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偵探小說（II）

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## 性別與身分認同之探討：

### 西班牙後佛朗哥時期的女性作家之偵探小說（II）

#### 中文摘要

女性運動的成功，結合了西班牙七零年代偵探小說之再興，終於產生女性偵探小說。喜美內斯巴爾雷(Alicia Giménez-Bartlett, 1951)的作品在具有高水準之其他女性先驅作家中，備受西國文壇批評家的讚賞。自 1996 年出版《死亡的儀式》(*Ritos de muerte*)，此後以巴塞隆納女警官貝德拉·德里卡多(Petra Delicado)為主角創作了一系列女性偵探小說，至目前為止已書寫其他六部作品：《狗的歲月》(*Día de perros*, 1997)、《黑暗的使者》(*Mensajeros de la oscuridad*, 1999)、《謀殺的文件》(*Muertos de papel*, 2000)、《天國之蛇》(*Serpientes en el paraíso*, 2002)、《滿載米的船》(*Un barco cargado de arroz*, 2004) 以及《空巢》(*Nido vacío*, 2007)。貝德拉·德里卡多系列小說的獨特之處在於女性偵探人物之刻劃，由於喜美內斯巴爾雷試圖解構傳統偵探小說以男性為中心的文本結構，例如女性主角大多是惡女，無法自衛的年輕女性，或是未受保護的犧牲者。主角貝德拉·德里卡多也再現了多重的越界，尤其在性別（女人）、職業（警官）及語言運用（嘲諷）等方面。

本計畫旨在分析喜美內斯巴爾雷的以性別與身分認同為中心主題之女性偵探小說，進而詮釋作者如何運用偵探體裁來呈現女性主義議題的越界及建構女性主體的論述。

**關鍵詞：**性別、身分認同、偵探小說、女性偵探、艾莉絲雅·喜美內斯巴爾雷

## **Gender and Identity: Women's Detective Fiction in the Post-Franco Spain (II)**

### **Abstract**

The success of the women's movement in combination with the rebirth of detective fiction in Spain in the seventies finally has produced women's detective narrative. Among the high quality of some of the pioneering examples, the works of Alicia Giménez Bartlett in particular have received substantial critical acclaim. With the publication of *Ritos de muerte* (Death Rites) in 1996, Giménez Bartlett has initiated a series of detective novels centered on the figure of Barcelona Inspector Petra Delicado and her inseparable colleague, Deputy Fermín Garzón, among which other 6 novels have been published: *Día de perros* (Dog Days, 1997), *Mensajeros de oscuridad* (Messengers of Darkness, 1999), *Muertos de papel* (The Paper Muerders, 2000), *Serpientes en el paraíso* (Serpent in Paradise, 2002), *Un barco cargado de arroz* (A Ship Full of Rice, 2004) and *Nido vacío* (Empty Nest, 2007). The uniqueness of the series of Petra Delicado lies in the creation of the female sleuth since the writer tries to break with the phallogentric structure of detective narrative in which traditionally female characters used to be fatal women, defenseless young women, or unprotected victims. In addition, Petra Delicado has demonstrated her multiple transgressions in terms of gender (woman), profession (police inspector) and the use of language (irony).

The present project aims to analyze gender and identity as central themes in the detective novels by Giménez Bartlett and explore how detective genre can be used by the writer to create transgressions of the incorporation of a feminist agenda for the construction of female identity.

**Key words: gender, identity, detective fiction, female sleuth, Alicia Giménez Bartlett**

## I. Introduction

The success of the women's movement in combination with the rebirth of detective fiction in Spain in the seventies finally has produced women's detective narrative. For the women writers and readers, detective fiction is more sensitive than other literary forms to respond and to reflect issues related to women. In fact, detective fiction provides an ideal literary medium for the incorporation of a feminist agenda and the articulation of a feminist consciousness and women empowerment, in sharp contrast to the origins of the genre in which women were often antagonists to the male heroes. Critics like Priscilla L Walton, Manina Jones and Maureen T. Reddy have pointed out the importance of detective genre serving as a space of debate to redefine and redistribute the power, thus Reddy's comment is certainly significant for highlighting the close relation between detective narrative and feminist project:

