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Abstract

The Chilean novelist Roberto Ampuero (1951-) is best known for his Cayetano Brulé detective series and for his conspicuous ideological conversion from socialism to liberalism (or neoliberalism). The commonly accepted political dimension of the crime genre in Latin America, particularly in the post-dictatorship southern cone, is therefore somewhat problematic in Ampuero's case. The 2008 novel, *El caso Neruda* (*The Neruda Case*), has an obvious political charge as it is set in the period leading up to the Augusto Pinochet coup of 1973. It is an origin story, going back to Cayetano's first mission, when he is contracted by the great poet and Salvador Allende supporter, Pablo Neruda, to track down a Mexican

doctor who may have a cure for the poet's cancer (Neruda's real wish is to track down the doctor's wife, with whom he had an affair and who may have given birth to his daughter). The dying poet echoes the state of the nation. Moreover, his populist persona is subjected to critical scrutiny, while his treatment of others (especially women) is presented as complicating his cultural and political legacy. The figure of the down-to-earth private eye, meantime, is also far from straightforward. In the end, a universalist discourse and an underlying neoliberal anxiety risk neutralizing the potential social impact of the noir fiction genre.

Roberto Ampuero and the Neruda Case: The Detective, the Poet, the 'Converso'

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The Chilean novelist Roberto Ampuero (1953-) is mainly known in his native country and elsewhere in the Spanish-speaking world for two things: his series of novels featuring the middle-aged Cuban detective based in Valparaíso, Cayetano Brulé; and his ideological shift from socialism to what he prefers to call liberalism (or what critics might choose to refer to as neoliberalism). Ampuero has written some seven novels in the Brulé series. The surname is taken from that of the author's grandmother (she and her husband were French immigrants who set up in Chiloé towards the end of the nineteenth century). Cayetano Brulé is also an immigrant (Ampuero based his appearance on a fish-out-of-water Venezuelan he once met in Bonn [Moody 1999: 138-39]). The character left Cuba for Florida

a few years before Castro came to power and did his military service near Frankfurt, Germany, before moving to Chile as a young man in the early 1970s to follow the woman he loved, Angela Undurraga Cox. In the series, he is now long split from Angela, in his mid-fifties, bespectacled, paunchy with thinning hair and a thick moustache. He is a private eye (having qualified via a correspondence course) and he drives a dilapidated car and always wears the same coat and tie (a much referred-to lilac number patterned with green guanacos which, we discover in the 2008 novel *El caso Neruda* [*The Neruda Case*], was gifted to him by Chile's great national poet). In an echo of Manuel Vázquez Montalbán's Pepe Carvalho, he is a would-be gourmet and is fairly down-to-earth, not driven by a ferocious work ethic, and fond of women. Ampuero admits that in his ramshackle manner he is, although not a policeman, reminiscent of the North American TV cop Colombo and he also identifies him with the ordinary detectives at the service of the people from Cuban detective fiction of the 1960s and '70s written by the likes of Luis Rogelio Nogueras, Daniel Chavarría and Guillermo Rodríguez Rivera (Moody 1999: 139). The Chile of the early 1970s and the German and Cuban links meanwhile hint at Ampuero's own connection to socialism. He was a member of the Chilean Juventud Comunista and moved to study in both East Germany and Cuba after the 1973 Augusto Pinochet coup against Salvador Allende. However, disillusioned with what he has often described as 'el socialismo real' (eg Wieser 2012: 139), he became a so-called 'converso' ('convert') (the term used in his book written with Mauricio Rojas about 'nuestra transición del marxismo al liberalismo' ['our transition from Marxism to liberalism'], *Diálogo de conversos* [*Dialogue of the Converted*] [2016: 17]). Eventually he would become Minister of Culture under Chilean President Sebastián Piñera's first administration (2010-14) and would support the billionaire's more obviously right-wing campaign that brought him to electoral victory again late 2017 (afterwards receiving an

offer of another culture brief in the government). If anything, Ampuero's discovery of social media, especially during and after the last Piñera campaign, identified him firmly with the right in the minds of many, particularly following his posting of a false tweet highlighting the controversial Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro's support for the opposition candidate Alejandro Guillier and his post-election tweet accusing the left of racism against 'los rubios' (meaning 'fair-haired people' and possibly implying 'fair-skinned people', that is those who are not indigenous or of mixed race) after comments by the Chilean Communist Party's Karol Cariola which he linked to his critical reading of Allende-era hero Víctor Jara's song *Las casitas del barrio alto* (*The Houses of the High District*).

