



Detective fiction in Chile: Developments in the genre

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Spotlight on...

Detective Fiction in Chile: Developments in the Genre

Kate M. Quinn

Abstract. This article discusses the consolidation in the 1990s of Chile's *neopolicial* works that combine hard-boiled and political elements, reassesses earlier twentieth-century genre writers, and examines the wider diversity of production up to the present day. It considers the conditions of genre production in Chile and the challenge of wider access to international readers.

Detective fiction has been cultivated in Chile since the early-twentieth century, but it remained a marginal genre attracting very few writers and little serious critical attention until the 1990s. The catalyst for the consolidation of the genre in Chile in this decade was the recent history of dictatorship (1973–90). During the 1990s, Chile grappled with the legacy of the past while dealing with the challenges faced by a tutelary democracy where the former dictator, General Augusto Pinochet, was still head of the armed forces until 1998. Detective fiction with its narrative structure of crime and investigation provided a particularly suitable means by which Chilean writers could explore the modern nation as a product of its violent past, and *neopolicial*, a politically inflected variant of the hard-boiled became the dominant model for this work. The success of *neopolicial* with both readers and critics in South America (especially those in nations with a history of dictatorship and a transition to democracy) opened a wider space for other voices and other approaches within the genre (see Quinn, “Chilean Writers”; Braham). Similarly, this greater visibility generated curiosity about earlier detective writers and the history of the genre in Chile. In the new millennium, new writers are addressing new issues, engaging in formal experimentation, and representing a greater diversity of communities. One striking and overdue development has been the emergence of a host of new women writers. Despite the increased visibility and vitality of the genre inside

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Chile, only a few names have won an international following. High-profile series authors like Ramón Díaz Eterovic and Roberto Ampuero routinely see their works translated into other languages, although the English market proves stubbornly resistant. Only authors like Roberto Bolaño and Luis Sepúlveda, whose literary profiles transcended the genre, could count on routine English translations. New writers are usually taken up by small independent publishers, producing limited print runs, with little capacity to market their books within Chile, let alone abroad. Hopefully, this article will assist in generating greater international awareness about the Chilean detective tradition and the works of contemporary authors.

CHILEAN DETECTIVE FICTION, PRE-1973

Alberto Edwards is of fundamental importance to any historian of the genre in Chile. He created the nation's earliest fictional series detective, Román Calvo, publishing 18 stories between 1914 and 1921 in *Pacífico Magazine* [Pacific Magazine],¹ a publication that he cofounded and coedited. Inspired by the success of Arthur Conan Doyle's stories in *The Strand* magazine, he styled his own detective "the Chilean Sherlock Holmes." Conan Doyle's influence is clear in several of the stories. In the May 1916 "El despojo sangriento" ["The Case of the Traveling Corpse," Yates, *Latin Blood*], the macabre discovery of body parts in a hotel in Santiago proves to be the work of medical students who wanted to test the prowess of Calvo, in an inversion of the plot of Conan Doyle's "The Adventure of the Cardboard Box" (1893). Despite Edwards's debt to Conan Doyle, he, in a playful assertion of the merits of his creation, has Calvo outsmart the English sleuth in "El marido de la Señorita Sutter" [Miss Sutter's Husband, March 1919]. The world portrayed in Edwards's stories is profoundly conservative, and his primary interest is in the lives of the ruling oligarchy and the political class to which he belonged and which he represented as a politician. Several stories such as "El secuestro del candidato" [The Kidnapping of the Candidate, March 1915] are notable for their satirical approach to national politics. Most of the Calvo stories are set in Chile, but sometimes the action moves to Europe and the United States, and there is even one set on a transatlantic steamer. Edwards's work demonstrates an engagement with broad cultural currents and a particular interest in Europe, which is entirely in keeping with his position as a member of the Chilean ruling class. *Pacífico Magazine* included translations of English detective stories, but Edwards was engaged in a one-sided dialogue, and the transatlantic cultural flow was decidedly unidirectional at the time he was writing.