Feminist crime novels, far from being mere escapist literature or isolated, peculiar experiments in an essentially masculine preserve, participate in the larger feminist project of redefining and redistributing power, joining a long and valuable tradition of women's fiction. (*Sisters in Crime* 149)

Among the high quality of some of the pioneering examples, the works of Alicia Giménez Bartlett in particular have attracted public and critical attention and acclaim. With the publication of *Ritos de muerte* (Death Rites) in 1996, Giménez Bartlett has initiated a series of detective novels centered on the figure of Barcelona Inspector Petra Delicado and her inseparable colleague, Deputy Fermín Garzón, among which other 6 novels have been published: *Día de perros* (Dog Days, 1997), *Mensajeros de oscuridad* (Messengers of Darkness, 1999), *Muertos de papel* (The Paper Muerders, 2000), *Serpientes en el paraíso* (Serpent in Paradise, 2002), *Un barco cargado de arroz* (A Ship Full of Rice, 2004) and *Nido vacío* (Empty Net, 2007). The uniqueness of the series of Petra Delicado lies in the creation of the female sleuth as the writer attempts to break with the phallogentric structure of detective narrative in which traditionally female characters used to be fatal women, defenseless young women, or unprotected victims. In addition, throughout the detective series Petra Delicado has demonstrated her multiple transgressions in terms of gender (woman), profession (police inspector) and the use of language (irony).

The present project aims to analyze gender and identity as central themes in the detective novels by Giménez Bartlett and explore how detective genre can be used by the writer to create transgressions of the incorporation of a feminist agenda for the construction of female identity.

## II. Literary Review and Research Methodology

In recent years more academic studies about Alicia Giménez-Bartlett have been published. Ramón Acín's article entitled "Novelas como liturgias de destrucción: Entrevista con Alicia Giménez Bartlett" which appeared in *Quimera* reveals thoroughly Giménez Bartlett's writing style of women centered fiction and her literary perspective. Angeles Encinar's "La narrativa policíaca de Alicia Giménez Bartlett" insightfully studies women's detective fiction by Giménez Bartlett, in particular on the analysis of the female protagonist, Petra Delicado, and the issue of "deconstruction" of detective novel. Other studies such as Kathleen Thompson-Casado's "Petra Delicado, A Suitable Detective for a Feminist?", Shelley Godsland's "From Feminism to Postfeminism in Women's Detective Fiction from Spain: The Case of Maria-Antònia Oliver and Alicia Giménez- Bartlett", and Nina Molinar's "Writing the Wrong Rites? Rape and Women's Detective Fiction in Spain", are focused on the issues of women by Giménez Bartlett's detective narrative, which include sexual violence, gender discrimination, sexual transgression, the discourse of postfeminism, etc. These three essays, with innovative and powerful perspective, have been collected in a special issue on "Hispanic Female Sleuth" by the well-know feminist journal *Letras Femeninas*.

The present project, based on textual analysis, studies the structure of detective genre, female characters (detective, victims, avengers), masculine characters, women's issues, writing style, and the aspect of time and space in Giménez Bartlett's detective narrative. Like the previous research (2007) on Rosa Montero's detective narrative, the major focus of this project will be gender and identity, in combination with literary theory and cultural studies in order to explore in detail other issues and significances related to women's detective fiction.

## III. Gender and Identity in the Petra Delicado series

In numerous occasions, Alicia Giménez Bartlett affirms the importance of the integration of detective genre in writing: "Sería más correcto decir en el ámbito de un género muy específico, en el que hay que cumplir unas reglas establecidas que el lector ya espera. Aparte de esas reglas, puedes añadir todo lo que quieras"<sup>1</sup>, "la novela negra es ideal como testimonio porque abre las puertas de la sociedad"<sup>2</sup>. Giménez Bartlett clearly acknowledges the conventions of detective genre, due to the fact that they play an essential role in the construction of the text; nevertheless, her choice of a female sleuth for the series implies certain complications with regard to the genre's gendered conventions, according to Thompson-Casado (2002: 72). These discussions of gender have been made evidently with humor and irony in terms of the definition of feminism, of the fight for power between men

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<sup>1</sup> For more details of the interview by Josan Hatero, see "Interview with Alicia Giménez Bartlett." [www.maslibros.com/entrevistas/12alicia.htm](http://www.maslibros.com/entrevistas/12alicia.htm)

<sup>2</sup> See the review of Alicia Giménez Bartlett's work "*Serpientes en el paraíso*, el nuevo caso de la inspectora Petra Delicado", <http://elmundolibro.com18/03/03>

and women, which, at the same time, encourage our reader to think over the new role played by women.

