

‘Travestido, Transformado, Definitivamente Distinto’? Transgenericidad and Gender Trouble in Leonardo Padura’s *Máscaras*¹

Ailsa M. Peate

University of Liverpool, UK

This article considers how *Máscaras* (1995), the third novel in Cuban author Leonardo Padura’s post-Soviet detective fiction series *Las cuatro estaciones*, transforms the genre. This article argues that at once using and subverting US tenets of noir, the author successfully transfigures archetypes of form and content, in particular commenting on the figure of the *Hombre Nuevo*. The article discusses *Máscaras* as an example of a trans-genre/transgenericidad: the novel demonstrates how postmodern symptoms such as self-awareness and metanarrativity, deviant from the archetypal crime genre, reinforce and inform notions of fluid and performative representations of bodies and sexualities in Cuba.

Keywords: Cuba, detective fiction, *Hombre Nuevo*, iconoclasm, postmodernism, transgenericidad.

In *Máscaras* (Leonardo Padura Fuentes, known as Leonardo Padura, 2013 [originally published 1995]), overtaken by nostalgia, state detective protagonist Lieutenant Mario Conde declares his Havana neighbourhood to be ‘travestido, transformado, definitivamente distinto’ (‘transvestited, transformed, definitively different’, Padura, 2013: 197) from that which it once was. It is this quotation in particular which highlights the novel’s subversive undertones and the generic mutation at the core of the narrative. Despite Leonardo Padura’s status on the island as Cuba’s greatest living author and distinguished international position (the series has been translated into various other languages including English, and BBC Radio Four’s Foreign Bodies (Lawson, 2014) dedicated to an episode in Padura’s *Las cuatro estaciones* series, and four translated editions of the Havana Quartet, as it is known in English, were also broadcast as part of the station’s Saturday Drama series [Peate, 2014]), as well as the sheer amount of academic thought his work has generated over the past two decades, little has been said about genre subversion and hybridity in his detective tetralogy *Las cuatro estaciones*, comprised of *Pasado perfecto* (1991) (*Havana Blue*, 2007), *Vientos de Cuaresma* (1994) (*Havana Gold*, 2008), *Máscaras* (1995) (*Havana Red*, 2005) and *Paisaje de Otoño* (1997) (*Havana Black*, 2006). Considering the detective genre’s socio-cultural background, this article thus discusses how Padura’s post-Soviet Cuban detective fiction transforms the detective genre as available in Cuba up until that point. Above all, it recognises that *Máscaras* at once uses and subverts US tenets of noir in order to transfigure archetypes of form and content. As a result, this article offers a new reading of *Máscaras* by engaging with critical discussion of the postmodern literary paradigm as a phenomenon within Cuban crime fiction, positing that *Máscaras* is an example of generic subversion. I argue that the postmodern symptoms within the text, deviant from the archetypal crime genre (within both Cuban and US literary history and cultural production), reinforce

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and inform notions of fluid and performative representations of bodies and sexualities, particularly in relation to the revolutionary ideal of the *Hombre Nuevo* (New Man).

Creating a Genre

Manipulated by Castro's revolutionary Communist Party's demands, the production of Cuban socialist detective fiction was different to that evidenced by the US hard-boiled genre (Braham, 2004; Wilkinson, 2006; Oakley, 2012). Created in an age of disillusionment in a post-Wall Street Crash society, the US genre responded to new cultural encounters (Knight, 2006: 25), thereby going some way to explain the genre's popularity in other Latin American countries which have also experienced social and political upheaval, such as Mexico, Argentina, and Chile. What marks Cuba as unusual in this particular context is the island's political history: critics such as Wilkinson (2006) argue that Cuba's history as a non-capitalist state means the country has not experienced the same transition to 'democracy' as many other Latin American States. In 1971, The Cuban Ministry of the Interior began a competition which aimed to encourage narratives promoting the view of 'the policeman as part of an efficient body of officers relying on Comités de Defensa de la Revolución [...] and government agencies to restore the desired order' (Serra, 2007: 157). It is well-documented that the crime genre produced in socialist Cuba adhered to the propagandistic revolutionary guidelines for literature, outlined in a Fidel Castro's 1971 address at the *Primer congreso nacional de educación y cultura* (First National Congress of Education and Culture), which stated the following:

Y para volver a recibir un premio, en concurso nacional o internacional, tiene que ser revolucionario de verdad, escritor de verdad, poeta de verdad, revolucionario de verdad. Eso está claro [...] Y las revistas y concursos, no aptos para farsantes. Y tendrán cabida los escritores revolucionarios [...] tendrán cabida únicamente los revolucionarios. [...] Nuestra valoración es política. No puede haber valor estético sin contenido humano.
(<http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1971/esp/f300471e.html>).

