely known Argentine translators and writers who were truly professional producers of the genre literature sold in the numerous kiosk collections of the 1950s and ’60s (85). Eduardo Goligorsky, mentioned in Chapter 1 as one of the most prolific of these specialists, published under numerous pseudonyms and alternated translations with pseudo-translations, reaching a wide public and earning, by his own account, an unusually steady income for an Argentine fiction writer of the 1960s. Lafforgue and Rivera quote Goligorsky’s recollection that around 1960, in the heyday of the Argentine hard-boiled pulp collections, print runs of hard-boiled novels fluctuated between ten and thirty thousand copies. The writers most proficient in the genre formula might need only a week to turn out a 128-page novel for which they were paid eight thousand pesos (24). According to Néstor Ponce, The growth of the market . . . facilitated the appearance of professional writers with different levels of dedication to the detective genre. This professionalization illustrates the concrete possibility of the incorporation of new social sectors into the ‘republic of letters’ (Diagonales 152). As Giardinelli observes, print runs of thirty thousand copies today would make Latin American publishers green with envy (Introduction xxviii). In the mid-1980s, Jorge Lafforgue calculated the average print run for Argentine novels at between two and three thousand (165).

4. As mentioned in Chapter 1, one of the most prominent of these publishing initiatives was the Serie Negra introduced by Editorial Tiempo Contemporáneo.
in 1969. This was the best coordinated collection of foreign hard-boiled writing yet published in Argentina, and it was edited by a young writer who has since come to be considered one of Argentina’s most important living novelists, Ricardo Piglia. Rodolfo Walsh was among the collaborators who provided more careful and complete Spanish translations than those afforded hard-boiled novels in earlier kiosk collections.

5. Writing in collaboration with two other novelists, Saccomanno produced the first of five novels published under pseudonyms in the Colección Caín (Lafforgue and Rivera 29). Along with the better known titles by Puig, Soriano, Martelli, and Martini, Julio César Galtero also published the hard-boiled El jefe de seguridad (Head of Security) in 1973, while Walsh issued another of his nonfiction investigative texts, El caso Satanowsky (The Satanowsky Case).

6. Historian David Rock writes that while a number of small guerrilla groups surfaced in Argentina during the 1960s, more effective guerrilla operations of kidnapping, assassination, robbery, bombing, and occasional assaults on security forces began in 1970. By the end of that year, three separate Peronist guerrilla groups had appeared, along with the increasingly formidable Trotskyite Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP), later redefined as Guevarist (352 53). Counterrevolutionary groups reacted to the guerrilla offensive by adopting extralegal tactics of their own. The coming of the guerrillas in mid 1970 immediately injected a vicious dialectic into the country’s conflict-ridden politics. In April 1970 an extreme right-wing group, reputedly composed of off duty police, known as Mano (Hand), attacked the Soviet ambassador in retaliation for the kidnapping [of the Paraguayan consul] in Posadas. Counterterrorism escalated rapidly, and by the end of 1970 Mano and other clandestine right-wing groups conducted their own series of kidnaps, abducting students or union militants of Peronist or leftist affiliation. Most of these victims simply vanished without a trace, and the few to reappear spoke of torture. By the early months of 1971 one such ‘disappearance’ occurred on average each eighteen days (Rock 355). As insurgent forces persisted and grew during the following years, with the Peronist guerrillas uniting under the name of Montoneros, the three armed services were drawn steadily into a war on subversion. Each blow struck by the guerrillas was matched in kind by clandestine groups on the right, and torture became a standard technique in the police interrogation of suspects (Rock 356). When both the Montoneros and the ERP persisted in their violent activities following the return to power of Juan Perón in 1973, the Peronist state orchestrated its own campaign of counterterrorism through the Alianza Anticomunista Argentina, or Triple A, thought to be run through the federal police (Rock 360). Following Perón’s death, the government of his widow Isabel Perón took an additional step toward the abolition of constitutional guarantees in November 1974 when it declared a state of siege in order to allow the army more latitude in responding to the unrelenting campaigns by the guerrilla forces.

NOTES

196
In her comments on *Los asesinos*, Amelia Simpson (55 56) focuses rather too generously on Martini’s intercalation of references to Monroe’s abusive objectification by the mass media as a critical complement to his depiction of the more radical objectification enacted by her murderer. While this critical discourse is certainly present in the text, it seems to me strongly overpowered by the impact of Martini’s first-person narration of the fantasy of the bloody killing of the world’s most beautiful woman, first proffered on the opening page of the novel. Although clearly condemning his narrator for moral and political reasons, Martini succumbs to the same genre trap as Collazos when he depends for dramatic and commercial effect on the scenes depicting the beating, rape, mutilation, and humiliation of the actress who personified culturally dominant male fantasies of female sexuality at mid-century. As imagined by Martini in chapter 23 of *Los asesinos*, the murder of Marilyn Monroe is preceded by a photo session narrated over several pages in which she is said to undress and pose willingly in the most provocative positions imaginable for the general’s camera before his lust culminates in violence. I cut her throat, her arms, her face, intones Martini’s general. Her breasts, her belly, her legs. Her back, her buttocks, her shoulders. The blood came out in spurts (255). Throughout the novel, Martini continues to activate this fantasy by having the general consult photos of the corpse.

8. Colmeiro explains as follows the novel’s betrayal of its advertised genre of novela policial: the absence of a detective or policeman unraveling the criminal intrigue, and the lack of a punishable crime...point toward an antidetective novel...The detective language is only another appropriated language serving as a model for the protagonists and as a structural framework in the novel (187). *The Buenos Aires Affair* is certainly one of the most critically examined novels discussed in this study. At the time of this writing, a keyword search for Puig and Affair in the electronic version of the MLA International Bibliography turned up more than twenty entries. In *Manuel Puig ante la crítica: bibliografía analítica y comentada (1968–1996)*, Guadalupe Martí-Peña cites a number of additional sources that don’t appear among the MLA search results (104 09). Among the critics who have dealt most directly with the question of the relation of *The Buenos Aires Affair* to detective genre, Juan Armando Epple calls it an antidetective novel (45) and René A. Campos a pseudo-detective novel (194) or noir novel (200). Lucille Kerr, who offers a careful analysis of the dispersal of detective agency and of truth in the novel, writes that Puig’s novel deforms that model [of the detective genre] in an apparently parodic reworking of its conventions. Yet, as in his other novels, the inventive operations through which ‘deformation’ is effected also regenerate and raise up the form (138). Marta Morello Frosch finds that *The Buenos Aires Affair* resembles less a detective novel than a crime movie...without detectives (153).

9. Celeste Fraser Delgado offers another cogent analysis of the novel’s evocation of this double repression. She writes that one chain of substitutions in

---

**Notes**

197
the novel’s discourse replaces the ‘pervert’ with the militant, as proscribed sexuality and proscribed sexual activity exchange places throughout the novel. . . . The Buenos Aires Affair takes place against the backdrop not only of the ‘cordobazo’ but against the escalating moral campaigns of the military regimes. Within this context, the queer sexuality repressed by the engineers of middle class national formation return in the form of a forgotten crime covered over by the representation of a false crime. Puig, by unmooring violence from any isolated act, unsettles the mechanism by which classic detective fiction disavowed the complicity of social relations and the discourses that sustain them in the production of ‘crime’ (66, 70). In Néstor Ponce’s view, Puig transgresses the norms of the genre by utilizing the codes of the detective novel, but without writing a properly generic text . . . the political traverses his work and in The Buenos Aires Affair relates it unquestionably to the hard-boiled and its sampling of the social mosaic. The novel not only observes violence as an individual phenomenon, but also insists on the social motivations of the crimes (authoritarianism within the family, phallocracy, the imposition of stereotypes) (Compartir la vida misma 300–01).