In the Petra Delicado series, the general structure is attributed to the classic detective novel due to abundant common elements: assassinations, enigmas, false traces, police investigations, deduction and solution of the case. Moreover, the model of hard-boiled school is perceived in the series, as we can find degraded urban scenery, tough and marginal characters, and violent actions. However, neither can we ignore the presence of police procedural that our writer employs to portrait her characters. Originated in the States during the 1940s, the police procedural as a sub-genre of detective fiction has been in existence for more than half a century, but its literary presence in Spain has not been so notable. In Symons' study, this sub-genre centers on police inspector's perspective, offering comprehensive details of the police's routine with regard to criminal investigations and, sometimes, describing details of police inspectors' private life to stimulate reader's interest in the work (1985: 94). Crime, in these works, is the principal motive for the investigation, and other issues, like justice, power as well as social order, are considered essential themes. All these elements can be found in the Petra Delicado series, where Giménez Bartlett is capable of interweaving with mastery strange cases and of creating suspense.

With a narrative voice in the first person, our writer situates her female sleuth in a governmental institution, traditionally bonded to authority and repression. Under this environment, clearly masculinist, we have observed that Petra attempts to deconstruct some negative feminine stereotypical representations which usually put emphasis on female passiveness, on the one hand, and on the other hand, question and criticize women's participation in patriarchal system. Therefore, issues of integration and resistance regarding the female protagonist's evolution have generated an ambiguous phenomenon throughout the series.

The ambiguity is revealed, first of all, through the detective's name, because "Petra" in Spanish symbolizes values conventionally associated with masculinity, such as stone, hardness and solidarity; in contrast, "Delicado" embodies concepts attributed to the female values, like delicacy and fragility. From the first page of the first novel *Ritos de muerte*, it is clear that the detective's ambiguous character is shown. Petra Delicado appears as a woman who, after her second marriage, intends to enjoy the life in a space of freedom and stillness. In spite of many difficulties, Petra has just purchased a house with a garden in the city of Barcelona where she plans to live alone. The house/home is like a nest, and the garden symbolizes the desire of giving life, so as to a return to nature, "poseer una casa de planta era como echar una soga hacia un poste, amarrarse a la tierra, enraizar" (7), the protagonist remarks. Petra also tells us why she gave up her prestigious career of lawyer and chose the profession of police: "Si había acabado haciéndome policía era para luchar contra la reflexión que solía inundarme frente a todo. Acción. Sólo pensamientos prácticos en horas de trabajo,

inducción, deducción. . . .“(8). In this sense, in order to portrait the detective, our writer employs the dualist gendered stereotypes, such as the female impulse of returning to the nature, the nutritive image of Mother-Earth in contrast to the masculine impulse of acting without reflecting. Thus, for her inability of reconciling different psychological necessities the image which we portrait Petra is certainly ambiguous and conflictive.

Petra’s ambiguity is also revealed by her concept of feminism. From the first novel *Ritos de muerte* to the following series, both Petra’s masculine colleagues and the characters implicated in the cases have labeled the protagonist as a feminist. Nevertheless, in diverse instances, the detective repeats again and again declaring that she is not a feminist. In *Muertos de papel* Petra in particular shows her antifeminist attitude when the inspector Moliner doubts her contradictory position:

Pero una cosa téngala por cierta: no soy feminista. Si lo fuera no trabajaría como policía, ni viviría aún en este país, ni me hubiera casado dos veces, ni siquiera saldría a la calle, fíjese lo que digo. (138)

In *Mensajeros de oscuridad*, Petra talks about “pendencias feministas a las que había renunciado tiempo atrás” (98), and in fact, the word ‘pendencia’ (dispute) bears with her negative perception toward the feminist discourse. It is supposed that Petra’s decisive declaration is ascribed to the cynical attitude of her masculine co-workers who, very frequently, recur to the word “feminism” as insult or accusation toward their female colleague. For they pre-suppose that Petra, a woman who fights constantly for the integration in a masculine institution and reclaims equal treatment, should be a feminist.

