

Laura Esquivel and Reyes Calderón's Inaugural Detective Novels: Transatlantic Hispanic Femicrime

Jeffrey Oxford¹
Midwestern State University

Artículo de Reflexión derivado de investigación
Recibido 23-03-2018.
Aprobado 18-05-2018

ABSTRACT:

Laura Esquivel's 2014 novel *A Lupita le gustaba planchar* is that author's as yet sole foray into detective fiction. While the work demonstrates certain parallels to the *novela negra*, both the author and main character are female, and the plot more closely resembles that of a fast-paced thriller. This work shows substantial similarities in style, tone, plot, and language with the important Spanish novelist Reyes Calderón's inaugural detective novel *Las lágrimas de Hemingway* (2005). This essay, then, is a comparative examination of those two works in a transatlantic gender/genre study of two femicrime narratives which show the increasing prominence of women's voices, reasoning abilities, and transformative powers within two traditionally patriarchal Hispanic societies.

Keywords: Laura Esquivel, Reyes Calderón, femicrime, feminism, women's voice

¹ Professor of Spanish and Chair of the Department of World Languages and Cultures at Midwestern State University (Wichita Falls, TX), is a specialist on the culture and literature of Spain since 1800, in particular Naturalism, women writers, and detective fiction. He is the author, editor or co-editor of a dozen books and more than forty.

Address: Department of World Languages and Cultures, Midwestern State University, Wichita Falls, TX 76308; E-mail: Jeffrey.oxford@msutexas.edu

**Las novelas inaugurales del género detectivesco de Laura Esquivel y Reyes Calderón:
“Femicrime” Hispánico Transatlántico**

RESUMEN:

La novela de Laura Esquivel, *A Lupita le gustaba planchar* (2014), es la única, hasta ahora, incursión de esta autora en la ficción detectivesca. Si bien el trabajo demuestra ciertos paralelismos con la novela negra, tanto la autora como el personaje principal son mujeres y la trama se asemeja más a la de un thriller acelerado. Este trabajo muestra similitudes sustanciales de estilo, tono, trama y lenguaje con los de la primera novela detectivesca de la importante novelista española Reyes Calderón *Las lágrimas de Hemingway* (2005). Este ensayo, entonces, es un análisis comparativo de esas dos obras en un estudio transatlántico de género de dos narraciones de “femicrime” que muestran la prominencia creciente de las voces, habilidades de razonamiento y poderes transformadores de las mujeres dentro de dos sociedades hispanas tradicionalmente patriarcales.

Palabras clave: Laura Esquivel, Reyes Calderón, femicrime, feminismo, la voz de las mujeres.

**Os romances policiais inaugurantes de Laura Esquivel e Reyes Calderón: Femicrime
Hispânico Transatlântico**

RESUMO:

O romance *A Lupita le gustaba planchar* de Laura Esquivel de 2014 é a única incursão do autor na ficção policial. Embora a obra demonstre certos paralelos com a novela negra, tanto o autor quanto a personagem principal são mulheres, e a trama se assemelha mais à de um thriller de ritmo acelerado. Este trabalho mostra semelhanças substanciais em estilo, tom, enredo e linguagem com o romance policial inaugural de Reyes Calderón, *Las lágrimas de Hemingway* (2005). Este ensaio, então, é um exame comparativo dessas duas obras em um estudo transatlântico de gênero/gênero sobre duas narrativas de crimes femininos que mostram a crescente proeminência das vozes das mulheres, habilidades de raciocínio e poderes transformadores dentro de duas sociedades hispânicas tradicionalmente patriarcais.

Palavras-chave: Laura Esquivel, Reyes Calderón, feminicrime, feminismo, feminismo, voz feminina

Laura Esquivel's 2014 novel, *A Lupita le gustaba planchar*, is the Mexican author's

recent—and so far, sole—foray into detective fiction. The work closely approximates, but does not totally subscribe to, the paradigm of the police procedural and the thriller conventions while also incorporating certain aspects of the popular *novela negra* subgenre. That is, the narrative is an action-packed, page-turning story of suspense in which women play substantial protagonistic and antagonistic roles in advancing the plot. Consequently, Esquivel's novel is an important contribution to the Hispanic detective fiction genre both in terms of its hybridized style and contribution to the femicrime subgenre. While there are other Hispanic female writers who have employed women detectives in their narratives, among the more important Spaniards to do so is Reyes Calderón Cuadrado, whose Lola MacHor series now includes six volumes. Although my research has failed to uncover any direct acknowledgement by Esquivel of Calderón's influence on her life and/or on this particular novel, without a doubt there are similarities between Esquivel's *A Lupita le gustaba planchar* and Calderón's inaugural detective novel *Las lágrimas de Hemingway* (2005) in terms of style, tone, plot, and language which, in turn, illustrate the rise in importance and increasing prominence of women's voices in Hispanic letters. This essay, then, will be an examination of these two narratives in a transatlantic gender/genre study of two Hispanic women writers with women protagonists in a particular hybridized style of detective fiction which presages future developments in Hispanic women's writings.