Ampuero's detective fiction needs to be read in terms of his political 'conversion' in which the scales are presented as falling from the author's eyes. Traditionally, detective fiction is about the quest for 'truth', the desire to see through myths and unearth the underlying reality behind conventionally accepted discourses. However, in the Latin American context and in what some might conceive of as the postmodern era, that quest or desire is frequently frustrated in crime fiction, the solutions to the mystery often being non-existent, problematic or at least not what the detective or perhaps even the implied author imagined. It is a commonplace of criticism on Latin American detective fiction that such fiction challenges the implied return to order that characterizes classic, police procedural or even hard-boiled models and that it is often more socially or politically focused. If Howard Haycraft's famous 1941 essay emphasizes the link between detective fiction and Northern/Western democratic institutions, the Mexican critic Carlos Monsiváis has also famously asserted that 'we don't have any detective literature because we don't have any

faith in justice' (quoted in Simpson 1990: 21, from Torres 1982: 13). Similarly, Cayetano Brulé reflects that a European or North American detective 'jamás lograría resultados en un continente caótico, improvisador e imprevisible como América Latina' ('would never accomplish anything in a región as chaotic, improvised, and unpredictable as Latin America') (Ampuero 2016: 109/Ampuero 2012: 91)[1]. At the same time, Mexican Paco Ignacio Taibo II's 'neopolicial' ('new detective fiction') and the rise of crime writing in the southern cone in the wake of the dictatorships of the 1970s and '80s put the genre to the service of a species of socio-political investigation of the nature of justice. Clemens Franken's study of the contemporary 'novela policial chilena' ('Chilean detective novel') (2003) identifies the 'novela negra' ('crime novel' or 'noir novel') as an effective vehicle for finding truth in the wake of the disappearances of the Pinochet dictatorship. The process of detection may be, as Ampuero calls it, 'muy vago' ('very vague'), but Cayetano Brulé, as a private, non-institutional investigator, is ideally placed for that process as he is 'independiente, escéptico de los politicos de izquierda, de centro o de derecha, pero adversario total de las dictaduras' ('independent, sceptical of politicians of the left, the centre or the right, but a total adversary of dictatorships') (Wieser 2012: 129, 130).

The investigation in *El caso Neruda* has a special political charge since it is set against the background of the dying days of the Allende era and the beginning of the Pinochet one. This work is somewhat unusual amongst Ampuero's crime oeuvre in that it is a kind of origin story which takes us into the past and explains how Cayetano was initiated as a young man

[1] Translations from *El caso Neruda* are from the published English translation (American spellings have been maintained). All other translations are mine. After the first reference to a text, page numbers only are used (as long as there is no ambiguity).

into the world of detection. In 2006, the sight of a photograph of Pablo Neruda transports the detective back to 1973, where he meets the great man in a quasi-transcendental encounter at a party in Valparaíso. After they have become acquainted, Neruda, who is dying of cancer, persuades Cayetano to undertake a secret mission – to track down a Cuban oncologist he met in the 1940s while Consul General in Mexico, Dr Angel Bracamonte, who had been researching the medicinal properties of plants. Cayetano's shambling but ultimately dogged inquiries take him to Mexico, Cuba, East Germany and Bolivia. He eventually discovers that the real goal of his quest is not to find a cure for cancer but to track down the existence of the daughter of Bracamonte's former wife, with whom Neruda had an affair and who may be the mother of his unknown child. The investigation becomes a race against time, as Neruda's life is ebbing away – just like the authority and viability of the regime of his friend Salvador Allende.

Attention is drawn repeatedly to the parallel between the declines of the president and the poet. Chilean society under Allende is seen as being in chaos, with sedition spreading like cancer and the shortages growing like a cancer (90, 148/ 74, 128). Cayetano has 'la sensación de que la salud de Neruda se deterioraba al mismo ritmo que la del país' ('the sense that Neruda's health was deteriorating at the same pace as the health of the nation') (293/269), while the poet himself comments:

> […] estoy jodido, Cayetano. No hay remedio. Ni para mí ni para Chile. Salavdor sufre un cáncer doble: el de la reacción que no lo deja construir el socialismo en democracia y el de los aliados que aspiran a imponer el socialismo mediante las armas. (125)

> […] I'm screwed, Cayetano. There's no cure. Not for me, and not for Chile. Salvador suffers from a double cancer: one from reactionaries who won't let him build socialism democratically, and another from allies who want to impose socialism through armed force. (106)

In a remarkable scene, both overblown and curiously mundane, Cayetano witnesses the final meeting of Neruda and Allende when the president stops by in his helicopter at La Sebastiana, the poet's Valparaíso home. The meeting, Cayetano muses, 'era una despedida, que nunca más volverían a verse' ('was a good-bye, that they would never see each other again')(306/280). Not long after this 'último encuentro' ('final meeting') (306/my translation), both men would be dead.

