Different Worldviews, Different World Literatures? The Contrasting Chronotopes of Ethnic Detective Fiction in *Pasado Perfecto* and *The Beggar's Opera*

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Abstract The present article discusses the nature of ethnic detective fiction from the comparative perspective of world literature by underscoring the divergent discourses that can hide under such a seemingly unified subgenre. In the context of our current understanding of world literature, both the Inspector Ramirez series by Canadian crime writer Peggy Blair and the Lieutenant Conde series by Cuban author Leonardo Padura can be categorized as multiethnic, international, minority, multicultural, cross-cultural or ethnic detective fiction, because of the series' focus on the Cuban crime scene. However, a comparison of the action-space, plot-space, and worldview chronotopes (i.e. time-space frames) of *The Beggar's Opera* and *Pasado perfecto* reveals that the focalizers of both novels adhere to opposite worldviews. *Pasado perfecto*'s Cuban worldview chronotope largely conforms to the premises of the original hardboiled paradigm, whereas the Canadian worldview of *The Beggar's Opera* appears to cross over from detective fiction into ethnographic travel fiction. In the end, it would seem the only thing holding both novels together is their shared label of ethnic detective fiction.

Key words Ethnic Detective Fiction; Hardboiled Crime Fiction; Cuban Detective Fiction; Canadian Detective Fiction; Chronotope

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"[Cuba] no es el infierno que dicen unos ni el paraíso que otros pretenden que sea. Es una especie de purgatorio."
— Padura

Goethe, the founding father of *Weltliteratur* as we know it today, first started lobbying for a unified world literature to counteract the destabilizing fragmentation underlying most of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century—a fragmentation to which we can relate today and that, probably, best explains our renewed interest in the concept of world literature. Goethe's world literature was to be a vehicle for the worldwide spread of humanist ideals and values. Even though he was heavily inspired by Ancient Greek and Latin sensibilities and aesthetics, his language of choice to achieve that kind of unifying, transnational literature was his own native German: a language and a culture that would "act as a sort of arbiter for the dissemination of work in foreign languages throughout Europe" (D'haen, *The Routledge Concise History of World Literature* 6). In the end, it was English—and not German—that became the lingua franca of world literature, but the Eurocentrism of Goethe's humanist enterprise remains as valid as ever. According to Marjori Perloff, the "essentializing of English" is inextricably intertwined with the concept of world literature because it "perpetuates the old notions of centers and margins which the new comparative literature model is supposedly countering" (178). Even though the upsurge in English translations of all kinds of ex-centric world literatures stems from a need to better understand the world in its entirety, i.e. beyond the borders of the Western hemisphere, today's synonymity of world literature with what Theo D'Haen refers to as "Anglophony" is telling of how neocolonialism is deeply engrained in that supposedly humanist concept (24, 144).

The present article questions the nature of the relationships that are created between detective novels when they are discussed from the comparative perspective of world literature. When analyzing a writer such as the Cuban Leonardo Padura without crossing any linguistic borders—that is to say in a Hispanic context—one rarely has to worry about possible accusations of neocolonialism (cf. Simpson; Stavans; Uxo). However, when taking into consideration how widely read—because widely translated—he is, comparisons with other internationally published crime writers of Cuban origin, such as the Canadian-based exile José Latour or Cuban-American Carolina García-Aguilera, are unavoidable (cf. Oakley). And what of his relationship with authors who write about the Cuban crime scene without being Cuban themselves, such as Canadian novelist Peggy Blair?[1] In the context of our current understanding of world literature, both Padura's and Blair's work can be

1 Blair's biographical blurb in *The Beggar's Opera* (2012) reads: "Peggy Blair has been a lawyer for more than thirty years. A recognized expert in Aboriginal law, she also worked as a criminal defense lawyer and prosecutor. Blair spent a Christmas in Old Havana, where she watched bored young policemen on street corners along the Malecón, visited Hemingway's favorite bars, and learned to make the perfect mojito."