On the other hand, along with different detective investigations, Petra seems to be a feminist spokeswoman. In *Ritos de muerte*, she deplores the lack of feminine consciousness or what is supposed to be ‘women’s basic reclamations’ among victims of rape, who dare not to identify the criminal because of a marked belief in the society in which rape is a crime that dishonors victims. In diverse occasions, Petra also protests officially against sexual discrimination in her institution, as we observe in the following passage:

Con todos los respetos hacia mis superiores quiero señalar que estoy convencida de que este trato injusto se me dispensa por el simple hecho de ser mujer, un colectivo sin relevancia dentro del cuerpo, al que minimizar o vejar resulta sencillo y sin consecuencias. (*Ritos* 94)

In *Muertos de papel*, Petra struggles for women’s equality, revealing strongly her disagreement about the use of sexist language by the deputy in terms of the word ‘hijoputa’ (son of bitch) in the conversation:

En realidad es curioso que los mayores insultos dirigidos a los hombres acaben también cayendo sobre la cabeza de una mujer. Porque ya me dirá, comisario, si porque un tío sea malvado o cabrón hay que cargárselo también a su madre. (12)

With these statements, yet it is difficult to classify Petra's feminism. Her intention of justifying the discourse of equality is not interpreted from the perspective of radical feminism nor of theoretical feminism, but is conceived as feminism in humanist sense, a kind of feminism with individualistic tendency of the nineties like postfeminism.

Shelley Godsland, in her study, affirms that the detective narrative by Giménez Bartlett has demonstrated certain aspects of postfeminism,<sup>3</sup> particularly, in the idea of women's returning to domestic space, women as product of media, the fallacy of the universal victim status of the female, or the lack of solidarity between women. All these features, in some way, represent the dilemmas which our protagonist needs to face with, as well as divergent and pluralist discourses of the age in which we are situated. Therefore, in the Petra Delicado series the search for identity and gender relations will be headed for multiple directions.

As we know, the removal to domestic space highlights the importance of privacy, a conventionally feminine feature. With a detailed description about the process of decorating and constructing an intimate and comfortable space, it seems that Giménez Bartlett wants to soften the tough character of female sleuth and stress the significance of possessing a precious house for a middle-age woman like Petra, representing a substantial change in her material life after years of fighting. In numerous passages, we observe that our protagonist makes use of her house to enjoy moments of solitude, of quietness, with "a good book of detective science, Chopin's piano" (*Ritos* 11). Nevertheless, while the cases get complicated, the house, sometimes, becomes a social space where Petra and Fermín get together to discuss about possible solutions to the cases or about the sentimental problems of each other. In this way, the meaning of privacy is not restrictive as we have imagined.

The media, undoubtedly, has primary impacts in the formation of postfeminism. Although Brooks asserts that the media, in general, promulgates a negative but popular perception of postfeminism (3), Whelehan also notes that the media plays an essential role in promoting an anti-feminist notion of postfeminism (240-241), Faludi signals that women living within the postfeminist economy produced by these agents view the media as the only possible and powerful means of confirming their female status. In the opening pages of

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<sup>3</sup> Although it is extremely difficult to define what postfeminism is, as Susan Faludi has noted, a very confusing term (1647), in general, it deals with a term to describe a series of reactionary perspectives on the second wave of feminism. However, Ann Brooks' remark is valuable and interesting as postfeminism is understood as "a useful frame of reference encompassing the intersection of feminism with a number of other anti-foundationalist movements including postmodernism, poststructuralism and postcolonialism." (1), "the conceptual shift within feminism from debates around equality to a focus on debates around difference" (4).