In spite of the fact that no current research exists comparing Esquivel's stories to those by Calderón, there is a fair amount of comparisons of Esquivel to others. Such analyses including other Mexican writers are perhaps the most common, with Elena Garros and Angeles Mastretta being the two most frequently mentioned counterpoints. Three doctoral dissertations of that vein include Marilyn Ríos-Santos' "El best seller en la narrativa mexicana desde los ochenta: Mercado, anticanon y ambivalencia en Angeles Mastretta, Laura Esquivel y María Amparo Escandón" (2005), María Sol Colina Trujillo's "Nation and Narration: Feminine Identity Reconstruction in Angeles Mastretta, Laura Esquivel and Carmen Boullosa" (2003), and Susan Kenney Naughton's "From Victimization to Retribution: Feminism in Narrative Works by Elena Garro and Laura Esquivel" (1999). Ela Molina Sevilla de Morelock's monograph, *Reflecturas y narraciones femininas de la Revolución Mexicana: Campobello, Garro, Esquivel y Mastretta* (2013), examines those four Mexican writers and how each one includes women's participation in the Mexican Revolution in their stories. Meanwhile, Maria A. Zanetta addresses the

interdisciplinary element of visual imagery in comparing *Como agua para chocolate* to paintings by the Spanish-Mexican surrealist Remedios Varo in her “Rebelión y reivindicación en *Como agua para chocolate* de Laura Esquivel y las pinturas de Remedios Varo.”

Other Latin American authors also have proven to be a source for comparative studies to Esquivel. Leticia Isabel Romo for example, explores the post-Boom writings of Esquivel, Ariel Dorfman and Tomás Eloy Martínez to show how the authors’ use of multimedia as a part of the text helps “to blur even further the thin line that once seemed to clearly separate Fiction from Reality”². Salvador A. Oropesa compares Esquivel’s *Como agua para chocolate* to Manuel Antonio Carreño’s *Manual de urbanidad y buenas costumbres* and argues that “la técnica de Esquivel radica en su uso consciente de la aceptación y manipulación de roles asignados a la mujer por la sociedad patriarcal”³. Herminia M. Alemañy Valdez uses female eroticism as a point of departure in her comparative study of Rosario Castellanos, the Colombian writer Fanny Buitrago and Laura Esquivel. And Georgina J. Whittingham and Lourdes Silva address the same element in their analysis of *Como agua para chocolate* and Gabriel García Márquez’s *Del amor y otros demonios*, alleging that “El éxito del mundo narrativo de Laura Esquivel se debe a su extraordinaria capacidad creativa y originalidad en el tratamiento de varios géneros literarios cultos y populares, de la parodia, de la ironía, y del realismo mágico”⁴.

But comparative studies including Esquivel are not limited to examining solely Latin American born or based authors. Nalini Natarajan⁵ addresses “subversive magic” common to both *Como agua para chocolate* and Salman Rushdie’s *Shame*. Josefa Lago-Graña analyzes writing as self-affirmation in works by the Spaniard Carmen Martín Gaité, the Mexican-

² ROMO, Leticia Isabel. “Autor y lector: Representación de la realidad en tres novelas del post-boom (Esquivel, Dorfman y Martínez).” Diss. U of NC, Chapel Hill, 2001, p. iii.

³ OROPESA, Salvador A. “Como agua para chocolate de Laura Esquivel como lectura del Manual de urbanidad y buenas costumbres de Manuel Antonio Carreño.” *Monographic Review/Revista Monográfica* 8 (1992), p. 258.

⁴ WHITTINGHAM, Georgina J. and SILVA, Lourdes. “El erotismo ¿fruto prohibido para la mujer? en *Como agua para chocolate* de Laura Esquivel y *Del amor y otros demonios* de Gabriel García Márquez.” *Texto Crítico* 4.7 (July-December 1998), p. 57.

⁵ NATARAJAN, Nalini. “Women and Subversive Magic: Shame and *Como agua para chocolate*.” In *Mapping out the Rushdie Republic: Some Recent Surveys*. Tapan Kumar Ghosh and Prasanta Bhattacharyya, eds. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016, pp. 124-33.

American Sandra Cisneros and Laura Esquivel. Itzá A. Zavala-Garrett's essay pointing out the similarities between Rosario Castellanos's *Balún Canán* and Mamá Elena of *Como agua para chocolate* is only one of several publications that address the common element of the domineering mother in the written versions of *The House of Bernarda Alba* and *Like Water for Chocolate* while Eva L. Santos-Phillips examines those same power struggles in the film versions of those works. Meanwhile, Ana Ibáñez Moreno has in publication three similar essays examining García Lorca's and Esquivel's narratives, preferring instead to use the term "madre terrible" over the more common descriptor "madre dominante."