10. For many years, wrote Borges, in books now happily forgotten, I tried to copy down the flavor, the essence of the outlying suburbs of Buenos Aires. Of course, I abounded in local words; I did not omit such words as cuchilleros, milonga, tapia and others, and thus I wrote those forgettable and forgotten books. Then, about a year ago, I wrote a story called ‘La muerte y la brújula,’ which is a kind of nightmare, a nightmare in which there are elements of Buenos Aires, deformed by the horror of the nightmare. There I think of the Paseo Colón and call it rue de Toulon; I think of the country houses of Androgué and call them Triste-le-Roy; when this story was published, my friends told me that at last they had found in what I wrote the flavor of the outskirts of Buenos Aires. Precisely because I had not set out to find that flavor, because I had abandoned myself to a dream, I was able to accomplish, after so many years, what I had previously sought in vain (The Argentine Writer and Tradition 175–76).

11. In a 1991 article to which I will refer repeatedly, José Pablo Feinmann summarized the historical circumstances to which Martini’s novel alludes: the political climate in which El cerco is conceived is that of the Triple A, an extreme-right organization accused of having committed two thousand murders, that of the Guevarist guerrilla tactics of the extreme left, that of the military coup plotters awaiting their moment to strike (as they finally did in March, 1976) and that of the government of María Estela Martínez de Perón, whose strong man was the sinister José López Rega [Minister of Social Welfare in her government], the instigator of the actions of the Triple A (Estado policial 145).

12. Tizziani does not use Marxist language in the novel, but certain passages make very clear the nature of Cairo’s resistance to labor through crime. Traveling on the subway in a car full of commuters, the fugitive reflects further on his
failure to escape the system altogether, as he stares at his fellow passengers and realizes that after years of trying to escape their fate, he remains a sheep like them, only now with a mark on his ear. On further reflection, however, the dejection of the commuters reinforces his determination to avoid their fate (88). A passage in which Cairo recalls the regimentation of daily activities in jail evokes even more vividly Foucauldian notions of the disciplining of bodies in time and space. He recalls that he had few fixed habits before being arrested, but that in jail he discovered that what broke prisoners, along with the guard’s baton and the solitary confinement cell, was the routing of repeating the same movements day by day with compulsory chronometric regularity (43). This passage describes in detail relentless, rigid routines of sleep, eating, washing, and machine work in a shop.

13. The Academia Argentina de Letras defines *lunfardo* both as a synonym of thief and as a jargon originally spoken in Buenos Aires at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by criminals, immigrants, and other marginal groups before becoming integrated more generally into popular Argentine speech (373).

14. This according to etymologies cited by José Gobello in his *Nuevo Diccionario Lunfardo*.

15. In 1993, André Gunder Frank delivered a very bleak assessment of the deterioration of Argentina’s relative position in the world economy over the course of the century. During this century, concluded Frank, and especially in its second half, Latin America in particular and most of the Third World have been increasingly marginalized in the world economy and to a large extent in world politics. . . . [P]erhaps the most dramatic and recent increase in marginalization or the accelerated process of Africanization is that of Latin America. The greatest relative, if not absolute, pauperization is that of the country that was once the richest and most promising, Argentina (28–29). By Frank’s account, Argentina went from providing 3 percent of world exports in 1928 to .3 percent in 1990.

16. In *Estado policial*, Feinmann recounts how director Adolfo Aristarain’s accentuated the political reading of the story. In the sequence in which Mendizábal walked to receive his assignment, Feinmann points out that Aristarain included details such as a sign reading Military Zone and that the Peña character wore a military haircut. In the film, as Mendizábal receives his assignment from a man behind a desk in an office, the camera picks out a statue of a grenadier sitting on the desk. According to Feinmann, those elements underscore one of the essential lines of the film: Power as criminality (151).

17. Amelia S. Simpson’s reading of *Últimos días* focuses more on the corporate capitalist and bureaucratic aspects of the story. The hard-boiled themes of organized crime and the bureaucratization and depersonalization of society are central to Feinmann’s novel. . . . Feinmann uses the organized underworld to represent a society in which violence is naturalized. . . . While the criminal nature of the business is indicated, in every other way the setting
resembles that of any corporate executive office (140, 142). Simpson observes that Feinmann portrays a social system of organization that defines individuals as interchangeable, expendable units . . . creating an image of the endless repetition of impersonal murder, which is equally an image of the infinite perpetuation of the patterns of the corporate system (144).

18. David Rock notes that by the time the Argentine army intervened decisively against the ERP in Tucumán in early 1975, during the presidency of Isabel Perón, the armed forces were well on their way to organizing the mechanisms of clandestine repression that would be fully activated following the 1976 coup. The three armed services were now on full war footing; supported by the state security police (Coordinación Federal), each formed espionage networks and clandestine operational units. These forces, which soon dwarfed their adversaries, imposed repression by the use of unchecked, random, indiscriminate violence that struck without warning or warrant. The definition of subversion was broadened and became increasingly capricious, encompassing the mildest protest (363). Following the coup, Rock writes, these clandestine networks and units accomplished a definitive repression of dissent by sowing terror on an unprecedented scale. The last phase of the guerrilla war was its bloodiest and most terrifying: all due process of law was overturned; military patrols infested the country; thousands vanished into the prisons and police torture chambers. During the previous six years the guerrillas’ victims had numbered at most two or three hundred; the price now exacted in retaliation, mostly through disappearances,’ was at least 10,000. The repression quite deliberately it seemed, was arbitrary, uncoordinated, and indiscriminate, which intensified its powers of intimidation (367 68).

19. Últimos días was reprinted by Seix Barral as recently as 2006, and the Buenos Aires newspaper Página/12 produced its own edition for sale at kiosks as part of a collection of Feinmann’s complete novels in 2007. Feinmann’s first novel has also proved extraordinarily productive of film adaptations. The first of these, as mentioned in a previous note, bore the novel’s original title and was released in Argentina in 1982. The second was a misbegotten English-language U.S.-Argentina co-production directed by Héctor Olivera (Two to Tango, 1988), and the third was a France-Cuba co-production that screened on French television in 1995 (Les Derniers jours de la victime). Ni el tiro also claims the very unusual distinction of having received two English-language film adaptations in less than a decade: Héctor Olivera’s Play Murder for Me / Negra medianoche (1990) and Juan José Campanella’s Love Walked In / Ni el tiro del final (1996).

20. Although Sasturain explains that he wrote a preliminary version of Manual de perdedores between 1972 and 1975, most of the final text was first published in brief serial installments in the newspaper La Voz between January and May of 1983. In 1985, the Buenos Aires publisher Legasa reissued the first of Manual’s two stories in book form. Manual de perdedores 2, which
followed it in 1987, opens with a chapter numbered 65, picking up exactly where the first story left off in chapter 64. Two later editions of Manual, one published in by Barcelona’s Ediciones B in 1988 and another by Sudamericana in Buenos Aires in 2003, integrate both parts under the shared title.

21. **Lunfardo** terms are sprinkled throughout the narrative and inflect the speech of various characters. Etchenique speaks as follows. Se piantó del Argerich porque lo quisieron amasijar. Por suerte yo le dejé un chumbo ayer a la tarde. Liquidó a uno y al otro lo encanaron. Rajó en el taxi y después se afanó la pick up (440). Or, approximately: He scrammed from the Argerich because they tried to off him. Good thing I left him a piece yesterday afternoon. He wasted one of them and they busted the other. He split in a taxi and then boosted the pickup.