There is an obvious element of melancholic elegiac nostalgia in the dual description of Allende and Neruda, and by extension the Chile of the early 1970s. Yet Cayetano's investigations in Chile clearly reveal a country in a state of division and decay under Allende's clumsy rule ('un Chile dividido y triste, donde escaseaban los alimentos y reinaba la incertidumbre' ['a sad, divided Chile, where food was scarce and uncertainty ruled'] [95/78]) and expose him to examples of the seemingly suicidal extremism and often violence of the left (one labour union leader comes close to implicitly dismissing both Allende and Neruda as being merely bourgeois reformists rather than true revolutionaries [47-8/33-4]). The fading of any residual faith in the socialist experiment is reflected in Cayetano's increasing estrangement from his bourgeois revolutionary partner Angela, whose decision to train as a guerrilla in Cuba he sees as typical of 'jóvenes idealistas' ('young idealists') who are foolishly persuaded to 'inmolarse en nombre de una causa que […] es

imposible' ('martyr themselves in the name of a cause that […] is impossible to attain') (192/171). Meantime, the Cuba he encounters on his visit during the investigation comes across as a shabby tropical parody of a revolutionary state, poor and oppressive yet still promising 'el paraíso a la vuelta de la esquina' ('paradise around the corner') (161/141). His main contact on the island is that archetypal real-life victim of Castro's purge of alternative thinkers, the poet Heberto Padilla (whose case bitterly divided and mobilized Latin American writers and ushered in the beginning of the end of the Latin American Boom [see, eg, Swanson 1995: 9-10]). His attempts to assist the detective expose the hypocrisy of the system and the society it has forged, most ludicrously in the form of UNEAC whose almost impenetrable Vedado headquarters are described as 'la blanca mansión de los intelectuales oficiales cubanos' ('the white mansion that housed Cuba's official intellectuals') (184/163). The German Democratic Republic, where Cayetano's investigation takes him next, is even more grim with its culture of oppression, constant surveillance, Stasi agents and threats made with 'instrumentos de tortura' ('instruments of torture') (259/233). Of course, these three countries (Chile, Cuba and the DDR) are the places of Ampuero's own educational and political formation. The central theme of *Diálogo de conversos* is how 'la frustrante experiencia personal en el socialismo realmente existente' ('the frustrating personal experience of living under real socialism') (36) in these places (certainly the latter two) lead him to break with communism and embrace 'liberalismo' ('liberalism'). He goes even further by decrying the way the memorialization of human rights abuses in Chile fails to take sufficiently into account that which he sees as having prompted the Pinochet coup, 'la responsabilidad nuestra en el proceso de polarización y división de Chile bajo el gobierno de Allende' ('our own responsibility for the process of polarization and division in Chile under Allende's government') (85). What is most striking, though, about the unconscious subtext

of *Diálogo de conversos* is the apparent causal leap from witnessing the failure of socialism to the open-armed acceptance of so-called liberalism. There is a quite a big temporal gap here and it is hard to see how a reasoned case for (neo)liberalism can be made purely on the basis of personal experiences from a very different context. Moreover, the nature of Ampuero's support for Piñera via social media rather undermines the common-sense reasonableness that seems to underpin his 'diálogo' ('dialogue') with Mauricio Rojas. What may really be being revealed here are the limitations of the (neo)liberal project as conceived by the likes of Ampuero.

One of the key concerns of recent neoliberal discourse in Latin America is the perceived danger of populism. In the 2015 prologue to Ampuero and Rojas' *Diálogo*, the most famous 'converso' of all, Mario Vargas Llosa, begins with a reference to 'dos cosas espléndidas' ('two splendid things'): the triumph of Mauricio Macri in Argentina and the defeat of 'el populismo de los esposos Kirchner' ('the populism of the Kirchners') (11). The Peruvian goes on to take a swipe at Rafael Correa (Ecuador), Evo Morales (Bolivia) and Daniel Ortega (Nicaragua), all in the context of a longed-for 'duro revés para el llamado "socialismo del siglo XXI" y el Gobierno de Venezuela' ('a tough setback for so-called "twenty-first century socialism" and the Venezuelan government') (11). Later in the book, Ampuero expresses his admiration for Vargas Llosa and 'la amplitud y radicalidad de su humanismo y liberalismo' ('the range and radicalism of his humanism and liberalism') (238). Equally he has dismissed Hugo Chávez as a self-serving 'caudillo' (a Hispanic 'chieftan' or 'boss') (Wieser 2012: 140) and his aforementioned fake tweet makes clear his negative view of the Nicolás Maduro government and Bolivarian socialism more generally. *El caso Neruda*