In Chile, Edwards's legacy has fared quite well. Selected stories were published as *Las aventuras de Román Calvo, el Sherlock Holmes chileno* [The Adventures of Román Calvo, the Chilean Sherlock Holmes] in 1953. Ramón Díaz Eterovic, who is a keen historian of the genre as well as a prolific author, included Edwards in his anthology *Crímenes criollos* [Creole Crimes, 1994]. Another collection of his stories appeared under the title *La secretísima* [The Most Secret, 2007]. His writing also reached a select readership in the United States in the original Spanish in edited collections aimed at undergraduate students in 1947 and 1952, plus the English-language "The Case of the Traveling Corpse" in Yates, *Latin Blood* (1972). In his introduction, Yates counts Argentina, Chile, and Mexico among the most important centers for detective fiction production in Latin America.

Yates also included a story by Chilean writer L. A. Isla (pseudonym of Luis Insulza Venegas). His detective Inspector de la Barra was the protagonist of the stories in *El crimen*

del Parque Forestal [The Crime in the Parque Forestal, 1946] and *El indiferente* [The Indifferent Man, 1947]. Unlike Edwards's interest in the ruling class, Isla concerns himself primarily with the middle class. De la Barra works with a team of professional police detectives, supported by technical crime scene experts and the staff of the medical laboratory. Yet, despite procedural details, Isla's approach owes much to the classical model. De la Barra's colleagues consider him something of a genius detective, capable of solving the most baffling cases, but many of the stories are pedestrian in nature. For instance, the 1946 "El caso de 'La flecha del sur'" ["The Case of the 'Southern Arrow,'" Yates, *Latin Blood*] is a tale of murder aboard a new train service linking the southern provinces to the capital city. But this is no *Murder on the Orient Express* and, when de la Barra learns the wealthy victim was estranged from his wife, he soon discovers the culprit was her lover. "El caso del botánico" [The Case of the Botanist, 1946], included in a 1964 Spanish-language anthology edited by Yates, might have been of greater interest to a foreign readership, since it makes more of its setting with de la Barra identifying a drug smuggler near one of the Chilean Andean border crossings. For *Crímenes criollos*, Díaz Eterovic selected "El caso de la Quinta Normal" [The Case in Quinta Normal], where the murder of a museum security guard turns out to be the unintended result of a robbery gone wrong, and the remorseful killer was the victim's son. In all three cases, foreign agents are involved in the crimes. This deflection of crime onto external sources, alongside stories in which no actual crime takes place, leaves cases of fraud and revenge killings in an otherwise orderly society in which state institutions function in an exemplary fashion.

At least Edwards and Isla domesticated the genre, unlike other early Chilean detective writers who published under English-sounding aliases and used foreign settings for their work. One such author was Camilo Pérez de Arce who, in the 1950s and 1960s, published several novels set in New York under the pseudonym James Endhard, but none of these bring anything new to the genre. Before this, he had used the Hispanic pen name Guillermo Blanco for a detective novel set in Chile, *Los minutos acusan* [The Minutes Accuse, 1947]. Although this novel did attempt a domestication of the classical model with the injection of some local color, it rang few changes beyond the Chilean oligarchy substituting for the English aristocracy and the *fundo* [country estate] nodding to the country-house setting. What is likely to be of most interest to a modern reader are the postcolonial aspects of the depiction of the Chilean landed gentry and the indigenous Mapuche, although this is almost certainly a reading the author would not have wished to invite.

The main interest of these stories and novels for modern readers is largely historical, as a window onto earlier eras and for what they reveal of the conservative values of the authors. Aspects of their production will be of interest to scholars at home and abroad, such as those who wish to trace the global impact of the Sherlock Holmes stories or those interested in the representation of the police and the justice system in detective fiction or in the use of Anglophone pseudonyms and foreign settings. However, by the time *Latin Blood* appeared in 1972, Chilean detective fiction had taken a radical turn away from the artifice of these writers. In the 1960s and early 1970s, a period of massive social change under the Christian Democrat (1964–1970) and Popular Unity (1970–73) governments, real policing provided the material for some of the best genre writing in the works of Luis Rivano and René Vergara.