22. In *Los que aman, odian*, Adolfo Bioy Casares and Silvina Ocampo spun a classical murder mystery around the cadaver of an Argentine translator of English detective novels apparently killed in her library amid unrevised translations. Uncertainty over the authorship of a text found with the body and which may either be a suicide note or a piece of a translation complicates the enigma of her death and further enhances the novel’s self-referential irony. For a reading of this novel in conjunction with Pablo de Santis’s 1998 *La traducción*, see my article Translators Slain at Seaside.

23. As Etchenique performs as hard-boiled detective, he reflects intermittently on his identification with the role. When he walks through a door with his gun drawn, he realizes that he’s doing what a detective does, and that therefore he is a detective (101). When he speaks, delivering an approximation of a Philip Marlowe sermon, he feels himself almost, but not quite, a finished character (153). Later, as he levels with the police inspector at the end of the first part of Manual, Etchenique points out that they are complying with a narrative convention, since the characters always sit down in the final chapter to tie up loose ends (189). Throughout the novel, Etchenique recalls his readings of Hammett, Chandler, Spillane, Charles Williams, and others, and he reminds other characters of the stipulations of the genre code, as they goad him about his studiously literary and quixotic behavior: Still playing Mike Hammer? (216) Just before she is abducted, the young leader of *la pesada* enunciates one of the most forceful denunciations, calling our attention again to production of a fictional reality through the act of writing. She informs Etchenique that what he is doing is literature, and that no one will believe what he is doing unless someone writes it down (304).

24. In a 2005 interview, Sasturain acknowledges a shared generational project without wholly endorsing Taibo’s formulation of the neopoliciaco. In the early 1970s, my generation started writing, the older guys like Piglia and Soriano and the ones my age, Martini, Feinmann, Battista, a bunch of them. In Spain: Manolo Vázquez Montalbán, Juan Madrid, Andreu Martín; in México: Paco Ignacio Taibo. They all write detective novels.
Why? The theories come later. Paco talks about the Latin American neopoliciaco. The detective novel of generation of 1968, of the youth uprisings, that finds in the detective novel a way to testify to the convulsive, pre-revolutionary situation in our countries. The detective novel was the critical realism of our time. There’s something to that, he could be right. What’s certain is that one writes what one has read and one makes movies on the basis of the movies that one’s seen and liked. We belonged to that generation that reread Hammett, Chandler, Kane [sic], McBain, that reevaluated them and discovered that they were really good writers. Those were our models for writing (Escribo aquello que he leído). Earlier in the same interview, Sasturain describes his effort to imagine a Buenos Aires detective as an initiative of cultural decolonization.

25. The military junta of 1976 appointed José A. Martínez de Hoz as Minister of Economy, and his team of extreme market economists presided over the transformation of the Argentine economy (see Rock 368 74). With regard to the radical economic reforms undertaken by the Menem administration, Alejandro Portes and Bryan R. Roberts observe: As has been pointed out by various observers, no other Latin American country witnessed such a fervent implementation of the free-market model as did Argentina during the years of Carlos Saúl Menem’s presidency (42).

26. In El género negro Giardinelli’s introductory assessment of the genre’s possibilities is boldly exaggerated but indicative of the enthusiasm shared by a significant community of Latin American writers beginning in the 1970s: Today the novela negra permeates daily life; it has the greatest possibility of surveying the political and social conflicts of our time; it penetrates in millions of homes throughout the world by means of cinema and television... and it has exerted a notable influence on almost all the great modern writers, in all languages and every genre (13). An introduction written for a 2004 guide to Latin American mystery writers shows Giardinelli’s enthusiasm to be unflagging: There is increasingly more textual evidence that demonstrates how the detective novel has exerted an extraordinary influence on modern Latin American narrative. As we have seen, that influence comes primarily from the hard-boiled North American novel. In spite of a strong influence also from the French hard-boiled novel, there is that element of ‘North-Americanness’ at the heart of the majority of texts written by Latin American authors of what has come to be called the Postboom era. This literature is characterized by graphic realism, the crudeness and authenticity of the dialogue, and even the possibility of dramatic representation as seen in North American narrative (xxvii); one can say that the hard-boiled genre has had a revolutionary influence on all Latin American narrative (xxxiv).

27. I have already referred to one of Piglia’s critical essays on the subgenre, as well as to his role as director of the influential Serie Negra series of hard boiled translations between 1969 and 1976. He also served as editor for a second series, Sol Negra, between 1990 and 1992, and he has edited
anthologies of detective stories for Editorial Jorge Álvarez (1969), CEAL (1979), Clarín/Aguilar in 1993 (*Las fieras* [The Beasts]), revised and expanded for Extra Alfaguara in 1999), and Planeta (1999). In general, Piglia’s understanding of the novela negra follows from that of the Contorno group. Piglia’s short story *La loca y el relato del crimen* has been reproduced in various anthologies of detective fiction since 1975, when a jury made up of Borges, Marco Denevi, and Augusto Roa Bastos awarded it a prize (consisting of a trip to Paris!) in the Primer Certamen Latinoamericano de Cuentos Policiales (Lafforgue and Rivera 37). Many critics have commented on Piglia’s play with certain codes of detective fiction in his first and most critically acclaimed novel, *Respiración artificial* (1980), but not until 1997 did he write a hard-boiled novel. The 2000 Planeta edition of *Plata quemada* that I refer to here announces that forty-three thousand copies of the novel were sold during its first three years in print, and we may suppose that many thousands more have been sold since on the strength of Marcelo Piñeyro’s successful 2000 film adaptation.

28. Renzi’s role as Piglia’s fictional alter ego has been widely discussed by critics, and *Plata quemada* provides a particularly concrete confirmation of this identification when, in conversation with Silva, Renzi mentions that he lives in November 1965 at the same hotel where Piglia himself elsewhere recalls having lived after moving to the city in March 1965 (Speranza 117). Another important aspect of Renzi’s fictional characterization is his employment as a crime reporter for the *El Mundo* newspaper, a job previously held by Roberto Arlt, whose relevance to the analysis of *Plata quemada* has been studied particularly well by Sandra Garabano. Renzi is also instrumental in the adulteration of the verisimilitude of the chronicle through introduction of the discourse of tragedy. This strategy for the subversion of testimonial realism is very comparable to that devised by García Márquez in *Crónica de una muerte anunciada*, which also fictionalizes the author’s biographical relationship to real events and emphasizes the logic of tragedy as one of multiple strategies for undermining the narrative authority of an apparently meticulous historical reconstruction.

29. The symbolic weight of Alto Palermo Shopping in the imagined geography of the Buenos Aires of the 1990s is not to be underestimated. Opened in 1990, at the beginning of the Menem era, Alto Palermo Shopping strove to situate itself as the primary site of luxury consumption in the prosperous Barrio Norte and its location at the Bulnes subway stop (where *Plata quemada* begins) and at the intersection of two major avenues, Santa Fe and Coronel Díaz, made it a new reference point in urban geography. As the mall’s Web site still proclaims, “Its unbeatable means of access make it the city’s reference point and meeting place. Sponsorship of foldout maps of the city’s subway system gave Alto Palermo Shopping the exclusive privilege of advertising not only on the back of the map but also on the system map itself. The mall’s logo featured so prominently by the Bulnes station on the map as to stand out above all other urban features.
30. The significance of this gesture has received ample attention in critical discussions of the novel. See, for example, Page (35–39) and Selnes.