may not explicitly target Allende as a populist, but it certainly seems to highlight the political populism of Neruda. Neruda was, of course, a longstanding anti-fascist campaigner, a member of the Communist Party, a senator who famously attacked the concentration camps under President Gabriel González Videla in the 1940s and was forced to flee into exile across the Andes, a tireless campaigner for his friend Salvador Allende and later his Ambassador to Paris, and he became a political and popular poet who mixed performance with campaigning, pseudo-visionary bombast and more humble celebrations of the everyday life of the common folk. Grandly referred to throughout as 'el poeta' ('the poet') and always addressed as 'don Pablo', Neruda is introduced in the second chapter as an almost mythical figure, a great man, feted by admirers, yet somehow embodying the people with his trademark Chiloé poncho and flat cap. Yet despite the awe and admiration Cayetano feels before him, he quickly becomes aware of the poet's 'automitificación' ('self-mythologizing') (emblematic of which may be his self-transformation from Ricardo Eliecer Neftalí Reyes Basoalto to 'Pablo Neruda' [57-8]), but also 'su vulnerabilidad mal dismulada' ('his poorly concealed vulnerability') (149/129, 130). Even the poet himself is aware of his own egoism (310/284) and that 'las palabras que hilvana el poeta son simulacros, artificios' ('words cobbled together by a poet are simulacra, artifices') (287/262). In his Author's Note following the English translation of *El caso Neruda*, Ampuero observes that 'Neruda's fame is so solid and universal that written works about him tend toward the apologetic and adulatory, keeping him on a pedestal' (379). In the novel, the Neruda that emerges from behind the mask of greatness, is in many ways vulgar and pathetic, self-serving and vain – and when it comes to women, the alluring web he weaves can be positively dangerous.

When Cayetano eventually tracks down the widow of Bracamonte, Neruda's former lover Beatriz, her words illuminate the power and peril of the populist poet's seductiveness. She says that she was 'conquered' by 'la causa politica de Pablo' ('Pablo's political causes') because 'necesitaba creer en algo que me trascendiera, una utopía' ('I needed to believe in something that transcended me, in a utopia'), to the extent that 'él tal vez me creó' ('you could say he created me') (362/334). Now, some thirty years on, she sees the fall of Allende as inevitable and the cause as a mere chimera (358 ff/330 ff). In a sense, love and politics have become mixed up in the story of Beatriz, and, of course, Neruda was always really a poet of love who did not really discover political verse until around the time of the Spanish Civil War. This all hints at the predominance of emotion and affect in populist politics, but also at the deception of that politics. It is the real women in Neruda's life who are made to embody the poet's propensity for instrumentalism and betrayal. The novel is actually structured around five sections, each bearing the name of and a degree of reflection on a woman from Neruda's life. The first four are real wives and lovers (the fifth is the fictional possible daughter): Josie Bliss, the erotic Burmese muse he met while working at the consulate in Rangoon (now Yangon, Myanmar) and whom he left, according to *El caso Neruda*, to become the poet he could not have been if he had stayed with her (80); the Dutchwoman 'María Antonieta' (Maryka or Maruca) Hagenaar Vogelzang, who was the mother of his hydrocephalic daughter Malva Marina and whom he abandoned with his child for another woman; Delia del Carril, a former Argentine aristocrat some twenty years his elder, who was very influential in his literary evolution and nudged him towards political and less hermetic writing, but whom, again, he betrayed and eventually split from; and finally Matilde Urrutia, his younger lover and later third wife who stayed with him until his death on 23 September 1973. The voice of Neruda (which is given expression in a number of

italicized sections of Ampuero's novel) describes these woman as: 'todas las mujeres que naufragaron en el océano de ilusiones alimentado por mis versos' ('all the women who were shipwrecked in an ocean of hopes nourished by my verses') (287/262). Neruda's womanizing is well-known and he has been much criticized by later generations for his portrayal of women in his poetry. Yet the figure of the poet in the novel recognizes that he could never have written the poetry that made him famous without them (147). Most chilling of all though is his admission about his treatment of Maruca and her daughter. He could not bear 'la monstruosa cabecita de Malva Marina', 'el monstruo que me nació' ('Malva Marina's monstrous face', 'the monster that was born to me') (210, 211/188, 189), could not write poetry with these females in his life, and he left them both behind in Nazi-occupied Holland and worked to bar their evacuation to Chile (149). With this in mind, the popular and populist socialist poet of the people looks somewhat shaky on that pedestal to which Ampuero alluded.