Rivano was a *carabinero* who self-financed his first novel *Esto no es el paraíso* [This Is Not Paradise] in 1965. The main characters are members of the *Carabineros*. The novel includes references to prostitution and to sexual exploitation of minors by the rich and powerful, with the authorities turning a blind eye. Rivano also draws attention to the poverty

of the shantytowns and the deep inequalities in Chilean society. He evokes the atmosphere in Chile during a decade of massive social change and growing political participation and activism, with brutal skirmishes between *carabineros* and protesters. Whereas others condemn striking workers, Hidalgo, one of the main characters, supports their desire to have a decent salary and speaks of social justice as he imagines those living in abject poverty rising up if their just demands are not met. Rivano was asked to leave the *carabineros* after writing this book because of the subject matter, and he went on to pursue a literary career as a crime writer, playwright, and bookseller. Rivano is closely associated with other writers of this period whose work described the lives of the poor, the marginalized, and the criminal underworld of the capital city. His criticism of entrenched inequality still resonates over half a century later. Rivano's *Narrativa reunida* [Collected Fiction] appeared in 2010.

Former homicide detective Vergara also comes from a background in professional policing. One of the most remarkable Chilean crime writers and arguably one of the finest Latin American crime writers from the late sixties into the mid-seventies (see Díaz-Ortiz), he published several books of fiction and true crime, including well-known historical crimes from the early-twentieth century, and more recent investigations on which he had worked. Vergara brings a gritty realism to his depiction of crime, alongside a desire to understand the causes of criminal behavior, and the author highlights the influence of environment as well as the impact of deprivation and extreme poverty. Vergara was already something of a media personality when he published his books, famous for his police work and for magazine stories published in the 1950s. His stories offer a detailed insight into the procedural aspects of policing as well as the role and workings of the justice system. He criticizes various branches of law and order for professional and ethical failings, as well as for abuse of authority, especially against the poor and socially marginalized. He does this with a reformist zeal, advocating for greater professionalization of policing.

Vergara outlines his approach to the genre in the preface to his first collection of stories *El pasajero de la muerte* [Death's Passenger, 1969], rejecting the classical school and insisting on the real-life experience that has informed his writing. The second story is an account of a notorious real murder that Vergara had investigated. Bearing in mind Vergara's rejection of the classical model, it is worth noting that this real crime was committed in 1947, the same year in which Camilo Pérez de Arce published *Los minutos acusan* and Isla published his second collection of de la Barra stories. This underscores the radical disparity between the elaborate game created in conventional detective fiction and the shocking reality of true crime. In his account of how Tucho Caldero brutally murdered his shopkeeper friend and disposed of the body to take control of his property, Vergara includes the full details of police procedure, from questioning witnesses to describing a forensic examination of the shop, including an explanation of the pattern produced by arterial blood spray. He also uncomfortably relates the recourse to physical torture to break the suspect and force him to lead them to the body.

Vergara's career as a writer continued after the 1973 coup, with his last book of stories published in 1978, but during these years, police and *carabinero* collusion in human rights violations undermined their potential as hero protagonists of fiction. Vergara's reputation deservedly survived, and an anthology of selected works was published in Chile in 2000 as *Crímenes inolvidables, 1923/1953* [Unforgettable Crimes, 1923–1953]; there is a project underway to reedit the stories and short novels first published in the 1950s.

It is tempting to speculate how Chilean detective fiction might have developed in the 1970s if the coup had not happened. Under Allende, the state undertook an active role in

the literary sphere through the publishing company Quimantú, whose remit was to make cheap, mass-produced books available to the poorer sectors of Chilean society. This might in time have provided a platform for national crime writers on a scale never witnessed before and allowed Chile to retain its rank among the leading centers for genre production in Latin America. However, under the dictatorship, the cultural sphere suffered the catastrophic effects of repression, exile, and censorship. Over the 17 years of the dictatorship, some writers who went on to have long careers in the genre began publishing—for instance, José María Vallejo and another police officer turned writer and journalist, Antonio Rojas Gómez. However, the reputation of *carabineros* and other agents of the state took a major hit for their collaboration in the repression of citizens who they were supposed to serve. Victims of state violence and opponents of the dictatorship lost faith in the institutions of the state.