In order to win a prize in a national or an international competition, one must be a true revolutionary, a true writer, and true poet, a true revolutionary. That is clear [...] And the magazines and competitions are not open to fakers. There will be a place for revolutionary writers [...] There will only be a place for revolutionaries. [...] Our assessment is political. One cannot have aesthetic value without substance. (All translations my own)

Such parameters therefore discouraged and did not recognise any work which would stand to promote individual effort and social problems in socialist Cuba. Castro's speech encouraged work by authors such as Armando Cristóbal Pérez and Ignacio Cardenas Acuña, whose novels Wilkinson (2006: 112–113) sees as highlighting 'the exemplary nature of post-revolutionary society' whose hero 'must be "a gentleman" and a detective for the pleasure of the intellectual challenge, rather than a policeman', or somewhat paradoxically 'has to be a member of the people's police force, entrusted by people 'en poder' to act on their behalf' (Wilkinson, 2006: 116), and a genre which, as Portuondo (1973: 132) states: 'mantiene los rasgos esenciales del género, pero trae este sentido de identificación de justicia y legalidad socialista, y, sobre todo, el concepto de realización colectiva como autodefensa del nuevo orden social revolucionario' ('keeps the essential features of the genre, but brings to the text a sense of identification of socialist justice and legality, and, above all, the concept of collective fulfilment as the self

defence of the new revolutionary social order'). Padura (2000: 150) himself was suspicious of the literature encouraged by the Congress, maintaining that *Tal confluencia es, por supuesto, más que sospechosa: ningún género nace convocado por un premio y obtiene resultados desde la primera convocatoria* (Such a meeting is, of course, more than suspicious: no genre is born by being encouraged by a prize or gets results from the first meeting). Nonetheless, many authors turned to the genre during this period in Cuba: in his 2012 article which addresses post-Revolutionary Cuban detective fiction and Padura's significance within this context, López Calvo (2012: 30) recognises that the claims made during 1971 were strengthened in 1972 when a set of rules were published to help those who wished to begin publishing detective fiction. It is therefore unsurprising that socio-cultural criticism was not widely expressed in the detective genre following major social upheaval in Cuba, as was the case in such narratives from the US and other Latin American countries. Instead, Cuban socialist detective fiction became a strategic instrument to disseminate revolutionary success.

Bearing striking similarities to Soviet detective fiction, Cuban socialist detective novels featured teams of state police officers working together to stop dissident behaviour (for examples, see Wilkinson, 2006: 110–115). Also like Soviet detective fiction, strict boundaries were set for the content and format of such novels (see Koreneva, 2005 for a thorough explanation of the Soviet detective novel and its various uses), with academics considering the genre to have been prioritised by Castro as its rigid structures could be easily appropriated (Wilkinson, 2006: 284; Serra, 2007: 156–157). As Padura (2000: 151) explains:

El resultado artístico de tales regulaciones fue la creación de una ruptura y un vacío en el terreno artístico que en algunos casos se trató de llenar de forma artificial con la promoción de nuevas figuras que sustituyeran a las excluidas.

The artistic result of such rules was the creation of a break and a vacuum in the creative field which in some cases one attempted to fill artificially through the promotion of new figures which substituted those excluded.

Detective fiction in Cuba therefore held a different purpose from that in other Latin American countries at the time. The genre in Mexico, for example, was used as a vehicle through which to express political disenchantment (see Nichols, 2011, for information on the Tlatelolco massacre in Mexico City in 1968 and the ensuing hard-boiled works by authors such as Rafael Bernal's *El complot mongol*, 1969).

Considering the detective novel as a response to new cultural encounters, this article understands that fall of the Soviet Union and its consequences on Cuba to have encouraged the publication of narratives which did not necessarily comply with the Communist Party's literary ideals as set out by Fidel Castro in 1971. To give one such example, *Máscaras* follows detective Mario Conde's investigation into the murder of a gay man, Alexis Arayán, whose body is discovered in the Havana Woods dressed as Electra Garrigó, the namesake of a play written by Cuban author Virgilio Piñera (*Electra Garrigó*, 1960, based on the Greek tragedy in which Electra and her brother Orestes take revenge on their mother and stepfather for the murder of their father). The narrative charts the detective's developing relationships with those within Havana's gay and transvestite underworlds, a significant departure from the work previously produced prior to the *Periodo Especial* (Special Period) which dealt with archetypal dissidents, caught and punished for their crimes by the effective state police apparatus. Though Padura's work may appear to engage more with the tenets of the US detective narrative, the core

argument of this article lies in the generic hybridity and mutation of both the US and the Cuban socialist detective novel. Here, I argue for *Máscaras* as demonstrative of an original take on the detective novel in Cuba. However, given this article's focus on homoeroticism and the *Hombre Nuevo*, it is important to note that other authors in Cuba's post-Special Period era also deal with these themes, such as Amir Valle and Lorenzo Lunar Cardedo. This article provides an interpretation of *Máscaras* as positioning Padura's work as more subversive than previously understood (see Bejel, 2001; Braham, 2004 for views on Padura's work as traditional within the context of Cuban detective fiction). I argue for the originality of Padura's work in *Máscaras*, contending that the author's work foregrounds transgenericidad (trans-genreing), both in relation to the questioning of the detective genre itself and the themes of the body and sexuality in the novel, with the narrative's action centring on transvestism, homosexuality, homophobia and disguise.