31. For discussion of a related tendency in Mexico, see Marcie Paul’s The Search for Identity: The Return to Analytic Detective Fiction in Mexico.

Chapter 5

1. Like so many other writers mentioned in this study, Tasis was also a translator of novels from English, and although his own detective fiction was cast in the classical ratiocinative mode, he later contributed Catalan translations of hard-boiled novels by William P. McGivern and Dashiell Hammett to Pedrolo’s La Cua de Palla collection (Hart 67).

2. The various histories of Spanish detective fiction provide conflicting dates for the first edition of Es vessa una sang fàcil. The date given by Craig-Odders (18) and Fuster (Manuel de Pedrolo) is 1954, while Valles Calatrava (105) and Vázquez de Parga (La novela policiaca 248) indicate 1958.

3. With regard to the family’s difficult position following the father’s death while fighting on the Republican side, Patricia Hart observes: As far as social criticism goes, Joc Brut treads carefully but effectively. A novelist publishing in Catalan in the sixties had to tread with care, but in spite of this, Pedrolo makes his point about the misery of the widows and families of the Republican cause who lived in postwar Catalunya (55). She mentions the scene of the mother’s humble death at the washing sink of a house where she worked as a particularly poignant example of Pedrolo’s concern for the indignities endured by the working class and especially those stigmatized by their identification with the Republican cause.

4. In his 1984 response to questions posed by Patricia Hart, Pedrolo declared himself at age sixty-five a partisan of Catalan independence and a heterodox Marxist (Hart 65). Hart summarized the basic concern transmitted from Pedrolo’s novels to the Spanish novela negra as a class-consciousness that sees the amassing of private riches as one of the highest evils (58), but Marxist discourse per se is far more evident in the novels Vázquez Montalbán published during the transition to democracy.

5. In Es vessa, Pedrolo identifies his protagonist Joan Roig as a reader of cheap popular novels, including those of Luis del Val and Joaquin Belda (108). In the novels Pedrolo wrote during his tenure as director of La Cua de Palla, references to genre codes become more explicit. As the protagonist of Joc Brut prepares to commit murder, he reflects: Like everyone else, I had read detective novels and I knew or thought I knew that the police often need only a few faint traces in order to discover the criminal (56). As he prepares to disinter a cadaver with the help of his collaborators, the detective of Mossegar-se la cua also reflects on the possibly literary inspiration for their actions: Undoubtedly we’d all read too many novels, but the fact was that we’d allowed ourselves to be carried away by our imagination, and there we
were (62). One of the detective’s assistants is an aspiring writer (72), and more than one peripheral character involved in the detective’s pursuit of Berta Llonc through Barcelona comments on the novelistic quality of his activity (125) When the detective oversteps his legal powers and forcibly interrogates the medical student, the scene recognizes its derivation as cinematic: It sounded like one of those jokes you see in the movies, but I was serious (132).

6. Avilés Farré contextualizes this trend as follows: Spain experienced a rise in public insecurity between approximately 1970 and 1990, which fits in with a pattern common to Western countries. The interpretation of this rise isn’t simple, since it occurred in the countries that have been studied following a long decline in criminality which appears to have reached its lowest point in the middle of the twentieth century. In contrast, crime statistics stabilized during the 1990s (138).

7. For a very succinct sketch of the economic and cultural transformations undergone by Spain during the 1960s and early ’70s, see Colmeiro (La novela 165). Colmeiro emphasizes increasing prosperity, improvements in education and a general trend of cultural modernization through capitalist consumerism, though within the limits of an anachronistically authoritarian political system.

8. The sequence of the Carvalho series is somewhat unsettled by the fact that the character first appeared in a rollicking non-genre novel, Yo maté a Kennedy. Impresiones, observaciones y memorias de un guardaespaldas (I Killed Kennedy. Impressions, Observations and Memories of a Bodyguard, 1972), belonging to the subnormal phase of Vázquez Montalbán’s writing. (For an overview of this literary program of subnormality, see chapter 2 of Colmeiro’s Crónica del desencanto.) Although the novels in which Carvalho appears as a private detective retain some continuity with the fictional biography established in Yo maté, the more extravagant attributes, such as the identification of Carvalho as John Kennedy’s assassin, are usually forgotten. Tatuaje is thus the first novela negra in a twenty-two volume series that includes mostly novels but also a number of story collections.

9. In Barcelona, Vázquez Montalbán adds: From the vantage point of el Tibidabo the whole of the city’s past becomes clear. Closest to the sea is the darkness of Mont Tàber and the old city around the port; beyond the old walls is the bourgeois grid, the Eixample and further out are Pedralbes and el Tibidabo itself, signs of the wealthy bourgeoisie’s attempts to escape across the hills. Finally you see, like a virus that destroys identity while spawning class menace, the growth of the industrial districts, first harmonized within a human scale then frenzied, with new neighborhoods appearing like boils, closing horizons in a city which loses its name where the dormitory towns begin, forming ghettos for an immigrant population that was produced and reproduced without every really knowing where it was (33 34). This overview of social geography is developed patiently throughout the Carvalho series.
10. Among Spanish detective writers, Eduardo Mendoza has been the most enthusiastic in exploiting the picaresque, which he recognizes as a native precursor to modern detective fiction. (See Colmeiro, *La novela* 204–05). Mendoza incorporated detective elements in his influential 1975 historical novel *La verdad sobre el caso Savolta* (*The Truth about the Savolta Case*, 1975) and devised a fusion of picaresque and detective fiction in a series of novels beginning with *El misterio de la cripta embrujada* (*The Mystery of the Haunted Crypt*, 1979). Although these novels are set in Barcelona, the giddily parodic nature of the series discourages me from considering it here. Recent critical studies of Mendoza’s novels are compiled in *Eduardo Mendoza: A New Look*, edited by Jeffrey Thomas Oxford and David John Knutson.

11. In his comments on this passage, Joan Ramon Resina remarks on Vázquez Montalbán’s treatment of history as aesthetic spectacle, and he also suggests that the reference to three centuries in the history of a city with history creates expectations that the series as a whole disappoints, since Carvalho’s historical perspective seems bounded by the Civil War. The gaze is dehistoricized and flattened as it takes in a city that seems to have sprung from the ember of the Civil War with no significant past and no other horizon that that imposed by that event (*El cadáver* 174).

12. In *The Detective Novel in Post-Franco Spain*, Craig-Odders provides useful synopses for all but the last three of the Carvalho novels (41–58). Another overview, extending through the end of the series, is available in Susana Bayó Belenguer’s *The Carvalho Series of Manuel Vázquez Montalbán: A Passing in Review*.

13. In chapter 3 of *Crónica del desencanto*, which comprises one of the most comprehensive critical overviews of the Carvahlo series, Colmeiro writes: part of Carvalho repudiates the collective dememorization of the present. . . . The city is the privileged depository of memory and the visible guarantor of a collective identity that it conserves within itself. . . . The city appears as a place of memory in which the urban landscape of houses, the layout of the streets, and the configuration of neighborhoods are a permanent reminder of a collective historical memory based on the resistance and survival of a city defeated time and again. An entire poetics of memory is inscribed on the geography of the city across which Carvalho travels daily, crossing from upper- to lower-class neighborhoods. The old neighborhood [bordering the Ramblas] represents the historical memory of a city that resists forgetting and the center of gravity that attracts Carvalho to it like a magnet. Significantly, Carvalho’s office is located there, as is Charo’s home. In the old Barrio Chino of his childhood, Carvalho senses the presence of a memory that dignifies the sordidness and poverty of the environment (189).