Although the dictatorship had a chilling effect on genre production, it paved the way for the more cynical and paranoid worldview of the *neopolicial* fiction that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s.

THE NEOPOLICIAL

According to government commissions, during the dictatorship more than 3,000 people were killed or “disappeared” and more than 35,000 were tortured in clandestine centers across the nation. Many more suffered exile (Truth and Reconciliation Commission; Valech Commission). Pinochet’s secret police, the DINA, pursued a policy of extermination against opponents, especially the members of MIR (Movement of the Revolutionary Left). Fear was a weapon of political and social control. The state became criminal and its institutions accomplices in massive, systematic violations of the rights of citizens. Although the first years witnessed the worst of the violence, renewed protests in 1983—the 10th anniversary of the coup—led to renewed acts of savagery. During the 1980s, pressure grew both internally and externally to normalize the situation. Thus, opposition parties were permitted to campaign in the run-up to the 1988 plebiscite that would decide if Pinochet remained in power for another eight years. The success of the no vote led to democratic elections in 1989 and the restoration of democracy in 1990.

In 1987, the year before the plebiscite, Ramón Díaz Eterovic self-financed his first Heredia novel *La ciudad está triste* [The City Is Sad]. In this short novel, hard-boiled PI Heredia investigates the disappearance of a young student in an unspecified Latin American nation. In an atmosphere of mistrust and fear, in which witnesses are unwilling to talk to the police, the private detective discovers agents of the state murdered her because of her political activism. This was an entirely new kind of detective novel in Chile that engaged explicitly with crimes of state. Díaz Eterovic was inspired by the U.S. tradition and by Spanish writers like Manuel Vázquez Montalbán who had found the genre a suitable vehicle to explore post-dictatorship Spain after 1975.

Díaz Eterovic’s series has become a chronicle of contemporary Chile, with the novels now published by the well-established Chilean publishing house LOM, but it was only with the third installment, *Nadie sabe más que los muertos* [No One Knows More than the Dead, 1993], that the series found a publisher in Chile. Set in the run-up to the 1989 elections, the first democratic elections since the coup, it sees Heredia hired to find the whereabouts of a

child born to murdered detainees. The novel confronts the human rights legacy of the dictatorship regarding the Disappeared. The plot includes exhumation of clandestine graves, forensic analyses of remains, and references to real human rights organizations and real cases of human rights violations. Characters reflect on the *transición pactada*, the negotiations ongoing between the main opposition parties and the military leadership. In this novel, Díaz Eterovic proved just how well the genre could be adapted to his contemporary reality. He displays extensive knowledge of the genre at home and abroad and foregrounds his familiarity with genre tradition in all the novels since Heredia is a keen reader of detective fiction. In *Nadie*, he relaxes reading Bioy Casares and Osvaldo Soriano and when he buys a Julian Symons novel, he mentions it was published in 1956 in the series Séptimo Círculo directed by Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares. He places it on his bookshelf between Jim Thompson and Horace McCoy. In a nod to previous Chilean writers, one character, Judge Cavens, used to write genre fiction under Anglophone names.

After his debut novel, Díaz Eterovic published four Heredia novels in the 1990s and 14 to date in the new millennium. His work in progress, set during the pandemic, will be the 20th. The series inspired a television adaptation in Chile, and the author has a wide readership at home and abroad. His work is routinely translated into multiple languages, but only two have been translated into English. These are the 1995 novel *Angeles y solitarios* [*Angels and Loners*, 2018] and the 2008 novel *La oscura memoria de las armas* [*Dark Echoes of the Past*, 2017], both translated by Patrick Blaine. Published 15 years after *Nadie sabe más que los muertos*, *Dark Echoes* engages with another major human rights legacy, the systematic use of torture by the military against the civilian population. It is set in 2004, the year in which a government-commissioned report into torture by the military was published. More than 30,000 victims testified to the commission and the report proved, even to the most hardened apologists of the dictatorship, that this had been a deliberate and systematic policy rather than the work of a few rogue individuals. In the novel, Heredia's client wants to know who killed her brother, Germán Reyes. The police believe it was a robbery gone wrong, but Heredia discovers the victim had been a detainee at a notorious torture center, Villa Grimaldi, and testified to the commission. Reading the official report on torture deeply affects Heredia, and it even haunts his dreams. However, he is cynical about the broader societal impact, wondering at several points what it means to those around him, desensitized by the banality of modern mass media. The detective proves German's former torturers murdered him because they feared he would expose their past (see Quinn, "Detection," for more on the series).