Part of the reason behind the popularity of *Las cuatro estaciones* is the creation of a Cuban sleuth who, though forming part of the socialist machine, also demonstrated clear disregard for previous Cuban investigators, more closely resembling the US detective: Mario Conde is presented as a drinker, a womaniser, a loner suffering from what Pérez (2010: 63) brands as an 'insufficient fervour' towards the Revolution, and a fighter, returning in *Máscaras* having been suspended from the force after starting a public brawl with another officer during the finale of *Vientos de cuaresma*.

I began this article with a debate on genre subversion, taking into account the slippery and complicated concept of postmodernity within the post-Soviet context of the *Periodo Especial*. I continue with an analysis of the postmodern self-awareness at the heart of the text, considering notions of fluidity of sexualities, metanarratives, underwhelming endings, and masks and multiplicities, interpreting postmodern symptoms within the text as demonstrative of deviance from both Cuban and US genre norm standards troubling the detective genre. I then consider the extent to which Padura's presentation of the detective acts as a subversive comment on the ubiquitous figure of the *Hombre Nuevo* focusing on the possibility of unspoken homosexual desires at the core of such an idol. I conclude that Padura's work acts as a destabilising commentary on accepted sexualities and genres in Cuba, suggesting both to be 'travestido, transformado, definitivamente distinto' to generic and gender archetypes.

Genre Trouble and Transgenericidad: The Postmodern Cuban Detective Novel

I use the term genre trouble in order to discuss the postmodern core of Padura's work, and also to engage with the thought conveyed by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*. Here, Butler (1990: 46) questions instances when one does not fit into the predetermined model of male or female, deeming gender trouble to constitute 'the mobilisation, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusion of identity'. Such a concept of subversion can equally be applied to Padura's work, and *Máscaras* is a particularly clear example of genre trouble and of the postmodern Cuban detective novel.

Postmodernity itself, the period of late capitalism, which implies a period of late modernity, is often linked to Western societies. Though such a concept of postmodernity may be maintained by some as necessarily divorced from Latin America and from communist Cuba in particular,

the literary classification of Padura's work as an example of postmodernist detective fiction and generically subversive comes from the author's preoccupation with double-encoding, meta-narrativity, parody, anxiety and multiplicity. The nature of Caribbean and Cuban postmodernity is highlighted by Williams (1995: 95), who identifies that 'an aquatic quality of the Caribbean is part of its inherent postmodernity', also stating that 'social scientists have described cultural constants of the Caribbean as fragmentation, instability, isolation, uprootedness, cultural complexity, disperse historiography, contingency, and impermanence'. Benítez Rojo (1992: 11) supports this view, understanding Caribbean culture as 'not terrestrial but aquatic; a sinuous culture', a result of centuries of European and Asian involvement due to the area's plantation history. Such fluctuating and at times clashing notions are integral to both the paradoxical postmodernist text, befitting the varied phenomenon itself. Here, I continue to demonstrate how Padura's postmodern detective novel, *Máscaras*, subverts both the socialist and the US detective fiction genres. I reference Hutcheon's (1989: 5) notions of double-encoding and parody as integral to postmodernist texts, McHale's view that postmodernist detective fiction constitutes the move from epistemological questioning to ontological instability (McHale, 1987: 10–11), and Lyotard's understanding that postmodernism is endowed with an intrinsic incredulity towards metanarratives (Lyotard, 1989: xxiv), in this case that promoted by the Communist Party after the 1971 Congress.

In considering *Máscaras* a Cuban postmodernist detective novel, I demonstrate how the text functions as an ontological development of McHale's (1987: 9) postulation of the modernist crime genre as the 'epistemological genre par excellence', in addition to Williams's (1995) estimation of the postmodern phenomenon in direct relation to Cuba. In this instance, what is perhaps most important is the notion of performance tied to Cuban literature. Williams (1995) highlights the fluidity that has already been noted by critics with regard to Cuban fiction, and quotes Benítez Rojo (1992):

The postmodern fictions of Cabrera Infante, Sarduy [...] are indeed performances [...] Benítez Rojo's reference to the 'aquatic' quality of Caribbean culture also recalls the aquatic quality of these always-transforming texts. The heterogeneous, aquatic, and double-coded nature of these unresolved contradictions places them among the premier examples of postmodern fiction in Latin America. (Williams, 1995: 106)

Performance, self-awareness, contradiction, subversion, doubling and transformation are key to the postmodern novel and are immediately apparent in Padura's work, a novel instilled with tension and anxiety, far removed from what was prescribed by the Cuban socialist regime, above all in relation to the iconic figure of the *Hombre Nuevo*. I consider the novel's postmodern tendencies through Padura's use of self-awareness, the fatalistic ending, double-encoding and contradiction, and a discussion of postmodern instability. Inherently multi-layered, the postmodern text supplies the reader with an infinite amount of possible interpretations of the narrative. For this reason, I approach *Máscaras* using the theoretical standpoints of Hutcheon in particular, who prioritizes the validity of the critical elements of postmodern narratives, despite their seemingly fluctuating nature, rendering such texts both complicit and resistant: Padura, I argue, critiques a homophobic discourse in Cuba through a trans-genre, and in doing so comments on such a discourse.