The story of Malva Marina and the investigative quest to find out if Beatriz bore the poet a daughter lead on to the themes of paternity and progeny, which are in turn linked to conceptions of poetic creativity and output. Neruda explains to Cayetano that his work as a poet left no time for children, which is why he abandoned his daughter and was unmoved by the news that Beatriz had given birth (152/131-2). However, with death approaching he is having a change of heart and needs to know if he does have another daughter (152/132). Now he realizes that 'la inmortalidad te la otorgan los hijos […], no los libros; la sangre, no la tinta; la piel, no las páginas impresas' ('immortality is bestowed by children […], not by books; by blood, not ink; by skin, and not by printed pages') (153/133). The women in his

life, then, have been a barrier to his creativity but also a source (in that he is a poet of love and desire). However, they also represent the spurned possibility of true creativity – the creation of real new life, not just that of poems as a form of offspring. It is never a hundred per cent clear if Beatriz's daughter is also Neruda's, but the young woman's name, Tina Trinidad, convinces Cayetano that she is, given that Beatriz has deliberately bestowed on her a second name that is that of the poet's beloved '*mamadre*' ('grandmother') (365/336). Unfortunately, Neruda never gets to find out, as he dies before Cayetano can locate him and give him the news he had been longing to hear. Some of those who judge Neruda on the basis of his perceived misogyny may regard this outcome as a form of fictional poetic justice. It might even be interpreted as a comeuppance for a populist whose rhetoric ultimately fails to bring any form of plenitude. Indeed, Neruda's cancer might itself be read as some kind of moral punishment. His mistreatment of women (and perhaps his adoption and support of a politics that will lead to ruin in his country) is a kind of self-inflicted illness or disease that will eat away at him and ultimately bring him down. Grant Farred, in a somewhat elusive reading of the novel based in part on Derrida's treatment of the *pharmakon*, appears to extend the disease metaphor to Allende:

> The socialist revolution is what brought Allende (fully) to (political) life; it is his commitment to this revolution that will lead to his demise. The very movement he brought to life is what will undo him. (Farred 2014: 170)

However, such a negative reading of Neruda cannot be the whole picture. Cayetano still likes and admires the poet despite what he learns about him. The scene towards the end where he sobs over Neruda's dead body is actually quite moving: he feels a sense of tragedy

at being unable to deliver to the poet the results of the investigative mission he had launched, tearfully tucking a photograph of Tina Trinidad into his jacket pocket and commenting that 'su intuición de poeta no lo engañaba' ('your poet's intuition didn't trick you') (391/361). And while Ampuero himself has commented that 'lo peor que se ha hecho es construir a un Pablo Neruda como un poeta casi santo, como un poeta ya colocado en el pedestal, como un monumento' ('the worst thing that has been done is to construct a Pablo Neruda who is a poet who is almost a saint, a poet who has already been placed on a pedestal, who is a monument'), he also believes that 'la grandiosidad de Pablo Neruda está justamente en su vida contradictoria' ('the grandiosity of Pablo Neruda lies precisely in his contradictory life') and that 'es un ser lleno de contradicciones, muy humano' ('he is a being who is full of contradictions, very human') (Wieser 2012: 144). In a sense, the reason the larger-than-life populist poet remains such a compelling figure well into the twenty-first century is that he is, in fact, in many ways just like the rest of us, and this is why his life and poetry speak to us still.

The 'ordinariness' of the great poet suggests that, in the end, he is not that different to the dilapidated detective who looks up to him with such deference. Indeed, in some ways the detective is more in the real world than the poet. Cayetano is exasperated that Neruda 'seguía jugando con las metáforas, imágenes, bonitas palabras'; 'poetas', he thinks, 'ya entendía porque se desconfiaban de ellos' ('He was still playing with metaphors, images, pretty words. Poets. Now Cayetano understood why people didn't trust them') (147/127). The poet himself even observes that 'si la poesía te transporta al cielo, la novela policiaca te introduce en la vida tal como es, te ensucia las manos y tizna el rostro' ('if poetry transports