Throughout the Heredia series, the memory of 1973 resurfaces in different contexts, reminding the detective of the world he had hoped to live in and serving as a point of comparison with modern Chile and Santiago, which appear as a debased product of the neoliberalism imposed through violence by the dictatorship. Indeed, 1973 becomes a primal crime scene for a host of writers in the 1990s and beyond. In Sepúlveda's 1994 *Nombre de torero* [*Name of a Bullfighter*, 1997], an exile living in Germany is blackmailed into returning to Chile to search for Nazi gold. This former *guerrillero*, Juan Belmonte, is up against an ex-Stasi officer and a former GDR intelligence agent. Set in 1991, the novel presents Germany and Chile undergoing periods of transition in which the principal characters consider themselves on the losing side of history and question what their purpose is now. Sepúlveda engages with several time frames—the contemporary period after the fall of communism, the Chilean Transition, the period of the military coup in Chile, and World War II and the story of how gold ended up in Patagonia.

Roberto Ampuero's first Cayetano Brulé novel also incorporates the experience of exile and of former *guerrilleros*. In *¿Quién mató a Cristián Kustermann?* [Who Killed Cristián Kustermann?, 1993], a wealthy client hires the PI to find the killers of his son who was gunned down in a restaurant he ran. Cristián had recently returned to Chile after years of ostensibly living in West Germany, but Brulé discovers that he had lived in East Germany and Cuba, where he trained as a guerrilla fighter, and that he had later participated in conflicts in Central America. He was supposed to lead an underground left-wing cell in Chile. Instead, he decided to reorient the organization away from armed struggle, accepting the reality of the new democracy. Despite the suspicions expressed by most of the left-wing characters in the novel that the dictatorship still retains power in Chile and is responsible for Cristián's death, Brulé establishes that one of his own comrades executed him (see Quinn, "Cases"). Ampuero's own well-documented political journey from left-wing opponent of the dictatorship to member of Sebastián Piñera's conservative government also included periods in East Germany and Cuba. In his early novels, he locates the history of Chile within the wider context of the Cold War and incorporates the experience of exile and political reorientation after the collapse of the Soviet Union into his fiction. Brulé is quite confident in the reality of Chile's democracy, offering up Cuba instead as an example of authoritarian rule. Thus, Ampuero uses the *neopolicial* to interrogate history from a different perspective and criticize those elements of the Left who condemn authoritarianism at home but celebrate it in Cuba.

HISTORICAL CRIME NOVELS

Historical memory is a key concern in Chilean detective fiction in both transhistorical and period crime fiction. One of the first period crime novels in Chile was Mauro Yberra's *La que murió en Papudo* [The Woman Who Died in Papudo, 1993] set in 1963 during the conservative government of Jorge Alessandri. Yberra is the pseudonym of Bartolomé Leal and Eugenio Díaz Leighton. Leal has published numerous detective novels as a solo author.