*Mensajeros de oscuridad*, Petra is chosen by the force to participate in a television chat show, not for her sleuthing skills, but for the fact that “siempre queda mayor una mujer” (8), as her boss explains. Besides, everyone thinks that a female police is ideal for human and diplomatic tasks (223). Though Petra is aware that her boss’s attitude is unfair and offensive, she decides to accept her mission of softening the image of police. In the television, Petra looks like a female figure, a passive object, essentially desired by male audience. Paradoxically, for she is not able to resist the captivating influence of television, but to enjoy public attention on her words, in fact, she feels like an authentic star. Thus, we can say that the media’s repercussion of projecting the female image is enormous. Ironically, in *Ritos de muerte*, it is television that is deployed as a medium for publicly ridiculing and humiliating Petra. We remember that during an interview in a chat show, three of the victims of rapes accuse the detective for her harsh and merciless treatment, statements which provoke discomfort aimed at removing Petra from the case, and which enhance the audience’s sensationalist appetite.

It is evident that Petra usually carries out her investigations with the purpose of re-establishing the order within the context of bourgeois and capitalist patriarchy. The detective does not act according to feminist theory, but based on rules of law. Thus, the concepts of posfeminism can be strengthened in the detective novels by Giménez Bartlett. In front of the female victims, Petra Delicado behaves herself as a police officer of hard-boiled school, lack of empathy, and even rejects the universal victim status of the female. Definitely, this attitude enhances another postfeminist discourse which constructs as a fallacy the gendered nature of women’s victimization. Furthermore, Brooks affirms that “in doing so the postfeminism challenges hegemonic assumptions held by second wave feminist epistemologies that patriarchal and imperialist oppression was a universally experienced oppression” (2). In *Ritos de muerte*, Petra interrogates “professionally” the girls attacked by a rapist with an unfriendly and brusque manner, without considering their fragility, their social marginalization and their condition of victims of rape, not even trying to soothing the poor girls as friends. For a police officer of hard-boiled school, the most important is to uncover the identity of infringer. Although Petra views those victims as unfortunate beings, she doesn’t classify women as universal victims of violence, but as members of “la gran cohorte de jóvenes desheredados que andaba deambulando por la ciudad” (42). Moreover, those girls remind our detective of “esos ratones que hemos cazado en la trampa y podemos contemplar largamente, el pelaje suave, los ojos como dos minúsculos botones (41), as shown with negative and despicable portraits. The idea that women are so capable of violence as men is clearly confirmed in the series and responds to the posfeminist viewpoints. It is in *Ritos de muerte* that Juan’s mother represents a sinister female character. Her son’s symbolic castration, according to Petra’s analysis, is mainly owing to Juan’s suffering from too many female pressures, excessive obligations (140). Evil characters such as Julieta, a sect member

in *Mensajeros de oscuridad*, Valentina, an expert of dogs in *Día de perros*, or Pepita, a writer of home decoration in *Muertos de papel*, are also women capable of committing criminal acts.

Another postfeminist feature lies in the absence of female solidarity, an idea postulated by Falcón and other theorists concerning the difficulty of constructing a collective female identity. It is noted that in the Petra Delicado series, our detective, whose social life is centered on male dominated institution, never forms part of any female social group, and, in certain occasions, asserts that women do not constitute a separate social group, and that everyone has her distinctive characters according to circumstances. Therefore in a discussion with her colleague, Moliner, about the topic of divorce, Petra questions the concept of female collective consciousness:

Iba a ser muy difícil hacerle comprender a mi compañero que no piensa igual una mujer que otra, que no todas somos partícipes de una única conciencia colectiva, que influyen los caracteres, la ideología, la época y la herencia, que nunca fueron iguales ni parecidas Marilyn Monroe y Madame Curie (*Muertos de papel* 55).

Later on, our detective insists upon the construction of female identity as a dynamic process and comments that “Las mujeres no somos una raza aparte, ni una categoría social, ni una estirpe maldita” (168).