labeled with the same polynomial, vague umbrella terms, such as "ethno-detective novels" (Erdmann 11); "multiethnic crime fiction" (Fischer-Hornung and Mueller); "international crime fiction" (Krajenbrink and Quinn); "'minority', 'multicultural', 'cross-cultural' and 'postcolonial'" or "'ethnic' detective fiction" (Matzke and Muehleisen 6–7).[1]

In *Investigating Identities: Questions of Identity in Contemporary International Crime Fiction*, editors Marieke Krajenbrink and Kate Quinn combine essays on Spanish, German, Russian, Dutch, Chilean etc. detective fiction in one volume. Dorothea Fischer-Hornung and Monika Mueller, editors of *Sleuthing Ethnicity: The Detective in Multiethnic Crime Fiction*, consider Asian American, African American and Cuban American crime novels to be on an equal footing with German and French novels. It seems that in order to fall under the ambiguous category of ethnic detective fiction, it is enough for a work to either not be originally published in English or to somehow diverge from the straight, white, male paradigm of hardboiled detective fiction (cf. Reddy; Pepper). This categorization is complicated, however, by the debate on voice versus experience (cf. Ashley et al.; Bakhtin) or how crime writing by so-called "cultural outsiders" relates to the work of those who write "from an insider's perspective" (Fischer-Hornung and Mueller 13). According to Maureen Reddy, the reason behind the unpopularity of this debate is the demise of identity politics in academic theory in the 1980s and 1990s and its replacement with discussions of appropriation and commodification (156). In an academic environment where "the question of whether the race of the author impacts the authenticity of character" has become "moot" (ibid.), scholars of ethnic detective fiction tend to go about the issue as follows. Fischer-Hornung and Mueller claim that "cultural outsiders" will "carefully attempt to avoid stereotypical references to the ethnicities portrayed in their novels" (13). Christine Matzke and Susanne Muehleisen, on the other hand, ask the following rhetorical question:

> Do practitioners of 'ethnic' detective fiction need to be 'ethnic' themselves in order to be 'truly' representative […]? When are 'ethnic' investigators a genuine means for social or political commentary, when are they merely a means to add exotic 'colour', not unlike their colonial predecessors? (7)

Similarly, Ray Browne views American Indian crime fiction by non-natives as a win-win-situation. It is "an economical form of physical and cultural tourism" that benefits, both, mainstream readers in providing them with "inexpensive and

1 The preferred term in the present article is ethnic detective fiction, for the sake of simplicity.

enjoyable thrills" as well as the Native minorities themselves because "ethnic crime fiction becomes a kind of affirmative fiction," a way for "these Anglos" to pay "the Indians" back "for former commissions of injustice" (Browne 8–9). According to Browne, all American Indians want is "to be noticed with dignity," so, therefore, they "do not mind being treated realistically and truthfully but they want a fair account" (10).

The overall impression these contemporary analyses of ethnic detective fiction give is that, initially, the distinction between writers who are 'cultural insiders' and those who are 'cultural outsiders' seems difficult to ignore. However, Fischer-Hornung and Mueller do suggest that most outsiders are "ethnically correct" in their writings and that exceptions to this rule—i.e. novels that "still betray instances of inadvertent racism"—are quite rare (13). On the other hand, Reddy is quick to claim that nearly all insider writers shift away from the predominantly white, heterosexual and male consciousness that is so typical of hardboiled fiction, allowing for a counterdiscursive rewriting of the genre in question (9, 41). In tune with Reddy, Suchitra Mathur dubs the insiders who do not overtly rewrite and subvert the genre and whose protagonists barely differ from "the metropolitan detective" as "postcolonial *mimic* [detectives]" (Mathur 108; emphasis in the original). On both ends of this discursive spectrum, insiders and outsiders are made out to be what Graham Huggan ironically dubs "heroic agents of liberation" (7).