In Roberto Bolaño's *Estrella distante* (1996), translated by Chris Andrews as *Distant Star* (2004), the protagonist evokes his memories of 1973, the coup, and the years of dictatorship from a standpoint in the present of the 1990s. The novel traces his attempts to locate the air force pilot responsible for the torture and murder of his friends and culminates in a contract killing on the Catalan coast (see Quinn, "Memory," esp. for discussion of *Distant Star* and Sergio Gómez's *Patagonia* where the action alternates between the present and World War II and the Holocaust). The action in José Gai's *Las manos al fuego* [Hands to the Fire, 2006] occurs in 1983 when an employee of a human rights law office goes to La Serena to investigate a disappearance. Here he becomes involved with *carabineros*, police, local gangsters, and a former lover from the period of the military coup. This triggers a series of flashbacks as events from 1983 alternate with scenes from 1973 when they were youthful militants. One striking element of the novel is the balance between resignation in the face of a dictatorship that has already lasted 10 years, with the sense of all that has already been lost, and the evocation of the possibility of resistance, of patience, of renewal. The novel ends with the protagonist undertaking an epic car journey from La Serena in the north to the main airport in Santiago against a backdrop of widespread protests and disruption, evoking real events from

1983. The protagonist's final act in joining a street protest, despite his pessimism about its potential impact, is a reawakening to a sense of commitment. Gai does a fine job of illuminating two key years in Chilean history.

In 2008, Roberto Ampuero published *El caso Neruda*, translated by Carolina de Robertis as *The Neruda Case* in 2012, an historical novel framed within the already established Cayetano Brulé series. Here, an image of Chilean Nobel laureate Neruda transports the detective back in time to 1973 and his memories of the period immediately before and after the coup, when the aging and ailing poet enlists him to find the whereabouts of a former lover, thereby steering him toward the PI profession. It is easy to see why this novel was translated into English; the star power of the Neruda name, alongside the re-creation of the Allende era and the coup, have a broad appeal.

Similarly, Carlos Tromben's *Podereš fácticos* [De Facto Powers, 2003] is set in the months leading up to the coup and evokes the period, with its street protests, an earlier coup attempt against Allende on June 29, and descriptions of ongoing works on the metro system, begun in 1969. Yet, the double murder investigated by PDI (Policía de Investigaciones) officer Palma is not directly linked to this history; rather, it is part of an esoteric plot, with elements of gothic and horror that Patricia Poblete Alday perceptively links to the origins of the detective genre. Palma's sidekick, a young sociologist, is interested in the material causes of criminality and is ill equipped to make sense of this situation. Tromben returned to historical detective fiction in *Prácticas rituales* [Ritual Practices, 2005], this time set during the presidency of Frei Montalva (1964–70) in 1969. This represents an important reminder of the progressive social policies pursued by the Christian Democrat government and the right-wing backlash that it, too, faced while in power. However, once again, the criminal plot is not directly concerned with this reality and instead centers on another esoteric conspiracy. However, shadowy powers operating behind the scenes exercise a nefarious effect on events, calling into question the agency of Chile's ostensible leaders.

One interesting approach to history is Jorge Baradit's ground-breaking *Synco* (2008). This techno thriller, as Baradit himself styles it, is set in a reality in which the loyal General Pinochet put down the military coup, and Allende is still democratic leader of a modernized cybernetic socialist state in 1979. The protagonist returns to the homeland she left as a teenager, questioning the façade of exemplary socialism she finds. As she meets key players from the events of 1973, she discovers a deeply troubling reality of lies, manipulation, and exploitation. The novel piles on more and more doubts about the nature of reality, drawing on global conspiracy theories and pointing to sinister powers moving events behind the scenes. *Synco* is a masterful blend of genres—science fiction, thriller, and alternate reality—its very hybridity marking an important innovation.

More recently, Carlos Basso's *República Nazi de Chile* [The Nazi Republic of Chile, 2019] is another hybrid detective novel set in an alternate reality in which the Axis powers won World War II, and Chile is now part of the Reich. The action takes place in New Nuremberg (formerly Osorno) on May 20–23, 1960, during a visit by Adolf Hitler to his favorite spa in the Andes. The novel name checks Augusto Pinochet and Manuel Contreras, the latter the head of the secret police during the early years of the dictatorship. Here they are minor characters, members of the Chilean military subordinate to German command. The protagonists include a policewoman opposed to the regime's policy of extermination and a former policeman of German descent who is a private detective. The novel culminates in the leaders of the Reich perishing as a rocket attack and the devastating effects of the historically accurate 1960 earthquake bring one of their monumental constructions down on them.