In *Crónica del desencanto*, Colmeiro adds: The intertextual saturation of the Carvalho novels increases the impression of literariness and fictionality of the whole narrative cycle and calls the reader’s attention to the fictional nature of the series, at the same time as it diminishes the pretension to mimetic reproduction of immediate reality (167). In later volumes, such as *Sabotaje*, Carvalho not only alludes to previous cases but also cites the titles of previous novels, and he generally displays, like Don Quijote, a growing awareness of his status as a character in a popular literary fiction. This excess of internal intertextuality underscores the construction of the narrative according to previously existing models of representation, reappropriated elements of a second-degree fictional order that are very symptomatic of the postmodern era (*Crónica del desencanto* 168). In the same study, Colmeiro concludes that throughout the series, Anecdotal realist referentiality and metalinguistic self-referentiality are constantly superimposed in a perilous balance (174).

15. In Resina’s damning assessment, Catalanness assumes the function of a negative mark . . . appearing again and again in direct relation to sinister events. The historical violence institutionalized in the ideology of centralism here receives justification as a legitimate defense against the cunning of an irresponsible or frankly criminal collectivity (*El cadáver* 107). Resina makes this argument in chapter 4 of *El cadáver en la cocina*, and he reiterates it in his forward to Craig-Odders’s *The Detective Novel in Post-Franco Spain* in response to Vázquez Montalbán’s protests of innocence. In this latter text he insists that the frequent attributions of sociological and political realism to the Carvalho series ignore the extent to which the epistemological claims of the series hinge on a set of axioms. One of these axioms identifies economic privilege with moral failing and unmitigated evil. . . . Another related a priori is the ethnic identification of the social elite in a post-ethnic society which emerges from a long period of denationalization. (xi). The same criticism, at least with regard to the significance of class, would be applicable toward much of the *novela negra* canon.

16. In *Shades of Green: The Police Procedural in Spain*, Craig-Odders writes: with few exceptions, the genre did not gain prominence in Spain until the 1990s. Just as the hard-boiled novel emerged much later in Spain than its North American counterpart, subsequent to the political and social liberalization that began in the late 1960s, the police procedural also appeared much later. The relative scarcity of the police novel in Spain also correlates directly to the long standing public perception of the paramilitary police system as the corrupt enforcer of fascist rule under Franco which was reflected in the negative portrayal of the police typical to the detective novels of the post-transition years (103). This article provides an up-to-date account of the emergence of the Spanish police procedural. In her conclusion, Craig-Odders cites eloquent proof of the social significance of the police procedural novel when she reports that Lorenzo Silva, another of the genre’s most successful practitioners in the last decade, has received the Silver Cross of the
Guardia Civil from Spain’s Minister of the Interior in recognition of his contribution to redeeming the image of the national police force from residual infamy of the Franco years (118).

17. For critical commentary on Juan Madrid’s novels, see especially Hart (159–71), Craig-Odders (The Detective Novel in Post-Franco Spain 71–75, 80–81 and 128–30), and Colmeiro (246–57).


Colmeiro, José F. *Crónica del desencanto: La narrativa de Manuel Vázquez Montalbán*. Coral Gables, FL: North-South Center P, U of Miami, 1996.


[Note: This reference is repeated twice in the list, but it is likely a typographical error.]


[Note: The interview is repeated twice in the list, but it is likely a typographical error.]


[Note: The reference is repeated twice in the list, but it is likely a typographical error.]


[Note: The reference is repeated twice in the list, but it is likely a typographical error.]


Morello Frosch, Marta. La sexualidad opresiva en las obras de Manuel Puig. Nueva Narrativa Hispanoamericana 5.1 2 (1975): 151 57.


Abad Faciolince, Héctor, 59, 61, 192n20, 194n25
Afinoguénova, Eugenia, 166, 67
Aguilar, Janeth, 188n4
Alarcón, Pedro Antonio de, 3, 141
Alianza Anticomunista Argentina, 112, 196n6, 198n11
Amar Sánchez, Ana María, 123, 24
Amores perros (film), 52
Argüello, Rodrigo, 192n20
Arias Archidona, Vicente, 10
Aristarain, Adolfo, 199n16
Arlt, Roberto, 100, 102, 105, 123, 203n28
Asociación Internacional de Escritores Policiales, 17
Augé, Marc, 130
Avilés Farré, Juan, 187n11
Ballesteros, Mercedes, 7
Bardem, Juan Antonio, 146
Baroja, Pío, 33, 37, 65, 186n9
Barreda Solórzano, Luis de la, 48
Barzum, Jacques and Wendell Taylor, 159
Battista, Vicente, 122, 124, 134, 201n24; Sucesos argentinos, 124
Baudelaire, Charles, 2, 3
Bedoya, Manuel A., 5, 7, 8, 18
Belascoarán Shayne, Héctor, 18, 33, 36, 41, 43, 49, 79, 116, 18, 120, 157, 161, 184n13
Belda, Joaquín, 5, 142, 204n5
Benjamin, Walter, 2, 20, 26, 168
Bernal, Álvaro Antonio, 193n21
Bernal, Rafael, 45, 46, 53, 54
Biblioteca Oro, 9, 11, 13, 143,
Bioy Casares, Adolfo, 11, 12, 14, 94, 123, 138, 191n16
Birkenmaier, Anke, 187n15
Black Mask, 10, 17, 157, 189n7
Bogart, Humphrey, 16, 33, 118, 125, 156
Borges, Jorge Luis, 11, 15, 94, 100, 138, 39, 191n16, 192n19, 195n2, 198n10, 203n27; El jardín de los senderos que se bifurcan, 139; La muerte y la brújula, 11, 100, 138, 198n10
Bosetti, Oscar, 115
Braham, Persephone, 22, 31, 32, 39, 49, 182n3, 185n2
Brand, Dana, 20
Briceño-León, Roberto, 38, 63
Brown, Fredric, 14
Bukowski, Charles, 54, 55
Burns, Rex, 189n7
Bustos Domecq, H., 11, 191n16
Cabezas, José Luis, 136
Cain, James M., 14, 60, 94, 129 30, 149, 202n24
Calabrese, Elisa, 97
Campanella, Juan José, 200n19
Campbell, Federico, 50
Campos, René A., 99, 197n8
Camus, Albert, 128, 130
Capmany, Maria Aurèlia, 181n2
Carr, John Dickson, 3
Carter, Nick, 5 6, 8, 142
Carvalho, Pepe, 18, 157 73, 176 77, 179, 205n8 9, 206n11 13
Carver, Raymond, 54
Casals, Pedro, 175
Cawelti, John G., 47, 67
Certeau, Michel de, 31, 89
Chandler, Raymond, 12 15, 30 31, 33 34, 37, 41, 60, 80, 93 94, 109, 123, 163, 172, 181n2, 185n7, 186n8, 201n23, 202n24
Chávez Castañeda, Ricardo, 182n4
Chesterton, G. K., 13, 20, 25 27, 31, 37, 146, 179
Christie, Agatha, 13
Clausel, Ifgenio, 46
cognitive mapping, 19, 40, 43 44
Cohen, Marcelo, 137
Colautti, Sergio, 138
Collazos, Óscar, 64 70, 72, 75, 91 92, 197n7; La modelo asesinada, 64 70, 72, 91 92
Collins, Wilkie, 3
Colmeiro, José F., 3 4, 98, 141 43, 153, 157, 159 60, 167, 172 74, 181n3, 182n5, 183n10, 184n12, 197n8, 205n7 8, 206n13, 206 7n14, 208n17
Coma, Javier, 60
Conde Vélez, Luis, 7
Conteris, Hiber, 181n2
Contorno, 15, 94, 96, 203n27
Correa Tascón, Mario, 193n23
Covarrubias, Ignacio, 94
Craig-Odders, Renée, 142 44, 178, 206n12, 207n15, 207 8n16, 208n17
Crosthwaite, Luis Humberto, 50
Daly, Carol John, 60
Debroise, Olivier, 52
De Ferrari, Guillermina, 55, 187n15
Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guatarri, 77
Delmar E. C. (Julian Amich Bert), 143
Del Olmo, Rosa, 63
Denevi, Marco, 203n27
Denis, Roberto, 128
De Quincey, Thomas, 86
Díaz Eterovic, Ramón, 22, 47
Díez Ripollés, José Luis, 172
dirty realism, 53 55, 82, 115, 187n15, 191n17
Dos Passos, John, 33, 186n9
Dostoevsky, Fyodor, 78
Doyle, Arthur Conan, 2 4, 6, 13, 17, 25, 183n9
Duke, F. P., 7
Duncan, Cynthia, 185n3 4
Dupin, C. Auguste, 20
Elías, Agustín, 7
El Séptimo Círculo, 11, 13 14, 94, 122
Enrich, Juan, 143
Epiple, Juan Armando, 197n8
Escobar, Pablo, 85
España, Gonzalo, 192n20
Estébanez Calderón, Demetrio, 181n1
Etchenique, 16, 117 24, 161, 201n23
Fadanelli, Guillermo, 52 56, 62, 136, 180; La otra cara de Rock
Hudson, 52 56; Lodo, 53
Fante, John, 54
Feinmann, José Pablo, 97 98, 109 16, 122, 124 25, 128,
Index