In the present article, I take issue with terms such as "ethno-detective novels" (Erdmann 11); "multiethnic crime fiction" (Fischer-Hornung and Mueller); "international crime fiction" (Krajenbrink and Quinn); "'minority', 'multicultural', 'cross-cultural' and 'postcolonial'" and "'ethnic' detective fiction (Matzke and Muehleisen 6–7) and their implication that all writing—be it by cultural insiders or outsiders—that appears to deviate from the straight, white, male sleuth somehow subverts the hardboiled detective genre. By comparing the action-space, plot-space, and worldview chronotopes (i.e. time-space frames) of *The Beggar's Opera*, i.e. the first novel of the Inspector Ramirez series by Canadian author Peggy Blair, with *Pasado perfecto*, i.e. the first novel of the Lieutenant Conde series by Cuban author Leonardo Padura, I question whether *The Beggar's Opera* and *Pasado perfecto* can be considered as belonging to the same subgenre of detective fiction.[1]

Bakhtinian Poetics versus Identity Politics

1 *Pasado perfecto* was translated in English as *Havana Blue*. I provide my own English translations of cited excerpts of *Pasado perfecto*, unless the English text of *Havana Blue* is more appropriate for the analysis at hand.

In the introductory passage of *Murder on the Reservation* (2004), Browne describes Native American ethnic detective fiction as follows:

> In the rapidly developing field of literature *by and about* Native Americans, ethnic crime fiction is a vigorous genre. In many ways this genre develops in the tradition of crime fiction in general, but it necessarily incorporates new materials and people in their own settings and cultures. Thus it is a new and different total environment for the age-old treatment of crime and punishment. (Browne 3; my emphasis)

Browne's assumption is that detective novels that deal with or emanate from a minority—in the sense of an ex-centric community within a Western country as well as an ex-centric world literature—almost automatically rewrite the genre in order to counteract the ideological viewpoint of the straight, white male that is so typical of hardboiled detective fiction (cf. Pepper; Reddy). As a matter of fact, according to Heta Pyrhönen there is a "phase of criticism" that "lends credence to these notions of ideology as an arena of contestation" (48). It views any detective novel that does not focus on straight, white, male detectives—such as "the feminist detective novel" or the "multicultural detective novel"—as containing an oppositional discourse that tackles "bitter racial, ethnic, class, and gender conflicts" head on (ibid.).

However, there are those who go against this propensity of seeing all (detective novels about) minorities as "heroic agents of liberation" (Huggan 7). For example, Reddy's intial premise in *Traces, Codes, and Clues: Reading Race in Crime Fiction* is that "racially progressive crime fiction that employs a reverse discourse and that deliberately stands against the white hegemony" must abound in the field of murder fiction (191). However, of the dozens of novels discussed in her book that present themselves to be "racially progressive," only a few remain standing after Reddy subjects their supposedly oppositional discourse to thorough analysis. Her conclusion is, therefore, a far cry from her original hypothesis:

> When I began writing this book, I hoped I would find something different from what I did in the end find. I imagined that the recent impact of writers of color on the genre was greater than I now see it actually has been, and I envisioned a book with a considerably more optimistic conclusion than this one. My greatest hope for detective fiction is that my work will be rapidly outdated by antiracist developments in the genre. (191-2)

D'haen, on the other hand, is less pessimistic about this apparent lack of a genuine reverse discourse in ethnic detective fiction. He contends that "contemporary multicultural high literature shows signs of essentialism because it tends to interpret all multicultural writing as countering the dominant discourse ("Samurai Sleuths and Detective Daughters: The American Way" 51). The question is, then, whether detective novels that do not deliberately stand against straight, white, male discourse should necessarily be rejected as lacking political engagement. In his analysis of several novels focusing on Chinese American and Japanese American sleuths, he argues that even though these protagonists do perpetuate certain stereotypes Western society imposes on them, they do not consistently go along with them. Their stance is one of double consciousness; these hybrid sleuths are aware of how the dominant cultural group perceives them and they play along with those clichés to prove that, despite their differences, they are fiercely and fearlessly independent Americans (50). The question D'haen asks is, then, whether minorities should be chastised for wanting to move away from the margins and reach for the coveted center? D'haen suggests that there is nothing wrong with wishing to "become American" because conforming to the norms and expectations of mainstream society will allow these minorities to climb the social ladder, which will eventually lead to a diversification of the traditional ruling classes by (51).