Perhaps the study closest in nature to the current one is Dori Valero Valero's "Del Baztán a México. A Amaia y a Lupita les gustaba ser policías" given that Dolores Redondo—the second author in Valero Valero's analysis—in addition to being a female Spanish novelist employing a female detective, sets her trilogy in the Baztán valley of Navarra, Spain, not too distant from Calderón's Pamplona. In that analysis, Valero Valero minimizes the influence of Nordic *noir* in Esquivel's work but does acknowledge the importance of two of that genre's traits: that "social criticism is essential"⁶ to Esquivel and that "Lupita finaliza el relato como una mujer empoderada, capaz de tomar sus propias decisiones"⁷. These characteristics, as will be seen later in this essay, are of high importance to Calderón's inaugural work as well.

Obviously, then, there is ample precedence for comparing Esquivel and her writing to other authors and their writings even though the bulk of the critical analyses takes Esquivel's *Como agua para chocolate* as the point of departure. Having said that, it is notable that the one extant comparative, critical analysis of *A Lupita le gustaba planchar* juxtaposes criticism of Esquivel's inaugural detective novel and a femicide narrative set in the Basque territory. While a comparison of Redondo's and Calderón's works are beyond the scope of the current essay, suffice it to say that they have much more in common than merely the setting, and a comparative analysis of Esquivel to Redondo offers justification for an Esquivel-Calderón examination as well. In order to facilitate an understanding of the ensuing comparison, a brief plot summary of

⁶ VALERO VALERO, Dori. "Del Baztán a México. A Amaia y a Lupita les gustaba ser policías." *Dossiers Feministes* 20 (2015), p. 85.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

the two novels under study in the current essay follows.

A Lupita le gustaba planchar is the story of Lupita, a troubled Mexican police officer. She was incarcerated at an early age for having committed filicide while in a drunken stupor and still suffers relapses into periods of drunkenness and drug abuse. When a local politician, Larreaga, betrays an indigenous group by agreeing to expropriate their sacred land, he is assassinated in very close proximity to Lupita. Lupita's own miraculous escape from death at the same time causes the indigenous group to consider her a sympathetic "guerrera de la luz"⁸. Soon thereafter, however, she is implicated in the murder by corrupt policemen and later almost killed by rival natives working in collusion with Lupita's corrupt colleagues. It is at the point of her being shot at, at point-blank range, when the shaman Tenoch ferrets her away to a safe, indigenous women's colony where she begins her own independent investigation of the politician's murder. Her probings lead to discovering both the name of the assassin and the reason for the assassination, and terminate in participating in a ritualistic, purification ceremony to cleanse her soul of the drunken rage and guilt which torment her own life.

Las lágrimas de Hemingway, in contrast, is the story of Lola MacHor, a law professor from Valladolid, Spain, who has gone to Pamplona during the *encierros de San Fermín* for the reading of her mentor's will and receiving from his lawyer a special inheritance gift that he has left her. During that week, her mentor's son Alejandro is drugged shortly before running with the bulls and dies after being savagely gored. Circumstantial evidence used as "proof" of Lola's collusion in the murder includes Lola's having recently lost out to Alejandro for a *cátedra* position and her husband Jaime's being a research veterinarian who has a supply of the drugs used to bring about Alejandro's death. Inspector Ruiz, a corrupt police detective who is also secretly working at the behest of Rodrigo Robles (a leader of a secret society at the university), arrests Lola and her husband on trumped up charges of murdering Alejandro. Lola, immediately upon hearing the detective's pronouncement, suffers a heart attack and dissociative amnesia and is taken to the hospital where she is shortly thereafter placed in solitary confinement and shackled to a hospital bed. While there, the assassin's henchmen attempt to carry out a plot to murder her, but she is saved by a nun volunteering at the hospital. Lola, subsequently, is able to

⁸ ESQUIVEL, Laura. *A Lupita le gustaba planchar*. New York: Vintage Español, 2014, p. 185.

discover the true murderer and his co-conspirators, after which she undertakes plans to start a new life in the judicial branch of government.

As should be apparent from these plot summaries, then, multiple parallels exist between the two novels. Both Lupita and Lola are middle-class professionals whose careers involve the field of law, and important events occur while each is recuperating in the hospital. In both novels the murder occurs during an important festival: Holy Week and the San Fermines, respectively. This serves to provide loud, public gatherings which aid in the concealment of the murderers and their deeds. Both Lupita and Lola are unjustly accused of murder by unscrupulous authorities and framed so that the charges against them will appear justified. Lupita, in fact, is involved in a massive, public melee with “La Mami” (the corrupt artisan leader aligned with “las guerreras de la oscuridad” indigenes) in which she suffers both broken ribs and a broken leg and is carried in a state of unconsciousness to the countryside where she is discarded on the ground beside another man killed in the same fight. This attempt by La Mami and the corrupt policemen to lay the blame for the politician Larreaga’s death and the near-death of La Mami on Lupita is ultimately unsuccessful as Lupita is able to call her friend Celia and secretly enter a rehab hospital before the police arrive on the scene and “discover” only the dead man. Only a short time later, however, Lupita is in the lavatory when an attempted assassin enters her hospital room and, taking advantage of the noise of the fireworks bursting outside the building during the holiday celebrations, strafes her bed with machine gun fire. When other gunmen outside the room order a retreat and the would-be killer leaves, Lupita also flees the hospital and attempts to mix in with “un grupo de nazarenos que caminaba en procesión”⁹. The hit men, however, find her in the crowd and attempt to shoot her there, being unsuccessful in their attempt when “el tripié del suero le salvó la vida al interponerse entre la bala y ella”¹⁰, at which point Tenoch swoops her up in his arms and escapes with her to “un lugar seguro”¹¹

At the beginning of the *A Lupita le gustaba planchar*, Lupita suffers heart problems—she questions if it is a heart attack—when she thinks about the interrogation she has recently

⁹ Ibid., p. 126.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 130.