us to the heavens, crime novels plunge you into life the way it really is; they dirty your hands and blacken your face') (38/24). Cayetano goes further. During a tricky and dangerous phase of his investigation, he asserts that 'él no era personaje de ficción', 'era de carne y hueso, y no habitaba en una novela sino en la realidad, una realidad implacable' ('he was not a fictional character', 'he […] was made of flesh and blood and did not live in a novel, but in reality, an implacable reality' (252-3/226). This claim echoes the perception of the Latin American detective novel as one that engages with the social and political realities of the subcontinent. Ampuero himself seems to believe in the political role of Latin American crime fiction. He describes his work as a 'contradiscurso' ('counter-discourse'), offering the possibility 'de que el latinoamericano no sea el protagonista, que el mundo sea visto desde el sur y que el relato cuente con una sensibilidad del sur, no con la sensibilidad hegemónica de alguien que está en Nueva York y mira hacia el sur o que está en Berlín y mira hacia el sur' ('that a Latin American can be the protagonist, that the world can be seen from the south and the story told with a sensibility from the south, not with the hegemonic sensibility of someone who is New York and looks down at the south or someone who is in Berlin and looks towards the south') (Wieser 2012: 136). But, of course, Cayetano Brulé is not real and is, definitively, fictional. In fact, a repeated motif in the novel is that he is Neruda's creation in the sense that it is the poet who made him a detective. He is a 'detective creado por Neruda' ('detective created by Neruda') (245/219), 'el detective que Pablo Neruda había dado a luz' ('the detective to whom Pablo Neruda had given birth') (150/130); and Neruda tells him straight out that 'tú también eres una ficción mía' ('you yourself are another of my

fictions') (309/283).[2] Moreover, Neruda tells Cayetano to learn his trade as a detective by reading the Maigret novels of the Belgian author Georges Simenon – in other words to base himself on another fiction and a model that is European and not Latin American. This idea of the protagonist's fictional nature and his debt to a foreign prototype rather undermines the agency of the detective and the validity of him acting as the embodiment of a counter-discourse to Northern and Western hegemony. What this perhaps all reveals is a status anxiety in Ampuero himself. Ampuero claims to offer 'una visión original' ('an original vision') that sets him apart from other Chilean writers of his generation because of his experience of 'desplazamiento' ('displacement') (Wieser 2012: 136). Elsewhere, he adds that, unlike most well-known compatriots of his generation, he was not trained in one of the famous 'talleres literarios' ('literary workshops') such as those of consecrated novelists like José Donoso and Jorge Edwards, that he does not have 'amigos escritores' ('friends who are writers'), does not mix in circles associated with 'la bohemia' ('the bohemian') and has a background in journalism rather than literature (Moody 1999: 134-5). Meantime, in *El caso Neruda*, the poet (a real-life fan of detective stories) is made to voice a defence of crime fiction as a minor genre: 'Me cargan los tipos que solo leen buenos libros. Es señal de que no conocen el mundo' ('I have no patience for people who read only good books. It's a sign they don't know the world') (308/282). If the canonical Neruda is to some extent debunked by Ampuero, then the writer of a subgenre is posited as being of worth. Yet what is also

[2] There is an interesting echo of this notion in Pablo Larraín's 2016 film *Neruda*. It focuses on the pursuit by fictionalized detective Oscar Peluchonneau (Gael García Bernal) of Neruda (Luis Gnecco) during the latter's attempt to escape into exile at the time of González Videla's crackdown on communists. Neruda plays a game of cat-and-mouse with the hapless detective, leaving him frustrating clues in the shape of copies of crime novels from the Argentine Séptimo Círculo series. Peluchonneau never gets his man, but becomes obsessed by the poet, concluding, in a somewhat surreal sequence before his death, that Neruda 'me ha escrito' ('created me') and that 'el poeta me inventó' ('the poet invented me'). Although Neruda does not come across as particularly attractive as a man, the detective seems to realise the power of his poetry and the capacity of art and language to help ordinary people comprehend and give expression to their own individual and collective experience.

coming across appears to be something like a pattern of defensiveness and inconsistency, perhaps even the irritation of a neoliberal who wishes to stand out against the masses he once supported.

Still, there is a definite attempt to situate Cayetano, this 'Maigret del Caribe' ('Caribbean Maigret') (75/59), in a species of reality or context of supposed authenticity. In a scary jam, Cayetano reflects:

> Si Maigret investigaba en el centro del mundo, él lo hacía en sus márgenes. En eso estribaba la diferencia entre un detective de ficción, creado por la pluma de un célebre escritor del Primer Mundo, y un detective de carne y hueso, un proletario de la investigación, un exiliado sobreviviente de los rigores del Tercer Mundo. (226)
>
> (Maigret lived and worked in the in the center of the world; Cayetano was on its margins. And there lay the difference between a fictional detective, born from the pen of a popular First World writer, and a flesh-and-blood detective, an investigative proletarian, an exile surviving the rigors of the Third World.) (202)