The other issue Browne inadvertently alludes to in his introduction is that literatures "by and about" so-called ethnic minorities belong to the same generic category (3). One might ascribe this to an innocent and benevolent desire to put an end to the canonizing practice of demarcating so-called minor literatures from more mainstream literatures (cf. Deleuze et al.). However, the use of terms such as (multi)ethnic, cross-cultural, postcolonial, multicultural or even international to refer to these emerging literatures betrays how comfortable contemporary critique is with the canon, since such labeling implies an immediate Othering of all those who do not fit the mainstream brief. This kind of terminology inevitably triggers an 'us versus them' discourse in literary analyses where these "new" Others and their fascinating "settings and cultures" are subjected to the neocolonizing gaze of the seemingly uninteresting and culture-less Western critic (Reddy 3). Such a practice assumes whiteness as a default position that does not need any kind of definition or labeling to refer to itself. Consequently, whiteness turns into "a screen through which the rest of the world is perceived" (Reddy 15).

Building on Reddy's and D'haen's abovementioned arguments, I contend that the chronotopes found in *The Beggar's Opera* by Canadian author Peggy Blair betray an implicit exoticization of Cuba. Additionally, I contest the assumption

that detective novels by non-mainstream writers necessarily subvert the detective fiction genre by demonstrating that in Leonardo Padura's *Pasado perfecto* the chronotopes go along with the conventions of the American hardboiled novel. The tendency so far has been to address questions of this nature by asking whether there is any merit to writing from an Other's point of view based on one's own personal experience, as opposed to artificially reproducing a voice as authentically as possible. This voice versus experience debate might have become unpopular because of "the demise of identity politics in academic discourse and theory in 1980s and 1990s," but it does not make it any less valid (Reddy 156). Why else is Padura never asked in interviews about the accuracy of his depiction of Cuba—even though such a question would not be misplaced, considering how controversial of a country it is—when Blair cannot go without justifying the authenticity of her work (e.g. Blair, *Peggy Blair on The Beggar's Opera*; Wiersema; Blair, *Q&A with Peggy Blair, Author of The Beggar's Opera and The Poisoned Pawn*)? This being said, the present article looks beyond the categories of voice and experience by performing a close reading of the agency behind the voice, namely the human imagination (Keunen 8).

In *Time and Imagination: Chronotopes in Western Narrative Culture*, Bart Keunen relies on Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope (i.e. a time-space frame) to chart certain invariants in narrative imagination. In fiction, the always biased images the writer has been mentally storing from the earliest moments of consciousness are assimilated in a series of narrative processes that result in the creation of fictional worlds-in-motion, a.k.a. chronotopes (5). What is of importance to my argument is that all of these images are invariably colored by value judgments:

> It seems that we perceive the value of an object together with its being, as one of its qualities; in the same way, for example, we sense the value of the sun together with its warmth and light. And thus all phenomena of being which surround us are fused together with our evaluations of them. (Voloshinov in Keunen 5)

By analyzing the worlds-in-motion (or chronotopes) created by Peggy Blair and Leonardo Padura in their respective narratives, I explore whether there are differences in value judgment between both novels and, if so, whether these differences allow for Blair and Padura to be placed in the same, supposedly counterdiscursive genre of ethnic detective fiction. Keunen's postclassical, chronotopic approach allows the text to speak for itself, instead of focusing on the

differences between the novels based on the background of their authors.