¹¹ Idem.

undergone at the police station concerning Larreaga's assassination; unable to contact any of her acquaintances by telephone, and overcome by the pain and subsequent memories of having killed her own son, "un golpe de culpa la azotó, la tiró al piso y la obligó a llorar como animal herido. Esa noche, por primera vez en su vida, Lupita dejó ropa sin planchar sobre la mesa" ¹². Crying, meanwhile, is of such importance to Calderón's novel that tears appear even in the book's title, and Lola's hospital adventure in *Las lágrimas de Hemingway* begins because she, too, suffers a heart attack upon being told that she is being arrested for Alejandro's murder, at which point the medical staff, in spite of inspector Ruiz's protests to the contrary, insist that she be hospitalized. Once there, the 92-year-old nun Rosario takes an immediate liking to Lola, is able to spend time with her under the guise of giving spiritual assistance, and not recognizing a new "nurse" who enters Lola's room to give her an injection confronts him with a series of questions about who he is and his work at the hospital. This saves Lola from receiving a lethal dose of the same drug used to kill Alejandro when the "nurse" in question flees the room without administering the injection and drops the syringe on the floor. That is, both Lupita and Lola suffer the same medical condition, and while in the hospital face certain death by hired assassins, but each is saved from such a demise by a person of the cloth.

Additionally, both Lupita and Lola have to fight a corrupt group of policemen, an organized sect bent on maleficence, and individuals who wish to assassinate them. La Mami leads a group of indigenous people and local artisans in *A Lupita le gustaba planchar* who are in league with drug traffickers and who oppose the decision of the local authorities to dislocate them from their peddler stalls in a local park. Lupita inadvertently gets caught up in the dispute and becomes one of their targets when she drunkenly continues to record video on her cell phone after being thrown out of a bar and captures La Mami's right-hand man admitting to bribing on her behalf one politician and attempting to bribe Tenoch's group as well. That is, as Lupita realizes only later, she has incriminating evidence prejudicial to La Mami's plans. Lola, meanwhile, is targeted for murder because she is professor Niccola Moccario's preferred mentee—even more so than his own son Alejandro—and must certainly, in Robles's mind, also know the names of the other professors composing the secret society, the *Hermandad*, who have

¹² Ibid., p. 16.

been, among other devious activities, unscrupulously controlling the law school's hirings for years.

At the end of both novels, both Lupita and Lola undertake a self-examination of their lives and decide to avail themselves of an opportunity to change the course of their future. After having solved the murder of the politician Larreaga, Lupita admits to Tenoch that what hurts her the most in life is “no haberle pedido perdón a [mi] hijo por haberlo matado”¹³, to which the shaman responds that the entire universe is connected and that Lupita can, in fact, still connect with her son even now if she so desires. Accepting his offer, Lupita participates in a ceremony which becomes “un parteaguas en su vida”¹⁴ in which she experiences a replay of her entire life, the entire history of the universe, and, through an embrace of Tenoch, is able to embrace all of her loved ones, past and present—including her son—at which point “En ese instante el alma de Lupita sanó”¹⁵. Lola's life-altering experience likewise occurs after having discovered the reason for Alejandro's murder, and it also comes about through the advice of a mentor and her connecting to her family and son. Judge Gabriel Uranga, a close friend and the one originally in charge of the investigation of Alejandro's death, understands Lola's pain upon realizing that her law school mentor Niccola was not as pure as he had always seemed to her and offers her the possibility of erasing the bile arising from her experience and changing her life by telling her “Vente a la carrera judicial, allí podemos curar ese mal”¹⁶. Shortly afterwards, the novel ends with Lola looking forward to the birth of her as yet unborn son, whose “pataleando en mi piel me reconforta. Cuando nazca, volveré a aprender de su rostro la inocencia, volveré a mamar la paz y la alegría de lo puro de los sin mácula y de la mayor propiedad que haya tenido nunca: mi familia”¹⁷. While not a ritualistic cleansing ceremony paralleling, in a traditionally religious manner, Lupita's conversion, Lola's change in career, in combination with her refocus on her son and family, does certainly represent a mental and spiritual rebirth in its own right.

¹³ Ibid., p. 82.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 191.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 196.

¹⁶ CALDERÓN CUADRADO, Reyes. *Las lágrimas de Hemingway*. Valladolid: Difácil, 2005, p. 302.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 315.