The postmodern undertones of the novel are made clear before the main body of the text begins. As a title, *Máscaras* hints at the multiple, fluctuating identities and the performance of

self at the heart of the novel. The author's note goes some way to answer any questions that the reader/critic may have concerning how such a text which appears to contravene so many of the tenets of the Cuban socialist detective novel as outlined in Castro's, 1971 speech has been published, accepted and feted in Cuba. (In 2012, Padura was awarded Cuba's *Premio Nacional de Literatura de Cuba*, a title which is awarded to authors *cuya labor aporte rigor y jerarquía a la literatura y la vida literaria cubanas* (whose work brings rigour and hierarchy to Cuban literature and to Cuban literary life) (http://www.ecured.cu/Premio_Nacional_de_Literatura). Unlike the writings of other Cuban authors of detective fiction, Padura's work is widely available in Cuba, despite being briefly banned (López Calvo, 2012: 30), has been awarded national prizes, and the author still lives on the island. In the preface Padura acknowledges the influence of the American author of the detective novel *The Maltese Falcon*, Dashiell Hammet, demonstrating generic awareness, and also making clear that *Máscaras* makes extensive reference to the works of renowned twentieth-century Cuban authors such as Virgilio Piñera and Severo Sarduy. Yet Padura does not only reference these authors, he writes them into his text: Alberto Marqués is a clear reference to Virgilio Piñera. Marqués, a gay playwright, even takes on Piñera's personality and physicality (Bejel, 2001: 173), and directs Alexis as Electra in his own version of *Electra Garrigó*. Furthermore, references to *Electra Garrigó* in fact make clear allusion to the Greek tragedy on which the play is based, in which actors wore masks in order to disguise their true identity (Wilkinson, 2006: 218). At the end of the novel, we discover that Alexis's father, Faustino, killed Alexis mistaking him for a woman while wearing a red dress: the mise en abyme created through multiple linked literary references colours the text with additional intrigue. Allusions to and borrowings from other Cuban authors may be part of the reason why Padura's work has been accepted in Cuba despite its break with generic convention, along with what reads as a disclaimer at the very end of the author's note, *Mario Conde es una metáfora, no un policía, y su vida, simplemente, transcurre en el espacio posible de la literatura* (Mario Conde is a metaphor, not a police officer, and his life, simply put, takes place in the possible space created by literature).

Perhaps the most obvious example of postmodern play in the novel occurs as the detective attends a party, thrown by a member of Havana's gay underworld. Attendance at this party, Conde explains, will inform him of the gay atmosphere and lifestyle in Havana (Padura, 2013: 37). Upon arriving at the party, Poly, a woman with whom Conde becomes romantically involved, asks him about his hobby as a writer:

-¿Qué tú escribes?
 -¿Yo? Pues, cuentos.
 - Que interesante. ¿Y eres posmoderno?
*El Conde miró la muchacha, sorprendido por aquella disyuntiva estética imprevista:
 ¿debía ser posmoderno?*
 -Más o menos – dijo, confiando en la posmodernidad y en que ella no le preguntara
 cuánto más y cuánto menos.

'What do you write?'
 'Me? Short stories.'
 'How interesting. And are you postmodern?'
 Conde looked at the girl, surprised by such an unexpected aesthetic disruption: should he be postmodern?
 'More or less', he replied, placing his trust in postmodernity and that she wouldn't ask any more on the topic.