WOMEN WRITERS

The history of the genre in Chile in the twentieth century is a predominantly masculine narrative. This only began to change in the 1990s, but, even then, there were far fewer female writers than male writers (see Loach). The female pioneers of the end of the millennium were Alejandra Rojas and Marcela Serrano. Rojas published novels that might be classified as domestic noir, as they are concerned with the domestic sphere, the revelation of family secrets, and the breakdown of intimate relationships. For instance, her first novel, *Legítima defensa* [Legitimate Defense, 1993], unravels the false narrative of a self-defense killing, forcing three sisters to face the truth about themselves and their mother.

Serrano, one of the best-selling modern Chilean authors, wrote the detective novel *Nuestra Señora de la Soledad* [Our Lady of Solitude, 1999], notable for its middle-aged agency detective Rosa Alvallay and the object of her investigation, disappeared best-selling detective author Carmen Avila. As with her male counterparts, Alvallay's life has been marked by the dictatorship—she lived in exile in Mexico and worked for a human rights organization. She also reflects on the difficulties of life in modern Santiago but, as a divorced mother of sons, her perspective is radically unlike that of the male PIs discussed. Like Díaz Eterovic, Serrano foregrounds her knowledge of the genre as Alvallay peruses the missing author's bookshelf, reflecting on the writers represented there—the traditional hard-boiled canon of Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, Ross Macdonald, and Chester Himes but also key woman writers Patricia Highsmith, P.D. James, and Sue Grafton. Vázquez Montalbán and Sepúlveda also are mentioned, representing Spanish and Chilean contributions to the genre. Alvallay retraces Avila's steps to Mexico and discovers that the author staged her disappearance to escape from an unhappy marriage and from the tyranny of her immensely popular detective creation. Rather than reap the professional rewards for solving this high-profile case, Alvallay opts to respect Avila's wishes (see Quinn, "Cases"; Quinn, "detective professional").

In the new millennium, Elizabeth Subercaseaux, another best-selling author, published two novels in 2007 featuring 60-year-old protagonist Julieta Barros, who investigates crimes alongside a male police detective. In *Asesinato en la Moneda* [Murder in the Moneda], a murder is committed in the highest ranks of government, and there are clues pointing to government corruption and wrongdoing in the justice system. However, these nods toward staples of *neopolicial* come to nothing when the murderer's motive is revealed to have nothing to do with politics. The more recent *La última noche que soñé con Julia* [The Last Night I Dreamed of Julia, 2012] deals with gender violence in the upper ranks of Chilean society (see González Zúñiga).

The second decade of the new millennium saw major student protests in Chile and an increasingly visible and militant feminist movement, denouncing patriarchal structures and systemic violence and discrimination, culminating in the *mayo feminista* of 2018. The intense spotlight on these issues led to greater coverage in detective novels written by men and women. Díaz Eterovic's *Los asuntos del prójimo* [The Affairs of Others, 2021] deals with coercive behavior, gender violence, and femicide,² taking on board a range of institutions, including universities and popular religion. Femicide is a major theme in Paula Ilabaca's second detective novel, *Camino cerrado* [No Way Out, 2022] in which homicide detective Amparo Leiva, a minor character in Ilabaca's first novel from 2015, is lead investigator in the case of a woman brutally murdered by her lover. She also must contend with an ambitious male colleague who tries to undermine her standing among her colleagues. Ilabaca

joins the ranks of former police detectives turned crime writers, becoming the first woman to do so.

Valeria Vargas's novel *El misterio Kinzel* [The Kinzel Mystery, 2018] introduces Laura Naranjo, who has been hired to research historic true crimes in Chile and is drawn into a multifaceted murder investigation. A revenge murder in 1947 sets in motion an intergenerational tale of victimization and violence against women and girls that culminates in a present-day obsession with avenging this wrong. Naranjo also investigates the murder of a vulnerable young woman who had turned to prostitution. Vargas is at work on the second Naranjo novel (see Quinn, "detective profesional").