137 38, 198n11, 199n16, 199 200n17, 200n19; Ni el tiro del final, 114 15; Últimos días de la víctima, 109 16, 125, 138, 199 200n17, 200n19
Fernández Flórez, Wenceslao, 7
film noir, 16, 94, 99, 117 18, 121 22, 125, 144, 149, 156, 184n12
flâneurs, 20, 88
Follari, Roberto, 62 63, 127
Fonseca, Rubem, 82, 123 24
Forero, Juan, 59
Francés, José, 5, 142
Franco, Francisco and Franquismo, 14, 143 44, 152 54, 157 58, 170, 175, 177, 207 8n16
Franco, Jean, 193n23
Franco Ramos, Jorge, 88, 91, 192n20; Rosario Tijeras, 88, 91, 192n20
Frank, André Gunder, 199n15
Franken Kurzen, Clemens A., 182n3
Fraser Delgado, Celeste, 197n9
Fuentes, Carlos, 46, 180
Fuster, Jaume, 14, 16, 156, 176; De mica en mica s’omple la pica, 156; Tarda, sessió contínua 3,45, 16, 156
Gaboriau, émile, 2 4, 25
Galán, Luís Carlos, 85
Galtero, Julio César, 196n5
Gamboa, Santiago, 22, 57, 59, 64, 70 75, 77, 79, 85, 87 88, 92, 100, 121, 181n1; Perder es cuestión de método, 70 73, 100, 121
Garabano, Sandra, 203n28
garbage, 51, 53, 79, 80
García Canclini, Néstor, 27, 29, 40 41, 43, 66, 85
García Márquez, Gabriel, 57, 59, 132, 189n9, 203n28; Crónica de una muerte anunciada, 57, 132, 189n9, 203n28
Gauguin, Paul, 163
Gaviria, Víctor, 61, 88
Generation of 1880, 93 94, 195n1
Giardinelli, Mempo, 13, 22, 57, 128 30, 185n5, 195n3, 202n26; Cuestiones interiores, 129 30; El décimo infierno, 129; Luna caliente, 128 29
Giménez Bartlett, Alicia, 174 75, 178
Giraldo, Luz Mary, 91, 194n24
globalization, 32, 87, 179 80, 191n15
Godsland, Shelley, 175
Goligorsky, Eduardo, 15, 195n3
Goodis, David, 14
González Inárritu, Alejandro, 52
González Ledesma, Francisco, 7, 22, 173 75, 183n8; Crónica sentimental en rojo, 173; Expediente Barcelona, 173; La ciudad sin tiempo, 173
Gossé Cleymann, Luis and Guillermo, 7
Granch, H. C., 7, 9
Green, Anna Katharine, 3
Grela, George, 185n4, 186n7
Groussac, Paul, 93
Guirao, Pedro, 143 44
Gutiérrez, Pedro Juan, 55
Halliday, Brett, 18, 37
Hammett, Dashiell, 9 10, 13 15, 34, 37, 60, 94, 100, 109, 122, 132, 144, 156, 163, 181n2, 186n7 8, 191n16, 201n23, 202n24, 204n1
Hart, Patricia, 141, 150, 182n3, 182n6, 204n4, 208n17
Harvey, David, 2
Helú, Antonio, 28
Hemingway, Ernest, 33
Hernández Luna, Juan, 48 49, 52 53, 62; Cadáver de ciudad, 53;
Hernández Luna, Juan (continued)  
Tabaco para el puma, 48 49; Yodo, 52  
Hilfer, Tony, 61, 188n3  
Himes, Chester, 33  
Holmberg, Eduardo, 93  
Holmes, Sherlock, 4 6, 10, 13, 26, 42, 65, 142 43, 159, 183n7, 183n9  
homicide rates, 38, 48, 63 64, 88, 126 27, 154 55, 187n11  
Hopenhayn, Martín, 186n10  
Hornung, E. W., 6  
Hume, Fergus, 4  
Inman Fox, E., 186n9  
Jacovkis, Natalia, 134 36  
Jameson, Fredric, 19, 30 31, 41, 43 44, 72, 80, 103, 122  
Jaramillo Ossa, Bernardo, 85  
Jardiel Poncela, Enrique, 6  
Jasca, Alfredo, 94 95, 128  
Jáuregui, Carlos A., and Juana Suárez, 89  
Jordana, Cèsar August, 7, 143  
Kafka, Franz, 101, 130  
Kantaris, Geoffrey, 193n22  
Kerr, Lucille, 197n8  
Knight, Stephen, 181n1  
Kokotovic, Micha, 188n4  
Kristeva, Julia, 72, 189n10  
Labanyi, Jo, 99  
La Cua de Palla, 16, 144, 204n1, 204n5  
Lafforgue, Jorge, 125, 141, 195n3  
Lafforgue, Jorge and Jorge B. Rivera, 12, 95 96, 182n3, 183n9, 195n2 3  
Laiseca, Alberto, 116  
Landeira, Ricardo, 2 3, 141  
Lander, María Fernanda, 89  
Lara Bonilla, Rodrigo, 61, 85  
Lartsinim, J., 143 44  
La Violencia, 57 59  
Leblanc, Maurice, 28  
Lefebvre, Henri, 166 67  
Lemus, Rafael, 49, 61  
Leroux, Gaston, 4  
Lezama, José Luis, 27  
Lomeli, Luis Felipe G., 50  
López Hipkiss, Guillermo, 7 10, 15, 144  
López Merino, Juan Miguel, 175  
López Rega, José, 112, 198n11  
Lostal, Sauli, 100  
lost decade, 22, 62, 127  
Lucas, Hyppolyte, 3  
Ludmer, Josefina, 94, 195n1  
lunfardo, 105 6, 122, 124, 135, 199n13, 201n21  
Lynch, Kevin, 19, 27, 40, 43, 169  
MacDonald, Ross, 14, 33, 185n7  
Mack-Bull, 5, 8  
Madrid, Juan, 178, 201n24  
Maillé, Emilio, 88, 192n20  
Mallorquí Figuerola, José, 7, 9 11, 15, 143 44  
Malraux, André, 33  
Mandel, Ernest, 44, 97, 187n1, 188n2  
Manz, Alf, 10  
Marcos, Subcomandante, 42, 117, 187n13  
Marechal, Leopoldo, 100  
Marsá Becal, Ángel, 7  
Martelli, Juan Carlos, 15, 96, 98, 100, 109, 115, 124, 196n5; La muerte de un hombrecito, 124; Los tigres de la memoria, 98, 100, 115  
Martín, Andreu, 16, 144, 175 79, 184n11, 201n24; Prótesis, 176 78; Si es no es, 176  
Martín, Andreu and Jaume Ribera, 176; Con los muertos no se juega, 176; La clave de las llaves, 176
Martínez, Guillermo, 138, 178; Acerca de Roderer (Regarding Roderer), 138; Crímenes imperceptibles/Los crímenes de Oxford (The Oxford Murders), 138
Martínez de Hoz, José A., 202n25
Martínez de la Hidalga, Fernando, 10
Martínez de la Vega, José, 27
Martini, Juan Carlos, 15, 17, 96, 97, 100, 102, 104, 109, 113, 14, 116, 122, 125, 128, 133, 37, 196n5, 197n7, 198n11, 201n24; El agua en los pulmones, 100, 101, 116, 134; El autor intelectual, 134; El cerco, 101, 102, 113, 14, 125, 134, 198n11; Los asesinos las prefieren rubias, 97, 98, 100, 197n7; Puerto Apache, 133, 37
Martí-Peña, Guadalupe, 197n8
Masiello, Francine, 99
McBain, Ed, 202n24
McGivern, William P., 204n1
Menchú, Rigoberta, 188n4
Mendoza, Eduardo, 157, 206n10
Mendoza, Elmer, 50
Mendoza, Mario, 22, 53, 55, 59, 73, 87, 89, 91, 92, 107, 126, 136, 180, 190n12, 13, 190, 91n14, 191n17, 191, 92n19, 192n21; Cobro de sangre, 191, 92n19; La ciudad de los umbrales, 74, 78, 80, 81, 92, 107; Relato de un asesino, 83, 84; Satanás, 73, 83, 84, 87; Scorpio City, 74, 77, 83, 86, 89, 91; Una escalera al cielo, 192n19
Menem, Carlos, 129, 135, 36, 202n25, 203n29
Mesquita Neto, Paulo de, 63
Miller, D. A., 105
Mira, Juan José, 7, 9
misogyny, 54, 67, 69, 75, 83, 91, 92, 97, 102, 104, 5, 145, 192n20, 197n7
Molinaro, Nina, 174
Molino, Pablo, 11