Here, Padura's use of indirect free style allows the reader to reflect on the novel and consider whether or not *Máscaras* itself does constitute a postmodern text, and indeed, to consider what postmodernism is constituted of within Cuba. Her interrogatives demonstrate curiosity and a need for answers, the foundation of the modernist detective novel; however, the contents of these questions are metaliterary and focus on the status of the text that the reader continues to read. Engaging with McHale's (1987: 9) declaration that the detective narrative is 'the epistemological genre par excellence' since rationality, revelation and fact are all sought, used and obtained in the typical detective text, Ewert (1999: 189) claims that the postmodern metaphysical detective story causes anxiety because it 'abounds with examples of other, unfamiliar universes and of uneasiness produced when boundaries between universes are violated [...] Metaphysical detection plays its games in a different narrative (and narrated) world'. The transformation of a traditionally epistemological genre into a postmodern metanarrative is, I argue, what is at play in this extract and, in her questioning of Conde, Poly's words underline the uneasiness and boundary violation at the heart of *Máscaras*. Conde cannot respond to these questions, the detective has no answer to give Poly and once again, the role of the detective is undermined. His response, 'más o menos', is a further example of the anxiety rife in Conde's identity, highlighting his insecurity when considering his own work and also demonstrating an awareness (on the part both of the author and of the reader) of the disputed postmodern paradigm in Cuba: such an unsure, contradictory response to Poly is an implicit sign of the postmodernism at play in Padura's novel. As Wilkinson (2006: 252) believes, 'By referencing the condition this way he [Padura] is deliberately drawing the reader's attention to the overall nature of his project'. The deliberate ambiguity and anxiety at play in this exchange is evidenced by Conde 'confiando en la posmodernidad y que *ella* no le preguntara cuánto más y cuánto menos' ('placing his trust in postmodernity and that *she* wouldn't ask any more on the topic', Padura, 141, my emphasis). This slippage – understanding *ella* as postmodernity or as Poly – is deliberate on Padura's part. It endows the conversation with a quality similar to the lack of control and adequate understanding arising from the confusion between postmodernity and Poly. It is this slippage that posits Poly as being almost interchangeable with postmodernity, and sites her as the problematic, indefinable, intangible image of postmodernity in the novel. At this juncture, trusting neither the anxiety-causing and interrogatory Poly, nor the contradictory and unclassifiable notion of postmodernism is preferable to Conde. Such an attitude undermines the role of the omniscient detective, in this instance transformed into a lost and confused entity.

It is perhaps the text's recurring trait of self-awareness that most clearly renders *Máscaras* a text so open to interpretation as postmodern. Conde's vocation to become a crime writer is a theme throughout the tetralogy, with Padura's fourth novel *Paisaje de otoño* seeing the detective leave the force to become a writer. It is therefore significant to discuss the inclusion of Conde's untitled short story within *Máscaras*, which has been often overlooked or simply referenced in criticism of Padura's oeuvre (Serra, 2007: 166), dedicates two paragraphs to Conde's would-be vocation as an author, mentioning in passing the unnamed short story in *Máscaras*). It is my contention, however, that Padura's choice to include an embedded narrative within *Máscaras* is far from tangential, and that a close analysis of it is essential to our understanding of the novel as postmodern. The short story appears within *Máscaras* with no introduction, announcing itself through the use of italics. The narrative focuses on a Havana bus driver, who, one day, decides to kill one of his regular passengers. The story follows his life and thoughts over several months, culminating in his murder of the chosen passenger, Isabel María.

The reader is presented principally with the story's protagonist, performing the banal act of watching a pigeon flying in the sky. However, José Antonio's normative act becomes more complicated upon closer examination:

Mientras esperaba, José Antonio Morales siguió con la vista el vuelo extravagante de aquella paloma. Observó como el ave tomaba altura, en una vertical insistente, y después plegaba las alas y hacía unas piruetas extrañas, como si en ese instante descubriera la sensación vertiginosa de caer al vacío.
(Padura, 2013: 185)

While he waited, José Antonio Morales's gaze followed the extravagant flight of that pigeon. He watched how the bird soared straight up into the air, and then tucked its wings in, pirouetting strangely, as if discovering for the first time the vertiginous feeling of falling into the void.

The reader of both *Máscaras* and Conde's short story are made instantly aware through the phrase 'aquella paloma' that narrator(s) and character here merge, and that the narrative unravels in the form of indirect free style, allowing the character's thoughts to be displayed intimately and immediately by the author. Indirect free style creates the effect of heightened feelings, intensifying or dramatising the character's words, and therefore the reader cannot fail to become aware of the protagonist's most intimate thoughts and decisions.

Though common in literature, the use of the imagery of birds as omens is perhaps best known from the opening pages of García Márquez's *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* (*Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, 1982), in which the dream imagery of birds, also at the very beginning of the narrative, is used as a negative omen to foreshadow protagonist Santiago's inescapable death. Conde's text is equally as fatalistic as those of both Padura and García Márquez: the unstoppable, unsettling and strange imagery which creates the description of the bird's movements, 'insistente', 'extrañas', 'vertiginosa' contributes to the reader's sense of unease and anxiety from the very beginning of the story, as in *Máscaras*. Here, Padura as author and puppeteer ultimately controls Conde's short story, and as a result this story communicates to the reader additional information about Conde that the omniscient third-person narrator has not made explicit. In this manner, the adjectives applied to the bird can then all be read as transferred epithets relating to Conde's changing selfhood. The short story can be read as an insight further into Conde's character, and adds additional layers to an already multiplicitous and fractured postmodern text.