This learning from others and regeneration into a pureness of life, in fact, seems to be the basic leitmotif of the entire novel by Calderón. In my 2012 interview with the author, I asked her, “¿Cree, entonces, que sus novelas tienen un elemento didáctico, una moraleja?”¹⁸. Her response repeated a statement that she had previously stated that tacitly confirmed the affirmative response that I was suspecting: “Si las novelas son buenas, te hacen mejores”¹⁹. Certainly *Las lágrimas de Hemingway* contains much social commentary: a seemingly non-positive view of bullfighting, a less-than-flattering portrayal of the university setting and academicians’ personal comportment, the Church as composed of workers who are willing to assist others with the proviso that they will be, in turn, receiving subsequent donations, and mankind’s preoccupation with and constant attempts to escape death. However, the most overt social commentary is pointed directly at the reader immediately preceding the novel’s denouement: “Sé que todos creemos tener derecho a juzgar a los demás, especialmente cuando se equivocan. Pero en realidad no somos quién para juzgar a nadie”²⁰. Calderón effectively sets up a series of events in this novel and successfully focuses on a leitmotif which “nos hace mejores”: we all have our own faults, and who are we to judge since we do not know all the details of the other person’s life and circumstances?

Esquivel’s novel also contains multiple occurrences of social commentary and ends with a positive admonition that all may not be as it so negatively seems. *A Lupita le gustaba planchar*, of course, deals with problems of Mexican society rather than Spain; in particular, it addresses the problems associated with machismo and alcoholism, the pervasiveness of illicit drugs, and the potential for a positive influence of indigenous beliefs and customs on contemporary society, to name only three. The overarching social commentary of Esquivel’s novel, the didactic moral, is seen most overtly, however, in the last paragraph of the work, after Lupita participates in the cleansing ceremony and her soul is healed. Here, the author speaks directly to the reader, expressing her belief in a positive future for her country: “Lo mejor de todo era que si Lupita,

¹⁸ OXFORD, Jeffrey. *Reyes Calderón’s Lola MacHor Series: A Conservative Feminist Approach to Modern Spain*. Brighton, Chicago, Toronto: Sussex Academic Press, 2015, p. 145.

¹⁹ Idem.

²⁰ CALDERÓN CUADRADO. Op. cit., p. 293.

que tanto dolor había acumulado, que tanto enojo había experimentado, había podido sanar y conectarse con el todo, México también podía”²¹. Both novels, then, remain faithful to the fairy tale ideals of traditional detective fiction in that the forces of good will always conquer the forces of evil, and when that happens life can continue happily ever after.

Having said that, and as mentioned in this essay’s introduction, neither *A Lupita le gustaba planchar* nor *Las lágrimas de Hemingway* follows totally the characteristics of any major detective fiction paradigm. Neither corresponds to the complex, deductive reasoning required of the “Whodunit.” While crime and sex are downplayed in the two novels, a substantial portion of the novels’ events—and certainly the murders—occur during important festival periods when large crowds are gathered in the cities, thereby also obviating a categorization of the narratives as “cozies.” While Lupita is a member of the police force, such is inconsequential to her resolving the murder; she is not assigned the case nor resolves the mystery through the assistance of fellow officers. Lola, while a law professor, is not a sworn peace officer of any type. In fact, both Lupita and Lola are innocent victims wrongly accused by the police. Neither narrative, then, is truly a police procedural. And while it is Lupita’s and Lola’s mental ruminations, deductions, and actions while restricted from the general public that which results in a resolution of the mysteries, neither character is a private detective by profession. In short, neither of the novels corresponds to the most commonly accepted characteristics of any detective fiction subgenre and would, therefore, be more aptly categorized as “crime fiction.” At the same time, it is notable that both authors use selected traits of various detective fiction subgenres to create hybridized novels that closely parallel each other. In another place, Oxford²² has examined in greater detail his justification for classifying *Las lágrimas de Hemingway* as an educational thriller—a label that does not fit *A Lupita le gustaba planchar* since this novel is totally void of any pedagogical setting or background—but suffice it to say that both Calderón’s and Esquivel’s novels can both be described best as hybrid Hispanic femicide thrillers which draw heavily from the police procedural subgenre.

²¹ ESQUIVEL. Op. cit., p. 196.

²² OXFORD, Jeffrey. “Police Procedural, Hard-Boiled, or Thriller?: Hybridized Novels by Reyes Calderón.” In *Spanish and Latin American Women’s Crime Fiction in the New Millennium: From Noir to Gris*. Eds. Nancy Vosburg and Nina L. Molinaro. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017, pp. 47-61.

While one might argue that, in her/his estimation, the two novels under examination in this essay are not true thrillers, that is fast-paced, action-packed page-turners, I would contend that such a qualification depends to a large extent on the perception and personal connotative values ascribed by the reader, and other fundamental characteristics of the thriller genre are clearly present and overtly employed. Jerry Palmer, for instance, argues that conspiracy is the “fundamental layer” of the thriller; that such “kickstarts the plot”²³. Obviously, conspiracy is the basis of the entire plot in both Esquivel’s and Calderón’s narratives. In Esquivel’s work the conspiracy—and, by extension, the entire novel—is based on La Mami working with bribed policemen, drug traders, and businessmen to realize her dream of having her own politician elected and the local artisans’ retaining their vender booth spaces while expropriating rival, indigenes’ sacred land. Without that conspiracy, there is no need to assassinate Larreaga or Lupita, and the novel ceases to have a *raison d’être*. In Calderón’s narrative, there is a double conspiracy: Rodrigo Robles, the *Hermanidad* professor who has Alejandro assassinated also attempts to frame, and then murder, Lola, but Clara, Alejandro’s brother, is the one who summons inspector Ruiz from Madrid to take over the case. Ruiz, at both Robles’s and Clara’s behest, is intent on convicting Lola and Jaime—should Robles’s attempted assassination fail—because Clara dislikes them and because he has romantic interests in Clara.