This brings us back to the idea of Cayetano's ordinariness next to the exaggerated grandiosity of Neruda. Diana Ramírez emphasizes the 'cotidianidad' ('everyday nature') of Cayetano Brulé, his 'dimensión neutral y humana' ('neutral, human dimension'), his embodiment of 'una humanización que le quita la ficcionalidad típica del héroe de la novela negra' ('a humanization that relieves him of the fictional quality that is typical of the hero of the noir genre') (Ramírez 2016: 35, 42). This neutraility, the modesty of his emotional life and political beliefs, and his open-mindedness, are what make him a good detective, as he is

not driven by some pre-existing agenda and is willing to go where the investigation takes him. Part of that willingness to follow a lead wherever it goes is the exposure to travel. Cayetano is something of a globe-trotting (if not in glamorous way) detective, his journeys echoing Ampuero's own extensive experience of visiting and living in other places. This gives Ampuero's detective novels 'un marcado carácter internacional e intercultural' ('a marked international and intercultural character') (Frankens 2002: 89, quoted in Ramírez 2016: 35), but it also perhaps hints again at a (neo)liberal underpinning with its evocation of laizzez-faire attitudes and global free movement across borders. Moreover, the representation of travel, and place more generally (as well as time), gives the novels a touristic air, suggesting at times an anthropologizing gaze and even an internalization of what Graham Huggan (2001) has called 'the postcolonial exotic'.

The opening chapter offers a kind of historical crib or travel guide to Chile and Valparaíso, while the subsequent action includes many references to local landmarks, places of interest, restaurants and local dishes (often using adjectives like 'traditional' or 'legendary' and including copious amounts of travelogue-style reflection). A similar job is done on Mexico, Cuba and Bolivia (with, for example, information on the location of the death of Trotsky, an explanation of what Granma is, and background to the capture and death of Che Guevara). Not only is this implicitly serving up Latin America for the delectation of foreignized consumption, it also involves the pedalling of hackneyed conceits about the subcontinent, as in this commentary in the middle of a colourful touristic digression:

> Era como si {Ciudad de México} estuviese muriendo y naciendo al mismo tiempo, como si lamentara la pérdida de la calma y de las construcciones antiguas, pero celebrara y anhelara la modernidad. (111)
>
> Mexico City […] seemed to be dying and being born at the same time, as though it lamented the loss of tranquility and ancient edifices, and yet celebrated modernity, longed for it. (93)

Indeed, although Ampuero has expressed his relief at overcoming his indebtedness to the style of Gabriel García Márquez that characterized his early short stories (Wieser 2012: 140), there are a number of Magical Realism *light* flourishes in his descriptions of 'la desbordante y copiosa realidad latinoamericana' ('the bursting, capacious reality of Latin America') (111/92). If Magical Realism was supposed to privilege the 'Third World' voice, in practice it often evolved into an exoticizing perspective that encouraged readers to gawp at the extremity and eccentricity of Latin American culture and society (see Swanson 1995: 7-11) . The essentializing attitude is summed up in a contrast made between Cuba and the southern cone, when 'la irreverencia lúdica del Caribe, […] la isla de la eterna pachanga' ('the whimsical irreverence of the Caribbean, […] the island of the never-ending party') is compared to the 'solemnidad grave y profunda' and the 'voluntad de sacrificio y trabajo' of the Chilean people ('[Chile's] profoundly grave and solemn people, […] with an ethic of work and sacrifice') (86/70). And, of course, the entire premise behind the idea of the Latin American detective that underpins the work of Ampuero, other authors and many critics of the genre is itself simplistic, patronizing and equally essentializing:

> Maigret jamás lograría resultados en un continente caótco, improvisador e imprevisible como America Latina. Al igual que el caballero Dupin y Sherlock Holmes,

> Maigret podía actuar a sus anchas en países estables y organizados como Estados Unidos y Francia, donde una filosofía racionalista regía la existencia de la gente, donde imperaban reglas y leyes claras, que imprimían cierta lógica a la vida, y había instituciones sólidas y prestigiosas, y la policía era eficiente y velaba porque se respetase la legalidad. En América Latina, en cambio, donde campeaban la improvisación y la arbitrariedad, la corrupción y la venalidad, todo era posible. (109)
>
> Maigret could never accomplish anything in a region as chaotic, improvised, and unpredictable as Latin America. Just like the gentleman Dupin and Sherlock Holmes, Maigret could investigate his heart out in stable and organized nations like the United States and France, where a rational philosophy reigned over the people, rules and clear laws prevailed, logic shaped daily life, and solid, prestigious institutions and an efficient police force worked to ensure respect for the law. On the other hand, in Latin America – where improvisation, randomness, corruption, and venality were the order of the day – everything was possible. (91)

Rather than offering a 'counter-discourse', this conception of the Latin American detective seems to reinstate (or risks reinstating) the old Civilization-versus-Barbarism argument, the ongoing spectre behind Latin American neoliberalism – the notion that social, political and economic order can only be achieved by the adoption or imposition of foreign models perceived as 'modern' and capable of taming the unruly masses.