As for the theme of gender relations, we can say that power is an indispensable element in Giménez Bartlett’s crime fiction. In general, our writer structuralizes her text in two parts: one in relation to criminal investigations, another regarding the development of professional relations between Petra and her subordinate Fermín Garzón, a veteran recently transferred from Salamanca. Fermín’s presence is of notable importance, because this character not only serves as an assistant in the process of crime solution like classical figure Watson, but also as a counterpart to our protagonist with regard to gender as well as her taste of cuisine, her vision of world and her concept of life. Both are in charge of every case, in which they learn to tolerate their mutual differences, to appreciate their individual merits. Despite of this, Petra is aware that being a woman, her effort should be doubled: first of all, she needs to gain respect from her subordinate; secondly, she should demonstrate that she is well prepared to fulfill the mission of resolving enigmas. All this is interpreted by Teresa L Ebert’s reflections upon the resistant and hostile environment in which female sleuths should face with while maintaining a stance of authority, and it is noted that in many crime fictions there is an ambivalence about female detectives who exercise their power as “This is part of a central problem for women and feminists that we call the ‘anxiety of authority’, in which power is ‘read’ as masculinist and thus women’s exercise of authority is commonly identified as male and antithetical to female values and experiences” (23). It is clear that a complex hierarchy of

authority exists in the police force. What Giménez Bartlett has planned to do is to situate her protagonist within an authoritative position, but at the same time to get Petra's behavior more and more problematic in an ambiguous way. We observe that in order to reach her proper position in a male dominated institution, Petra adopts an active and aggressive attitude which brings her some troubles; however, later on our detective asserts that she has headed for correct direction. In a passage, Petra thinks over how useful it is to exercise her power: "Garzón había dado un buen diagnóstico: me aprovechaba de ser mujer. El marco ya estaba creado: prejuicios, convencionalismos. . . para darle la vuelta a la escena sólo se necesitaba un poco de poder. Y ésa solía ser la parte que fallaba, la pizca de poder en manos femeninas. Pero yo ahora lo tenía" (*Ritos de muerte* 68).

In other occasions, when our detective is not working on deciphering puzzling crimes, tends to exaggerate her exercise of authority, in other words, not only causes suspects' humiliation but also hardens enquiries, or, on the contrary, constantly questions her lack of authority, especially when she has to follow Garzón's or other male colleagues' advices with the purpose of progressing investigations of cases. Thompson- Casado remarks that Petra's contradictory reaction of authority in part is due to her unquestionable acceptance of rigid standards of the police force, some standards for which she should fight consciously, but from which, at the same time, she is unable to separate (78). Definitely, Petra's struggle for power is closely linked to her fight for equality under the context of patriarchy. Like most of the women from her generation, our protagonist was not educated to assume her authority as something inherent by nature, and now is confronted with challenges of opportunity and power, thus her stance is naturally critical and ambiguous.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

After a general study of Giménez Bartlett's detective novels, it is noted that the chronicle of Petra Delicado provides us a dynamic process of female self-realization, a profound consideration on gender relations. Giménez Bartlett is very conscious of characteristics of detective genre whose narrative art is based on the creation of suspense, through digressions, concealment or retention of information until the suitable moment; nevertheless, what impresses us from the series is the subversive spirit in Giménez Bartlett's writing. In the novels we have researched, themes of gender and identity clearly subvert women's taboos but meanwhile question the integration of a feminist agenda in contemporary society. From what we have explored we infer that Petra Delicado is a representative model of Spanish posfeminism who ventures to transgress the boundaries of established order and to assume a new and active role of a woman, who continues confronting multiple challenges in search of her own space.

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## **VI. Self-Evaluation of Research Project**

The present project is the second part of three-year-project and also an extension of my recent research on Spanish detective narrative which is based on the study of gender and identity to explore women's detective fiction in the post-Franco Spain. While conducting this project, I have studied thoroughly five of Giménez Bartlett's Petra Delicado series- *Ritos de muerte* (Death Rites, 1006) *Día de perros* (Dog Days, 1997), *Mensajeros de oscuridad* (Messengers of Darkness, 1999), *Muertos de papel* (The Paper Muerders, 2000) and *Un barco cargado de arroz* (A Ship Full of Rice, 2004), and have written a manuscript and submitted to a monograph entitled: *Giménez Bartlett/Petra Delicado: Documenting the Rise of a Female Detective*. The manuscript is still under review. I will attempt to work on another paper concerning women's place in the Petra Delicado series. In summary, this research result corresponds with the objective of present project and I expect that the following project will explore in detail Catalan women's detective fiction.