Classical narratology studies generally describe the textual invariants of a narrative, such as the chronology of a text or the narrator's perspective. On the other hand, postclassical narratology deals with the imaginal quality of narrative events and the possible worlds that can be communicated through these mental images (Herman and Vervaeck in Keunen 6). This development in narratology was largely inspired by Bakhtin's idea that all literary images are chronotopic, receiving order from time (*chronos*) and space (*topos*) simultaneously. Language, as a treasure-house of images, is therefore fundamentally chronotopic (Bakhtin in Keunen 7). Consequently, every narrative relies on chronotopes—in the sense of "imaginal [constructs] or [entities] representing a temporal process that occurs in a spatial situation"—as building blocks for the construction of its story (13).

Keunen contends that the chronotope stimulates the reader on three different levels, with the help of three different types of chronotopes. On the lowest level, there is the **action-space** chronotope where a specific, geographically defined event is visualized as occurring within a certain timeframe. On the second level, we find the **plot-space** chronotope. The conjunction of a particular time and space summons the image of an abstract, fictional world where an identifiable action develops over a certain amount of time. Finally, on the third and highest level, there is the **worldview chronotope**. On this level, "an abstract philosophical representation about the moral implications of the depicted events" is conveyed (9).[1]

Ramirez the Canadian

Perceiving a certain object or a photographic reproduction of that object is quite different from imagining the object. To conjure up its image in the mind's eye means to create a schematic form of it, far less defined than the actual, concrete object. Therefore, when a writer tries to convey a certain chronotopic image to the reader, the preferred approach will be one of *pars pro toto*: "a few meaningful segments of an object [in the broadest sense of the term] are sufficient to make us recognize and designate an image" (Keunen 17). The more "overlearned propositional information" the author shares with the reader about a certain image, the less time is spent on describing the object in question (Keunen 19). Common images are rarely described extensively because the reader's propositional information should

1 Bakhtin's, and Keunen's, differentiation between action-space and plot-space is somewhat reminiscent of the Russian Formalist's – and, later on, Tsvetan Todorov's – distinction between story and plot, or *fabula* and *sujet*. However, Bakhtin does not make the story subservient to the plot, since it is all the elements of the story considered together – i.e. the different action-spaces – that create the abstract time-space conjunction of which the plot-space consists.

be enough to conjure up a mental image based on the *pars pro toto*-process Keunen described earlier. However, in the case of objects that the author expects will be new and unusual for the reader, the descriptions will be more detailed.

Even though "schematization and reductionism" are essential parts of the mental processing on the level of the action-space chronotope, not all spatial objects can be represented in a text: that is where "the power of suggestion" comes into the picture (18). Bakhtin's claim that every mental image is built on the basis of the combination between a certain time *and* space means that every action-space chronotope where "the character is situated in this or that spatial environment […], moves around […], and reaches for objects" is interpreted as one, fluent matrix. Every element of that chronotope—the character, the space (s)he moves in, the object (s)he reaches for etc.—is related to every other element, so that they all help each other along in conjuring up a full and fully-functioning mental picture of that particular action-space chronotope. Telling stories is in other words a process of "modeling, and enabling others to model, an emergent constellation of spatially related entities" (Herman in Keunen 19). However, the reader will only consciously pay attention to the objects (in the broadest sense of the term) that are involved in a certain action—hence "action-space" chronotope. Just like the filmmaker expects the spectator to focus solely on a moving object/character and not on the immobile background, so too does the author expect the reader to pay attention to "moving characters" alone (24). It is crucial the author communicates a clear mental image of these moving characters to the reader. Detailed descriptions of the characters themselves do not suffice. Using "the power of suggestion," the author injects the above-mentioned "constellation of spatially related entities" that the active characters find themselves in—i.e. the objects surrounding them, their setting, their less active fellow characters—with an implied meaning that, eventually, reverberates back on the main, "moving" characters and gives them a crisper definition.