Monroe, Marilyn, 97, 197n7
Monsiváis, Carlos, 28, 29, 31, 33, 39, 57, 72, 126
Montoneros, 109, 112, 119, 196n6
Montserrat, César de, 143
Montt, Nahum, 84, 87, 89, 92; El Eskimal y la Mariposa, 84, 87, 89
Moreiras Menor, Cristina, 179
Morello Frosch, Marta, 197n8
Moreno, Enrique (Francisco González Ledesma), 173
Muñoz, José Luis, 175, 184n12
Mutis, Álvaro, 59
Nabokov, Vladimir, 128
narconovela, 49, 50, 59, 61
Naturalism, 37, 186n7
neopoliciaco, 22, 27, 29, 32, 45, 47, 53, 60, 64, 80, 83, 90, 97, 117, 120, 123, 172, 178, 185n4, 201, 2n24
nota roja, 29, 51
novela negra (definitions), 1, 60, 62, 181n1
Ober, Adolfo, 11
O’Bryen, Rory, 89, 194n23
Ocampo, Silvina, 123, 138, 201n22
Ocampo, Victoria, 183n9
Oliver, María-Antònia, 156, 174, 75; Estudi en lila (Study in Lilac), 174
Olivera, Héctor, 200n19
Orsi, Guillermo, 138
Ortega, Francisco A., 59
Ortega, Julio, 1
Osorio, Amando and Julio Zarralúqui, 143
Oxford, Jeffrey Thomas and David John Knutson, 206n10
Pacheco Areco, Jorge, 114
Padura Fuentes, Leonardo, 22, 182n3
Page, Joanna, 131, 204n30
Palaversich, Diana, 54, 55
panoptical realism, 30, 42, 105, 133
Pardo Bazán, Emilia, 3, 5, 7, 142
Parra, Eduardo Antonio, 22, 50 52, 62, 79, 125 26, 190n13;
    Nostalgia de la sombra, 50 52, 79, 125, 190n13
Parra, María Ligia, 194n23
Paul, Marcie, 204n31
Payró, Roberto J., 134
Pedrolo, Manuel de, 15, 144 54, 156, 163, 176, 183n10, 184n11, 204n1, 204n3 4, 204 5n5; Algui que no hi havia de ser, 153; Es vessa una sang fàcil, 15, 145 46, 150 51, 204n2, 204n5;
    L’inspector fa tard, 15, 146; Joc Brut, 15, 146 50, 156, 163, 204n3, 204n5; Mossegar-se la cua, 15, 150 53, 204 5n5
Pellón, Gustavo, 19
Pérez Capo, Felipe, 7
Pérez Galdós, Benito, 2
Pérez Ruiz, Yolanda, 188n4
Pérgolis, Juan Carlos, 65, 188n5, 189n6
Perón, Eva, 137
Perón, Isabel (María Estela Martínez de Perón), 196n6, 198n11, 200n18
Perón, Juan, 112, 196n6
Peyrou, Manuel, 95
picaresque, 30, 33 34, 37, 50, 61, 80, 192n20, 206n10
Piglia, Ricardo, 15, 91, 96, 103, 116, 124, 130 34, 145, 156, 180, 196n4, 201n24, 202 3n27, 203n28 29; Plata quemada (Money to Burn), 91, 130 34, 203n7, 203n28 29; Respiración artificial, 203n27
Piñeyro, Marcelo, 203n27
Pirandello, Luigi, 123
Pizarro, Carlos, 85
Pla, Roger, 95, 128
Poe, Edgar Allan, 2 4, 8, 17, 20, 25, 27, 86, 180, 182n4; The Murders in the Rue Morgue, 2, 180, 182n4
police procedural, 67, 174 76, 178, 207 8n16
Polít Dueñas, Gabriela, 193 94n23
Ponce, Néstor, 141, 195n3, 198n9
Pöppel, Hubert, 13, 57 58, 62, 72, 182n3, 192n20
Porciones, Josep Maria de, 165 66
Porter, Dennis, 42, 186n7 8
Portes, Alejandro and Bryan R. Roberts, 202n25
post-boom, 19, 56, 59, 202n26
post-neopoliciaco, 52, 83, 125 26, 128 29, 134, 172, 178, 191n18
Pratt, Mary Louise, 91, 133
Premat, Julio, 132
Proceso de Reconstrucción Nacional, 97, 109, 112 13, 116, 118, 124, 129
Puig, Manuel, 96, 98 101, 104, 196n5, 197 98n9; The Buenos Aires Affair, 98 100, 197 98n9
Punte, María José, 112
Queen, Ellery, 3 4
Quiroga, Horacio, 93
Ramírez Heredia, Rafael, 46 47, 51, 64; Muerte en la carretera, 47;
    Rastros, 94, 122; Trampa de metal, 46
Reguillo, Rossana, 194n23
Relph, Edward, 168
Resina, Joan Ramon, 3 4, 10, 141 44, 146, 167 68, 171 72, 181n1, 181n3, 183n10, 206n11, 207n15
Restrepo, Laura, 81, 191n15
Rimbaud, Arthur, 78
Rinehart, Mary Roberts, 3 4
Rivas, Duque de, 2
Rivera, Jorge B., 125, 141
Rivera Garza, Cristina, 55
Roa Bastos, Augusto, 203n27
Rock, David, 196n6, 200n18
Rodoreda, Mercè, 143
Rodríguez, Juan José, 50
Rodríguez Pésico, Adriana, 131
Romero, José Luis, 21, 26, 40, 89
Rosario Tijeras (film), 88, 192n20
Rosas, Juan Manuel de, 136
Rotker, Susana, 126
Rubiano, Juan Carlos, 192n20
Sablich, José, 95, 185n5
Saccamano, Guillermo, 96, 196n5
Sáenz, Dalmiro, 95
Saíz, Víctor, 95
Salazar, Alonso, 61
Samperio, Guillermo, 56
Sánchez, Fernando Fabio, 187n14
Sánchez-Prado, Ignacio, 52, 54, 56, 61, 87, 125
Sango, Raúl and Ramón Corderch, 143
Santamaría, Germán, 194n23
Santis, Pablo de, 137 38, 178, 201n22; El enigma de París, 138; El teatro de la memoria, 138; Filosofía y letras, 138; La traducción, 138, 201n22
Sargent, Charles S., 108
Sarlo, Beatriz, 126 27, 129
Sarmiento, Domingo Faustino, 136
Sasturain, Juan, 16, 22, 116 25, 156, 184n12, 200 201n20, 201 2n24; Arena en los zapatos, 124; La lucha continúa, 124; Manual de perdedores, 16, 117 25, 156, 200 201n20
Schaeder, Barbet, 193n22, 194n23
Se7en, 51
Sebreli, Juan Carlos, 96
Selnes, Gisle, 204n30
Seltzer, Mark, 179
Semana Negra, 17
Série Noire, 1
Serra, Ana, 193n22
Sicaresca, 60 62, 88, 192n20, 194n25
Sicarios, 58, 61, 64 65, 68 69, 86, 88 89, 192n20, 193n22, 194n25
Silva, Armando, 190n11, 190n14
Silva, Lorenzo, 178, 207 8n16
Simenon, Georges, 13
Simpson, Amelia S., 57, 185n2, 197n7, 199 200n17
Sinay, Sergio, 116, 122
Soriano, Osvaldo, 15 16, 96 97, 101, 116, 122, 125, 156, 181n2, 196n5, 201 2n24; Triste, solitario y final, 16, 97, 181n2
Spillane, Mickey, 15, 37, 104, 186n7, 192n20, 201n23
Stavans, Ilan, 12, 46, 182n3, 185n2
Steffans, Lincoln, 37
Stevenson, Robert Louis, 74 75, 83 84
Stout, Rex, 3
Sur, 11, 93 94, 138, 191n16
Swedenborg, Emanuel, 77
Swensen, Cole, 20 21, 37, 184n1
Symons, Julian, 3 4, 10, 182n4
Tadeo Juan, Francisco, 8
Taibo II, Paco Ignacio, 16 18, 22, 29 37, 39 48, 51 52, 60, 64 65, 70, 79, 82, 90, 97, 116 18, 120 21, 123 24, 132, 157, 160 61, 181n2, 184n13, 185n4, 185n6, 201 2n24; Adios, Madrid, 18, 184n13; Algunas nubes (Some Clouds), 33, 41; Cosa Fácil (An Easy Thing), 34, 47; Días de combate, 16, 34 35, 42, 47, 118; Mi amigo Morán, 181n2; Muertos incómodos (The Uncomfortable Dead), 42 43, 117, 121, 187n13; No habrá final feliz (No Happy Ending), 39, 79, 132; Que todo es imposible, 33; Regreso a la misma ciudad y bajo la lluvia
INDEX