In addition to conspiracy, Tim Dirks notes that in the thriller genre, the “tension usually arises when the main character(s) [with whom the reader sympathizes] is placed in a menacing situation or mystery, or an escape or dangerous mission from which escape seems impossible”²⁴. Readers do, in fact, sympathize with the main characters in both novels due, in large part, to the authors’ extensive portrayal of Lupita’s and Lola’s physical, physiological, and psychological weaknesses; both are very much human, an average individual with whom it is easy to relate. They are not superheroes; neither are they stock characters who remain static throughout the novels. Both Lola and Lupita are innocent, middle-class professionals obviously framed by their enemies. They both suffer heart problems and public ridicule. Lupita’s involuntary urinary release when Larreaga is killed in front of her portrays her humanity and is seen in multiple

²³ PALMER, Jerry. *Thrillers: Genesis and Structure of a Popular Genre*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979, p. 53.

²⁴ DIRKS, Tim. “Thriller-Suspense Films. Part 1.” *Filmsite.org*. N.d., n.p.

replays of the footage in news reports. Her shame and humiliation are compounded further by the disgust one feels toward the machista media commentators who note “eso pasa por poner a las ‘chachas’ de policías”²⁵. The reader likewise sympathizes with Lola when, learning from the nun Rosario why she is shackled to a hospital bed, her heart palpitations start again, and she involuntarily vomits profusely all over the bed linens. Her humiliation continues while she is being transferred to a private room, “Los demás [pacientes] aplaudían mi traslado con expresiones de júbilo”²⁶ not wanting to be near a murderer.

Both characters gain additional sympathy from the reader through the lamentable descriptions leading to their crying on multiple occasions while considering the impossibility of their situations. Lupita is obviously being sought, and none of the policemen—and perhaps not even her closest friend—can be trusted; her friend Celia, in fact, is supposedly the only one who knows that Lupita has entered the rehab hospital, but the hired assassins somehow learn that fact and carry out an attempt on her life even there. Tenoch ferrets Lupita away from the attempted assassination in the middle of the Easter parade, but she doesn’t know him, his name, or whether he is a friendly or unfriendly shaman, and he will only tell her that he is taking her to “un lugar seguro.” Lupita, sadly, has no option but to put her trust in this unknown stranger since she has no other means of escaping those who have attempted to kill her. And even while in the “lugar seguro,” an indigenous women’s encampment, a group of men assault the camp with machine guns available only to the military, leaving Lupita once more to question whom she can trust. Ultimately, Lupita’s investigations lead her to conclude that Larreaga’s murderer, in fact, is someone whom she has trusted and thought above reproach, and she must confront that person regarding the murder before any peaceful resolution can be achieved. Lola, likewise, faces what seem to be insurmountable odds and menacing situations. She is chained to her hospital bed, officially in solitary confinement and unable to speak to anyone, not even a lawyer. Obviously, inspector Ruiz will do whatever is necessary to obtain her conviction, and, truth be known, there is more than merely superficial circumstantial evidence linking Lola and Jaime to the murder. When Iturri, the local policeman originally assigned to the case, surreptitiously enters her room

²⁵ ESQUIVEL, *Op. cit.*, p. 13.

²⁶ CALDERÓN CUADRADO, *Op. cit.*, p. 189.

and begins to ask questions, Lola soon realizes that she needs to trust his extra-official investigations if she is to have any hope of escaping Robles's clutches. The reader sympathizes even more deeply with Lola when she, because of being shackled to the hospital bed, is unable to position her body properly and urinates not in the bedpan but all over the bed itself. She has, in effect, lost all sense of personal dignity and privacy even in spite of being actually innocent; regrettably, she does not know if she can truly trust the police detective Iturri or not but realizes that he is her only hope of redemption. Reader sympathy toward the main character, then, is a strong element in both Esquivel's and Calderón's novels, closely tying them to the thriller subgenre.