The omniscient narrator of *The Beggar's Opera* often relies on the power of suggestion. From the very beginning of the story, in the prologue, the narrator gives a hint of the exoticizing modus operandi of the rest of the novel. The reader is introduced to what would have been a classic, tragic scene; that of a little boy watching his beloved grandmother take her last breath. However, the narrator suggests this is not an ordinary boy nor an ordinary grandmother. And the scene does not take place in an ordinary hospital, nor in an ordinary country. The hospital room is described as smelling of "tobacco and anise, mixed with sweat"—not

exactly the regular smells one expects to encounter in a hospital (*BO* 1).[1] And the grandmother is presented as being quite a character. Far from the archetypal pie-baking grandmother, this woman is a prophet, who promises to pass on her "gift" to her grandson (ibid.). Before allowing the grandmother to explain what this "gift" is, the narrator adds a telltale detail to the description of the deathbed scene. It says: "She [the grandmother] released her grip and patted his [Ricky Ramirez's] cheek with her soft **brown** hand" (*BO* 1; my emphasis). That the narrator explicitly mentions the brown color of the grandmother's hand—as opposed to the common, pale hands the narrator seems to use as an implicit point of references—predicts that in this novel whiteness and, by extent, Western culture will be considered to be the norm. They will serve as "a screen through which the rest of the world [will be] perceived" (Reddy 15). As the brown hand of the grandmother is suggestive of her non-Western origins, the foreign words in her enigmatic explanation of what her gift to her grandson entails and the spiritual, 'ethnic' nature of that gift do not seem out of place: "Messengers from the other side. Eshu, the *orisha*, will send them to help you so you can help them. You will be a policeman, Ricky. I see it in your future. Threat them with respect, as they will you. But never forget this: Eshu is a trickster" (*BO* 1-2).

Soon, the reader learns more about the garbled prophecy of this *étrange* and *étrangère* grandmother. When Ramirez starts seeing the ghosts of the murder victims assigned to his team, he asks his friend and coworker, the brilliant coroner Hector Apira, whether ghosts are always hallucinations or if there is a small chance they might be real:

> "What about the *santeros*?" asked Ramirez. He pulled a stool over and sat down to steady his legs. "They claim to communicate with the dead. My grandmother was Vodun. On my father's side."
>
> Slave traders brought Ramirez's Yoruba ancestors from West Africa in the 1880s to harvest Cuban tobacco and sugar. The Yoruba followed their own religion, Vodun, as well as the Catholicism forced upon them by their owners.
>
> Or at least they pretended to. They cloaked their religion with Catholic rites, but never gave up their own practices. The resulting mix of Catholicism and Vodun—Santería, or Lukumi—included a belief in multiple gods, and regular and animated interaction with the spirit world.[6]
>
> Apiro nodded doubtfully. "Superstition, I think. […]." (*BO* 13)

1 For the sake of clarity, excerpts from *The Beggar's Opera* will be referred to as *BO*. The same goes for *Pasado perfecto* and *Havana Blue*, which will be referred to as *Pp* and *HB*.

That the narrator draws out two paragraphs to explain to the reader what Santería is suggests that neither the narrator nor the reader are expected to have much "propositional knowledge" about this particular object. This adds to the strange Otherness of, both, the characters and the settings the narrator is describing, since these kinds of explicit descriptions are only necessary for "new and unusual [things] for which the reader must generate an image [made up from scratch] in order to understand the narrative" (Nell in Keunen 19).