Julia Guzmán is yet another new detective writer who has shown a bold willingness to experiment with the genre. Her first novel *Juegos de villanos* [Villains' Games, 2018] approaches the genre in a conventional way as Miguel Cancino, a young bookseller turned private detective, investigates a disappearance and uncovers a case of fraud among the rich and powerful. However, her *La conjura de los neuróticos obsesivos* [The Conspiracy of the Obsessive Neurotics, 2021] is a dizzying hybrid of detective and science fiction. Here, an alternate reality version of Miguel Cancino works alongside crime fiction-obsessed PI Ester Molina to investigate a series of bizarre murders against a backdrop of increasing social instability. They learn that one of the obsessive neurotics of the title is killing off his alternates, attempting to occupy the best possible reality.

DIVERSITY AND TOPICALITY

Given the importance of women writers in the history of the genre, it is especially striking that female voices emerged so late in the Chilean tradition. It is therefore heartening to find the genre attracting new writers like Guzmán, Ilabaca, Vargas, and a diversity of voices more representative of the wider nation. It is similarly worth noting that Cecilia Aravena and Eduardo Contreras feature a homosexual PI in *La verdad secuestrada* [The Truth Held Hostage, 2019]. This former police detective investigates the kidnapping of a young girl and uncovers a link to a case of human rights violations from the dictatorship era. Homosexuality was only decriminalized in Chile at the end of the twentieth century and LGBT+ rights are another topic emerging in the crime genre. Ethnic diversity and the status and culture of the indigenous peoples is another topic that has had little resonance to date in the detective genre. Luis Sepúlveda's *Hot Line* (2001) has a Mapuche detective operating in Santiago, and in Juan Ignacio Colil's *Los muertos siempre pueden esperar* [The Dead Can Always Wait, 2017], the detective investigates the murder of a young Mapuche in Santiago, uncovering links to the conflict between the Mapuche and the Chilean state.

Women's rights, gender violence, femicide, LGBT+ rights, and the rights of indigenous communities are compelling contemporary concerns, and the detective genre has proved very responsive to societal issues. In the Heredia series, Díaz Eterovic has tackled a wide range of topics since 1987, including the illegal arms trade, racism against immigrants, environmental degradation, political corruption and fraud, elder abuse, and clerical sex abuse. The social, cultural, economic, and human rights legacy of the dictatorship continues to resonate on the 50th anniversary of the coup, especially considering the *estallido social*—the mass protests of 2019—and the overwhelming rejection of the Pinochet-era constitution in a referendum.³ In *Imágenes de la muerte* [Images of Death, 2022], Heredia investigates

the death of a photographer who documented violence against protesters. At the end of the novel, the PI, like Gai's protagonist, overcomes his natural cynicism and joins the protesters, allowing himself to be caught up in the rebellious spirit of the crowd.⁴

It is fitting that Díaz Eterovic, with his considerable contributions to the *neopolicial*, was guest of honor at the IV Festival Santiago Negro in September 2022 and at the first Puerto Negro, which was held in Viña del Mar in October 2022. These events hosted a wide range of authors—familiar and new, national and international—testifying to the ongoing vitality of the genre in Chile.

Keywords: Chilean detective fiction, historical fiction, Latin American detective fiction, *neopolicial*, women's writing

NOTES

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are by the author.
2. Roberto Bolaño's *2666* (2004), remains an obligatory point of reference on femicide in Juárez, Mexico. Sergio Gómez's *La mujer del policía* [The Policeman's Wife, 2000] also relates the story of a femicide, highlighting issues of inequality, lack of education, vulnerability, and economic dependence.
3. Since then, the electorate has rejected a draft constitution produced by an elected constitutional assembly, and the process to draft the new Constitution is ongoing at the time of this writing.
4. The *estallido* has inspired many writers and it is unsurprising that Ampuero brought Cayetano Brulé back after a long hiatus for *Demonio* [Demon, 2021], where the detective uncovers an international left-wing conspiracy to destabilize Chile.

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