Having placed *A Lupita le gustaba planchar* and *Las lágrimas de Hemingway* in the thriller subgenre, it is readily apparent that both narratives also borrow heavily from the police procedural structural paradigm in spite of the fact that obviously, neither story is a true police procedural, that is, a mystery "solved by policemen using normal police routines"²⁷. The elements of that subgenre which both authors do employ are multiple: Lola carries out her investigation in a similar fashion as a policeman, using abductive reasoning to propose a hypothesis and making inferences, and then she uses the various clues she finds in order to arrive at the most logical explanation which is, indeed, what the material evidence and proof she finds in the novel's denouement indicates. Additionally, in a fashion similar to the stereotypical ending of the police procedural novel, in which the detective is in the squad room typing up the report on a manual typewriter so that all know that the crime has been resolved and order is restored to the world, Calderón's novel ends with Ruiz's and Robles's imminent conviction and Lola "Escribiendo estas páginas [the novel, and, by extension, the crime report] casi sin respirar"²⁸ in almost parodic imitation of the police procedural genre. Esquivel's *Lupita*, as well, solves the mystery through her reasoning skills, finally obtaining the affirmation of her inferences when she confronts Larreaga's assassin with the evidence and her reasonings, none of which has been obtained through normal police routines. Although Esquivel employs only a third-person narrator

²⁷ DOVE, George N. *The Police Procedural*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1982, p. 47.

²⁸ CALDERÓN CUADRADO, Op. cit., p. 315.

(a large portion of Calderón's novel is first-person), at the end of the penultimate chapter it is likewise obvious in Esquivel's story that the crime has been resolved and that La Mami and her group will face their day of reckoning; the novel's last chapter, the purification ceremony in which Lupita participates and becomes cleansed of all past misdeeds, including filicide, thereby corresponds to the police procedural's desire for a closed ending in which all is once more right in the world.

Finally, it should be noted that both Esquivel's and Calderón's novels distance themselves substantially from the popular hard-boiled genre, even though that subgenre's "use of an urban environment"²⁹ and the "hard-boiled hero as someone who is alone"³⁰ are characteristics of the two narratives. In spite of Lupita's temporary residence in the remote women's collective, the bulk of the narrative and important plot twists have an urban setting while Calderón's novel occurs almost exclusively in Pamplona. Obviously, Lupita is alone: single, with no significant other, having even killed her only son, and oftentimes destitute of even her one friend Celia. Lola, while married, is officially in solitary confinement and chained to a hospital bed in a private room for much of the story. That is, while an urban environment and hero loneliness are fundamental characteristics of the hard-boiled genre—and present in the two novels under discussion—such is substantially outweighed by the fact that violence, a *sine qua non* of the subgenre, is only occasionally present in Esquivel's and Calderón's works and for all intents and purposes never at the forefront of the plot. Neither Lupita nor Lola uses force or violence in the pursuit of a resolution to the crime of which they are falsely accused, and the additional necessary inclusion of "non-standard diction [... and] slang"³¹ in the hard-boiled is totally absent from these two novels. Consequently, Esquivel's and Calderón's approximations to the *novela negra* is ephemeral at best. That the hard-boiled is so popular of a subgenre of detective fiction in Hispanic literature and both authors avoid incorporating it in their hybridized works is even further substantiation for an analysis of the transatlantic similarities between these

²⁹ MOORE, Lewis D. *Cracking the Hard-Boiled Detective: A Critical History from the 1920s to the Present*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006, p. 11.

³⁰ PANEK, LeRoy Lad. *New Hard-Boiled Writers, 1970s-1990s*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 2000, p. 11.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

two particular authors.

In conclusion, Laura Esquivel and Reyes Calderón are two important female Hispanic authors who have as a main character in their inaugural detective novels a female main character. That both authors have shunned the traditional placement of women in the detective story as merely background figures is notable; even more remarkable is that both, in fact, have placed a woman not only as a main character in the narrative but front and center as the protagonist, *the* character who solves the crime of which she is falsely accused. Both authors, in doing so, employ a hybridized model, incorporating various aspects of the thriller and the police procedural to create a story with which the average person can relate, one that is somewhat fast-paced but whose resolution depends on the inference skills of the female, main character. An important revolutionary aspect of both novels, then, is that women not only have a voice but are able to reason and make inferences which invalidate and undermine masculine/machista thoughts and values within traditional, patriarchal societies. Both Esquivel and Calderón demonstrate that women are as capable of doing a “man’s job” as are the men themselves, and thereby they create important Hispanic femicide novels. It, indeed, will be interesting to see if Esquivel writes additional detective narratives in the future, and if those narratives will continue to portray Lupita as an equal—or better—counterpart to the male investigator in a fashion similar to what Calderón has continued to do in her Lola MacHör series.