The reader becomes quickly aware of a pre-determined ending to the short story, entirely constructed by Conde's writing due to the use of the phrase 'Iba a matar a aquella mujer' ('He was going to kill that woman'), which appears in the same or in similar forms a total of ten times throughout this short text. Paradoxically, the insistent repetition of the same phrase highlights the multiple personalities of guaguero (bus driver) José Antonio. Most obviously, this repetition serves to enhance the protagonist's predilection for routine, and the therefore almost ritualised final act of murder. His tendency towards routine and a repetitive lifestyle is demonstrated throughout the short narrative, perhaps most vividly through his daily routine, specifically that pertaining to his sexual relationship with his wife (Padura, 2013: 189, 192). In addition to regulated life, the repeated phrase 'iba a matar a aquella mujer' is both orally and aurally a violent, staccato sentence, as well as an image incongruous to José Antonio's

repetitive, dull life. Though in the past he had thoughts of harming other drivers (Padura, 2013: 186), he has become accustomed to the imprudent nature of motorists on a daily basis. This acceptance and docile manner complements his occupation of providing a service for others, as well as his tendency towards routine and repetition:

*Ya tenía cuarenta y siete años y cuando empezó como guaguero, recién salido del servicio militar, apenas tenía diecinueve, y todo ese tiempo había sido chófer de la ruta 4: desde entonces, cada día cinco vueltas a La Habana durante once meses seguidos, conduciendo por las mismas calles, a las misma horas, con las mismas paradas y hasta recogiendo a las mismas gentes que se fueron haciendo sus amigos al paso de los meses y los años, y asistió a bodas, ingresos hospitalares, algunos cumpleaños y hasta entierros de aquellos pasajeros habituales, **sin pensar jamás en matar a ninguno de ellos.*** (Padura, 2013: 188, my emphasis)

He was already forty-seven and, when he had started as a bus driver, just out of military service, he'd been barely nineteen, and all that time he had been driving Route 4: ever since, every day he did five circuits around Havana, eleven months on the trot, driving through the same streets, at the same times, with the same stops, even picking up the same people who, over the months and years, came to be his friends, and he went to weddings, visited at hospitals, went to some birthday parties and even the burials of some regular passengers, **never thinking of killing any of them.**

As a result, José Antonio appears easily influenced, and the repeated phrase comes to sound increasingly like a mantra. On several occasions, José Antonio begins to reference his desire to kill as 'la necesidad' ('the need', Padura, 2013: 186) or 'el mandato' ('the mandate', Padura, 2013: 186, 190, 191). A lexis full of repeated synonyms which invoke imagery of religion, cults, or of a divine order, repetition of unsettling phrases centring on murder, and the inverted, negative omen of the dove clearly communicates to the reader the predetermined dénouement of Conde's work. Within this context, the short story included within *Máscaras* is a clear demonstration of the postmodern play at the heart of the text, doomed from the outset at the hands of Conde.

José Antonio kills Isabel María at her home: her murder is a finalising, totalising act, with José Antonio stabbing the woman in her chest, but José Antonio is still confused by his actions, immediately asking himself '¿Por qué?' ('Why?', Padura, 2013: 193). The semiotics of murder and its usual motivations, such as jealousy, greed, rage, revenge and wrath, are laid aside. Humanity's lack of understanding of its own actions as demonstrated by the incomprehensible yet clearly signposted and foreshadowed denouement to the text is demonstrated in José Antonio's complete apathy towards his situation and lack of motivation for his crime.

Conde's short story within *Máscaras* references the omnipotent author, stresses obscurity and questions truth. It is thus highly postmodern, and clearly a postmodernist detective novel – above all because of the glaring lack of any detective to re-establish the status quo. The concept of the omnipotent author is particularly interesting, because as we understand Conde's power and control over the text, we also begin to become aware of the acts of reading and writing, and can reconsider the statement at the beginning of the novel in the author's note. As a result, the reader comes to question authorial decisions and their own interpretations of a purposefully written text, becoming further aware of the text as construct, intensifying the anxiety experienced when reading Conde's resigned text and Padura's self-aware metanarrative. The

lack of epistemological truth within the two texts reinforces Padura's work as a clear example of the postmodern crime novel, and demonstrates the great extent to which his work is 'travestido, transformado, definitivamente distinto' ('transvestited, transformed, definitively different', Padura, 2013: 197) in relation to Cuban detective texts preceding it. The inclusion of the short story plays a crucial role firmly situating *Máscaras* as a postmodernist text, but also works as an outlet for Conde's tensions and anxieties surrounding his identity. The fact that Conde's narrative fails to achieve the most basic goal of the crime novel – the adequate solution – reinforces his own failures as the *Hombre Nuevo* who cannot adhere to the prescribed archetype.

Iconoclasm in *Máscaras*: Postmodern Subversions of the *Hombre Nuevo*

Critics such as Serra (2007: 156–157) view the detective of Cuban socialist crime fiction as representative of the idealised *Hombre Nuevo*. The idealised image of Cuba's New Man was first disseminated in Che Guevara's work *Socialismo y el hombre en Cuba* (*Socialism and Man in Cuba*, first published 1965). Described by Serra (2007: 3) as 'The new person embodying the radical change that the Cuban regime was interested in', the *Hombre Nuevo* was therefore a vehicle to promote strength and power and have a willingness to fight on behalf of others – in Latin America and elsewhere – who were experiencing repressive capitalist regimes. As Christensen (2012: 99) has put it, 'through official sponsorship and popular appeal, the "*Hombre Nuevo*" became the idea of masculinity for Cubans. In simplest terms, this ideal was "to be like Che": brave, authentic, well-read, emotionally connected and committed to the welfare of the entire human race'. Conde is, in many ways, demonstrative of such a figure: a state-employed detective who smokes cigars and drinks, he has an interest in literature given his aspirations to become a writer, is physically fit, and comes complete with a history of romantic relationships with women. Though Conde clearly possesses many of the traits of the *Hombre Nuevo*, I read Mario Conde as a reformulated and subversive take on the Cuban detective and New Man.