The politics of detection, then, are really rather problematic in *El caso Neruda*. The alleged 'neutrality' of Cayetano the private detective is reflected in his 'escepticismo, su negativa a abrazar causa alguna, su tendencia a contemplar las cosas desde lejos'

('skepticism, his refusal to embrace any cause, his tendency to watch things from a distance') (216/193). This notion of detached observation is important. The private detective connotes independence and is often a maverick figure in fiction, seen as operating outside the system with an almost chivalric code of honour (See Swanson 2005, 2002). Yet, as Peter Messent has pointed out, 'the private eye […] may appear to see and act from an individualistic and autonomous perspective, but the detective's agency is in fact subordinated to larger forms of social monitoring and control, and her or his vision is limited by the "private" basis on which he or she operates' (Messent 1997: 10). This perspective could almost be read as a critique of neoliberalism. Messent also emphasizes the way 'detective fiction stresses over and over again the authority that comes from close, continual and apparently detached observation' (6). The very term 'private eye' links detection to seeing and knowledge, and, as Messent again notes, Rosemary Jackson has established the connection between the seeing eye and the stable self: 'I "see" is synonymous with "I understand". Knowledge, comprehension, reason, are established through the power of the look, through the "eye" and the "I" of the human subject' (Messent 1997: 5; Jackson 1981: 45). Yet Cayetano cannot be sure what he is seeing here. He is pretty confused throughout and merely assumes (or guesses) that Tina is Neruda's child. He also fails in his mission to transmit that news to the poet before he dies. And, of course, the mystery of Neruda's death is never explained (to be fair, Ampuero does not here get in to the various conspiracy theories around this topic, prompted mainly post-publication anyway by the allegations of Neruda's chauffeur Manuel Araya in May 2011 and revived late 2017 when a team of international scientists concluded that Neruda did not die of cancer after all). And, of course, the novel ends in a circular way, with Cayetano visiting the offices of a prestigious international consultancy firm to be greeted by a former leftist

guerrilla and a former right-wing military interrogator who now enjoy 'los mejores contactos con el Gobierno y el empresariado, con los ministerios y la oposición' ('the very best connections with government and business, with ministries and the opposition party') (404/373). In a sense, the violence and extremism of both left and right represent the real crime in this novel (there is no crime as such to be investigated in the 'Neruda case' that Cayetano takes on). Yet those involved are not punished but rewarded and all that conflict seems to have been ultimately for nothing.

The ending, nonetheless, does seem to be some kind of ironic and perhaps mildly critical commentary on neoliberalism. In fairness, Ampuero has tried to be clear that 'me siento lejos de toda reducción del liberalismo a una política económica o cosas parecidas': 'no se trata', he says, 'de crear un liberalismo dogmático, único y monolítico, sino de establecer los límites frente a quienes postulan un liberalismo en lo económico, pero pueden vivir perfectamente sin libertad política' ('I feel very removed from any reduction of liberalism to economic policy or the like': 'it is not a question of creating some form of dogmatic liberalism that is uniform and monolithic, but rather of establishing limits in the face of those who propose a liberalism confined to the economic realm, but who are capable of living perfectly well without political liberty') (Ampuero and Rojas 2016: 156, 239). Having said that, the text of *El caso Neruda* appears, perhaps unwittingly, to de-politicize the gesture of using a specifically non-European or non-North American detective to conduct an investigation in a very specific murky historical and political context. The novel's discourse of love seems to dissolve specificity into a sort of unquestioned universalism. The poet comments, for example, that 'el mal de amores en todas partes tiene

el mismo clima' ('love troubles are the same in every climate') (30/16). The frequent references to destiny or fate also deny politics. There are even nebulous hints at Borgesian notions of dreaming and repetition, such as when Cayetano wonders if his life is a dream (305/279) or when the poet claims that the tale of his relationship with Beatriz has already been told by Virgil two thousand years ago in the form of the story of Aeneas and Dido (336/309) (there is also, of course, an echo of Dante's Beatrice here). Moreover, the novel is peppered with gnomic utterances that lack the substance they appear to promise: comments like 'aquí [en Valparaíso] nadie se muere para siempre' ('here [in Valparaíso] no one dies forever') (20/7) or 'un hombre solo delante del mar es como si estuviera en el medio del mar' ('a man alone in front of the sea may as well be out at sea') (28/15). Most vacuous of all are the observations that accompany descriptions of Neruda's fascination with dressing up. Sententious statements like 'la vida entera es un desfile de disfraces' ('life is nothing more than a parade of disguises') (79/54) ultimately mean very little and, anyhow, the sentiment behind them brings us back to notions of unknowability and futility. Case closed? Yes, but with more questions than answers.

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