References

- ALEMAÑY VALDEZ, Herminia M. Entre olores y sabores: El erotismo en tres narradoras hispanoamericanas: Castellanos, Esquivel y Buitrago. In: *Cuervo*. 1998, no. 19, pp. 3-11.
- CALDERÓN CUADRADO, Reyes. *Las lágrimas de Hemingway*. 2 ed. Valladolid: Difácil, 2005, 315 pp.
- DIRKS. Tim. "Thriller-Suspense Films. Part 1." In *Filmsite.org*. [on-line]. Accessible at: <http://www.filmsite.org/thrillerfilms.html>.
- DOVE, George N. *The Police Procedural*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1982, 280 pp.
- ESQUIVEL, Laura. *A Lupita le gustaba planchar*. New York: Vintage Español, 2014, 196 pp.
- IBÁÑEZ MORENO, Ana. Análisis del mito de la madre terrible mediante un estudio comparado de *La casa de Bernarda Alba* y *Como agua para chocolate*. In: *Espéculo: Revista de Estudios Literarios*. [On-line]. 2006, no. 32. Available at: <http://webs.ucm.es/info/especulo/numero32/mitomad.html>.
- . Análisis del mito de la madre terrible mediante un estudio comparado de *La casa de Bernarda Alba* y *Como agua para chocolate*. In: *Revista de Literatura Mexicana Contemporánea*. [On-line]. 2006, no. 12.31, pp. 51-58. Available at: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=2658706>.
- . La madre terrible: Un análisis comparativo del mito en *Como agua para chocolate* y *La casa de Bernarda Alba*. In: *Revista de Literatura Hispanoamericana* [On-line]. 2006, no. 53, pp. 35-47. Available at: <http://produccioncientificaluz.org/index.php/rlh/article/view/18942/18929>.
- LAGO-GRAÑA, Josefa. *Beyond the Private Sphere: Writing as Space of Self-Affirmation in Martín Gaité, Esquivel and Cisneros*. PhD Dissertation. Lincoln: University of Nebraska,

Lincoln, 1997.

MOLINA SEVILLA DE MORELOCK, Ela. *Reflecturas y narraciones femininas de la Revolución Mexicana: Campobello, Garro, Esquivel y Mastretta*. Woodbridge, England: Tamesis, 2013, 220 pp.

MOORE, Lewis D. *Cracking the Hard-Boiled Detective: A Critical History from the 1920s to the Present*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006, 306 pp.

NATARAJAN, Nalini. Women and Subversive Magic: *Shame and Como agua para chocolate*. In: *Mapping out the Rushdie Republic: Some Recent Surveys*. Tapan Kumar Ghosh and Prasanta Bhattacharyya, eds. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016, pp. 124-133.

NAUGHTON, Susan Kenney. *From Victimization to Retribution: Feminism in Narrative Works by Elena Garro and Laura Esquivel*. PhD Dissertation. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1999.

OROPESA, Salvador A. *Como agua para chocolate* de Laura Esquivel como lectura del *Manual de urbanidad y buenas costumbres* de Manuel Antonio Carreño. In: *Monographic Review/Revista Monográfica*. 1992, no. 8, pp. 252-260.

OXFORD, Jeffrey. Police Procedural, Hard-Boiled, or Thriller?: Hybridized Novels by Reyes Calderón. In: *Spanish and Latin American Women's Crime Fiction in the New Millennium: From Noir to Gris*. Eds. Nancy Vosburg and Nina L. Molinaro. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017, pp. 47-61.

---. *Reyes Calderón's Lola MacHor Series: A Conservative Feminist Approach to Modern Spain*. Brighton, Chicago, Toronto: Sussex Academic Press, 2015, 162 pp.

PALMER, Jerry. *Thrillers: Genesis and Structure of a Popular Genre*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979, 232 pp.

PANEK, LeRoy Lad. *New Hard-Boiled Writers, 1970s-1990s*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling

Green State University Popular Press, 2000, 229 pp.

RÍOS-SANTOS, Marilyn. El best seller en la narrativa mexicana desde los ochenta: Mercado, anticanon y ambivalencia en Angeles Mastretta, Laura Esquivel y María Amparo Escandón. PhD Dissertation. Storrs: University of Connecticut, 2005.

ROMO, Leticia Isabel. Autor y lector: Representación de la realidad en tres novelas del post-boom (Esquivel, Dorfman y Martínez). PhD Dissertation. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2001.

SANTOS-PHILLIPS, Eva L. Discourses of Power in the Film Versions of *The House of Bernarda Alba* and *Like Water for Chocolate*. In: *Hispanic Journal*. 1997, no. 18.1, pp. 9-22.

TRUJILLO, María Sol Colina. Nation and Narration: Feminine Identity Reconstruction in Angeles Mastretta, Laura Esquivel and Carmen Boullosa. PhD Dissertation. Columbia: University of Missouri, 2003.

VALERO VALERO, Dori. Del Baztán a México. A Amaia y a Lupita les gustaba ser policías. In: *Dossiers Feministes*. 2015, no. 20, pp. 85-99.

WHITTINGHAM, Georgina J. and SILVA, Lourdes. El erotismo ¿fruto prohibido para la mujer? en *Como agua para chocolate* de Laura Esquivel y *Del amor y otros demonios* de Gabriel García Márquez. In: *Texto Crítico*. July-December 1998, no. 4.7, pp. 57-67.

ZANETA, Maria A. Rebelión y reivindicación en *Como agua para chocolate* de Laura Esquivel y las pinturas de Remedios Varo. In: *Latin Americanist*. 2014, no. 58.2, pp. 157-174.

ZAVALA-GARRETT, Itzá A. Las hijas de Yocasta: Relaciones conflictivas entre madres e hijas en *Balún Canán* y *Como agua para chocolate*. In: *Revista de literatura mexicana contemporánea*. 2011, no. 48, pp. 17-25.