Taibo II, Paco Ignacio (continued)
(\emph{Return to the Same City}), 36 37, 40; \emph{Sintiendo que el campo de batalla} . . . , 33, 36, 39
Tango, 118 19, 121 22, 124 25, 132
Taxis i Marca, Rafael, 144, 204n1
They Might Be Giants (film), 16
Thompson, Jim, 60, 129
Tizziani, Rubén, 101 8, 111, 116, 122, 128, 145 46, 165, 198 99n12; \emph{Noches sin lunas ni soles}, 101 8, 116, 146, 198 99n12
Torres, Vicente Francisco, 182n3, 187n14
Trail, Armitage, 94
Triple A. \textit{See} Alianza Anticomunista Argentina
Trotsky, Leon, 39
Trotter, David, 71, 189n8
Trujillo Muñoz, Gabriel, 45, 49, 50
Tupamaros, 114
Unamuno, Miguel de, 123
urban mapping, 20 21, 23, 29 33, 40, 45, 47, 64, 70, 83, 89, 101, 120 22, 133, 135, 145 46, 151, 167, 171, 174, 187n14
urban violence, 19, 22 23, 37 39, 48, 62 64, 88, 108 9, 126 27, 154 55, 172, 180, 186n10, 187n12, 190n11, 205n6
Urbanyi, Pablo, 122
Usigli, Rodolfo, 187
Val, Luis del, 204n5
Vallejo, Fernando, 81, 88 92, 189n9, 191n15, 193n21, 193n22, 193 94n23; \emph{La virgen de los sicarios}, 88 92, 189n9, 193n21, 193n22, 193 94n23
Valles Calatrava, José R., 10, 16, 141, 181 82n3, 182n5, 184n12
Van Dine, S. S., 3 4
Varela, Luis V., 93
Vargas Llosa, Mario, 64, 87
Vázquez de Parga, Salvador, 4 5, 8, 10, 13, 33, 143, 182n3, 182n6
Vázquez Montalbán, Manuel, 16, 18, 22, 155 74, 176, 178, 181n3, 182n5, 183n7, 201n24, 204n4, 205n8 9, 206n11 13, 206 7n14, 207n15; \textit{Desde los tejados} , 159; \emph{El hombre de mi vida (The Man of My Life)}, 170 71; \emph{El laberinto griego (An Olympic Death)}, 168; \emph{El premio}, 170; \emph{Los mares del sur (Southern Seas)}, 155, 162 66, 169; \emph{Milenio Carvalho}, 157, 170; 
\emph{Quinteto de Buenos Aires (The Buenos Aires Quintet)}, 18, 170; \emph{Roldán, ni vivo ni muerto}, 169; \emph{Sabotaje olímpico}, 162, 168 69, 207n14; \emph{Tatuaje}, 16, 157 58, 161, 171, 184n10, 205n8; \emph{Yo maté a Kennedy}, 205n8
Vidocq, Eugène François, 2
Villarreal, Rogelio, 54 55
Virilio, Paul, 77 78
Volpi, Jorge, 178
Vosburg, Nancy, 174
voyeurism, 65, 67 69, 91, 159, 162, 192n20
Wallace, Edgar, 6, 11, 13
Walsh, Rodolfo, 95, 100, 120, 124, 196n4 5
Wells, Caragh, 167 69
Wilkinson, Stephen, 182n3
Williams, Charles, 201n23
Wortman, Ana, 127, 129
Wyels, Joyce Gregory, 185n6
Yates, Donald A., 95, 183n9
Zarama, María Claudia, 70
Zubillaga, Verónica, 38