The deconstruction of the figure of the *Hombre Nuevo* is perhaps most obvious when Conde attends the party where he meets Poly. The multiplicity of identities present act as yet another challenge to Conde's already weakening imposed revolutionary view of Cuban society. This conflict is clearly visible in his reaction to seeing two men – in drag – kissing:

Un escalofrío dañino recorrió toda la estructura del policía cuando descubrió la pareja que se besaba con total impudicia: dos hombres – según códigos jurídicos y biológicos –, de unos treinta años, ambos de bigote y pelo muy negro, unían sus labios para propiciar un tráfico de lenguas y salivas que estremeció al Conde con la violencia de una repugnancia agresiva [...] Supo entonces que había ido demasiado lejos en aquel viaje a los infiernos y que necesitaba otro aire para no morir de asfixia y consternación. Él, que era policía y se jactaba de haber visto todas las barbaridades posibles, ahora sentía aquella sacudida dolorosa, nacida del núcleo invariable de sus hormonas masculinas, incapacitadas para resistir la negación más alarmante de la naturaleza. (Padura, 2013: 145–146)

A painful shudder ran through the policeman when he discovered a couple lewdly kissing: two men – according to legal, biological codes – about thirty years old, both sporting moustaches and jet black hair, who locked lips to foster a flow of tongues and

saliva which made Conde shake with violent repugnance [...] He knew then that he'd gone too far on that journey to hell and that he needed different air, otherwise he was going to suffocate or die of panic. He, a policeman who boasted he'd seen all kinds of possible barbarity, now felt a painful jolt come from his core of male hormones, unable to resist that most disturbing negation of nature.

This scene is also demonstrative of how disturbing the experience of the party is to Conde's troubled heterosexuality. The use of both biological and juridical lexis and 'códigos', such as 'unión', 'núcleo', 'hormonas masculinas', 'naturaleza' by Padura here is, I argue, an example of what Butler identifies as the juridico-scientific discourses regulating sex. Sex is a gender marker, part of a production which as Butler (1993: 1) states, has the 'power to produce – demarcate, circulate, differentiate – the bodies it controls'. Butler continues that biological sex is installed as a code at birth, not only in relation to physical genitalia and gender is assigned to the subject in an act of pre-gendering:

To claim that the subject is itself produced in and as a gendered matrix of relations is not to do away with the subject, but only to ask after the conditions of its emergence and operation. The 'activity' of this gendering cannot, strictly speaking, be a human act or expression, a wilful appropriation, and it is certainly not a question of taking on a mask; it is the matrix through which all willing first becomes possible, its enabling cultural condition. In this sense, the matrix of gender relations is prior to the emergence of the 'human'. (Butler, 1993: 7)

The inculcation in this matrix is probably what makes Conde identify himself as a heterosexual man due to both biology and pre-determined body laws of patriarchal Cuban society, which prefers heteronormativity: in Cuba, heteronormativity is preferred to the extent that homosexual sexual activity is largely only considered so if one acts as the passive entity of the pairing, the active participant being viewed as *hombre hombre* (Lumsden, 1996; Bejel, 2001; López, 2015). It is in this sense that Conde has not used a mask until the investigation in *Máscaras*, up to this point in the tetralogy, he was wearing a mask of gender, but was unaware of it. Bearing in mind, then, that 'performativity is thus not a singular "act," for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition' (Butler, 1993: 12), Padura's novel displays key characteristics of the postmodern here, and the multiple self in this scene. Primarily, Conde appears disgusted when he sees the two men kissing. However, it is both the juridical and biological tone of the excerpt that invites a Butlerian reading, since the instilled matrix is negated as their kiss is interpreted as *la negación más alarmante de la naturaleza* (the most disquieting denial of nature) (Padura, 2013: 145–146). Nonetheless, Padura double-codes the scene through the use of a lexicon that can be read to evoke either pleasure and/or pain in order to provide the reader once again with a sense of Conde's unspoken homoerotic desires as highlighted by such phrases as, *escalofrió dañino* (painful shudder), *estremeció al Conde* (made Conde shake), *había ido demasiado lejos* (he had gone too far), *morir de asfixia* (suffocate [to death]), *aquella sacudida dolorosa* (a painful jolt), *incapacitadas para resistir* (unable to resist) (Padura, 2013: 145–146). Conde's emotionally juxtaposed reactions to the scene illustrate what Butler (1993:19) refers to as 'a certain gender trespass in order to facilitate the otherwise unspeakable desire'. When considering these unspeakable desires, it is also significant to note that Conde has chosen to attend the party again without his gun:

El Conde había sentido un rubor tangible y consideró, antes de salir de su casa, que, si tenía cara de policía y hasta lo investigaban por ser policía, esa noche debía llevar su pistola de policía, cuyo peso frío sostuvo entre las manos por un minuto, antes de convencerse de que los riesgos de esa noche no se defendía con plomos y optó por abandonar el arma en la profundidad de su gaveta. (Padura, 2013: 135)

Conde had perceptibly blushed before leaving home, and thought that if he had a policeman's face and if he was under scrutiny for being a policeman, he should take his police-issued pistol with him tonight, whose cold weight he held in his hands for a minute, before convincing himself that the night's dangers couldn't be fought with bullets and so he opted to abandon the weapon in the bottom of his desk drawer.

Possession of phallic power has deserted Conde, and his conscious rejection of the phallus could be interpreted as Conde further performing gender trouble. *Máscaras* ends with Conde going to Poly's home, intent on spending the weekend having sex with her. Though Conde's decision to spend his time with Poly is not a particularly subversive act for a detective within the crime fiction genre, this ending can be interpreted as demonstrating some veiled potentials for homosexual desire on the part of Conde. Poly is presented androgynously, Conde himself wondering '¿Será un travesti?' ('Could she be a transvestite?', Padura, 2013: 141), as Poly 'no era linda ni poblada de encantos carnales' ('she wasn't pretty or bestowed with fleshy charms', Padura, 2013: 140), and who has 'unas nalguitas de gorrión sin nido' ('a nest-less sparrow's bottom', Padura, 2013: 139), a description which does not equate her with maternal conventions, underlined by the fact she demands that Conde penetrate her anally (Padura, 2013: 149). As such, although Padura may appear to end *Máscaras* by conforming to sexual and gendered norms, on this level, the heterosexism on display is in fact another example of heteronormativity being underscored with homoerotic subtext. *Máscaras* could therefore be interpreted as a comment on how the traditionally rational, male-associated detective genre can be subjected to gender trouble.

Having arrived, Conde lets himself out onto Poly's balcony, where he considers Havana. The detective begins asking existentialist questions about his reality ('¿Será posible volver atrás y deshacer entuertos y errores y equivocaciones?' ('Would it be possible to go back and retrace steps, take back errors, undo mistakes?', Padura, 2013: 233), and, the reader becomes aware, Conde makes direct reference to his short story. He focuses on the image of the dove, concluding 'Yo soy esa paloma, pensé, y pensé que, como ella, no tenía otra cosa que hacer: solo remontar el vuelo, hasta perderse en el cielo y en la noche' ('I'm that pigeon', he thought, and thought that just like the bird, he could do nothing other: just soar high until he disappeared into the sky at night', Padura, 2013: 233). Furthermore, Conde's references to his own story within the overarching narrative colours Padura's text as entirely self-conscious and fatalistic – Conde will continue as he is – nothing has changed. Although I argue that the novel's end is not necessarily as conclusive as it seems, critics such as Bejel (2001:172) interpret this ending, with Poly and Conde spending the weekend together, as a reductive conclusion to the work, suggesting that *Máscaras* promotes non-normative, transgressive sexualities as being largely viewed as redundant within the Cuban context:

Such a restrained ending leads me to conclude that an ideological conflict has hindered its [the novel's] most daring possibilities. After bringing the theme of homosexuality and the abuse of gays to the surface, the text ultimately opts for a solution that is

contained and ideological (in the worst sense of the word), reinstalling and reaffirming the heterosexism that it had challenged earlier. (Bejel, 2001: 172)

I would argue, contrary to Bejel, that the ending merely *appears* restrained, and the dénouement in fact acts as a screen, on the one side of which lie heterosexual models – the *Hombre Nuevo* – and on the other side, homoerotic subtleties.

Conclusion

The examples given are among many in a text rich with postmodern interplay, and demonstrate how developed and far-removed Padura's work is from both US and socialist predecessors. *Máscaras* is particularly transgressive in both form and content, ultimately offering his readers a Cuban selfhood *travestido, transformado y definitivamente distinto* from that promulgated during the 1970s and 1980s during the ongoing *castrista* regime, and from that offered in US narratives. Rather, the modernist crime genre is transgenred and transformed, becoming self-aware and contradictory, with the purposes of the crime text and of the detective turned on their heads. Roles such as the *Hombre Nuevo* are equally as distorted, and succeed in troubling the patriarchal male matrix. Padura's text presents archetypal roles, through an archetypal genre, in order to then subvert, deconstruct and reconstruct both.

The masks that characters assume can be as emancipatory as others are repressive, as evidenced by Conde's personal struggle with his identity as *Hombre Nuevo*/detective and as closet homosexual. *Máscaras* provides the reader with a multiplicitous Cuban identity, perhaps one that still does not completely disengage from its heteronormative *machista* matrix, but one that is nevertheless nuanced, transgenred and delicate.

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