As a matter of fact, these ethnographic details seem to dominate the novel and almost push the actual investigation to the background. In traditional hardboiled detective novels, it is the dialogue between the investigator and his suspects that the narrator most focuses on. In *The Beggar's Opera*, however, the narrator slips these country-specific details into the dialogues, such as here:

> Ellis let out a deep breath. "Isn't Raúl Castro supposed to be more moderate?"
>
> The diplomat smiled slightly. "A lot of Batista's supporters were executed summarily after the revolution. Is Raúl more moderate? Rumour has it he pulled the trigger himself. Sure, as acting president, he may loosen up some things that annoy people currently. Like letting them have more access to the internet. He may even free a few political prisoners. But don't kid yourself, Fidel Castro's still in charge."
>
> "I can't believe they would execute a foreigner. […]." (*BO* 139)

The narration in between dialogues abounds with ethnographic information as well. These pieces of propositional knowledge range from Cuba's history ("Until the late 1800s, slaves were considered property, and birth certificates were never issued for them.") to Cuba's socialist policies ("The Cuban government provided free university education to all of its citizens.") and Cuba's, supposedly, odd laws ("It was not uncommon for members of citizen watch groups to call about crimes without identifying themselves. The use of a cellphone was unusual, however."), to name a few (*BO* 15, 103, 56).

What is also remarkable is that at least once in almost every chapter the narrator digresses from the main story to mention things that are not available in Cuba and situations that are not as they should be, suggesting there is a point of reference out there that does correspond to a perceived baseline. For example, Ramirez notices how Hector Apiro must make due with an improvised metal gurney

for his autopsies. "A *proper* table would have had runoff areas for blood and other fluids," but Apiro has no choice but to use metal buckets (*BO* 11; my emphasis). Similarly, Ramirez describes the decrepit buildings of Old Havana as looking like "slums" (*BO* 112). In these concrete action-space chronotopes where the police inspector watches Hector performing an autopsy, for example, or where he strolls the streets of Old Havana, Ramirez's observations point toward a certain double consciousness. It is odd, however, that Ramirez should know what a "proper" table looks like when he has never known anything else. And why would he describe the buildings of Old Havana as "slums" when the decaying state of these colonial houses is part of his day-to-day reality—a normal, negligible feature of his backdrop? It is almost as if he has the Havana of "before the embargo" in mind (*BO* 180). However, Ramirez is not likely to remember that era considering he was, most probably, born after the Revolution. His double consciousness makes more sense, however, when Blair's other two focalizers are added to the equation. Apart from Ramirez, there is also Mike Ellis, a Canadian police officer who is wrongly accused of murder while vacationing in Cuba, and fellow Canadian Celia Jones who is flown out to help her compatriot because she is the only lawyer of the Ottawa Police Department to speak fluent Spanish. When Ramirez is featured in *The Beggar's Opera*, he is usually interacting with Mike Ellis or Celia Jones. In English too, a language Ramirez was taught by his American mother. In this context, it could be argued that Ramirez' point of view runs parallel to that of Celia Jones or Mike Ellis.

Ramirez's awkward double consciousness relates to the overarching plot-space chronotope of the novel. The plot-space of a certain narrative is the world construct that emanates from the conjunction of all the action-space chronotopes of the novel. Incidentally, in *The Beggar's Opera*, these action-spaces rarely rely on propositional information because the characters, objects and settings are depicted as "new and unusual" (Nell in Keunen 19). In fact, Mike Ellis refers to Cuba at some point as "somewhere exotic" (*BO* 98). The narrator further enhances that sense of exotic novelty—as opposed to Western normalcy—by using focalizers with either a Western outlook, such as Celia Jones or Mike Ellis, or with a double consciousness, such as Inspector Ramirez. As Keunen explains, just like objects within a certain action-space (and action-spaces themselves), the literary plot-space is also open to reductionism and schematization (20). It would be very tedious for the reader if the narrator were to describe every detail of a certain plot-space. In order to avoid this, the narrator relies on implied contrasts, contained in the different action-spaces, to summon up the intended "storyworld" (Ryan in Keunen 20). In a romance, the basis of all detective fiction, a peaceful situation is disturbed by a conflict. The conflict is

fought against, resolved and, eventually, followed by a state of perfect bliss again. The default chronotope in that situation is "the wondrous space" (Bakhtin in Keunen 20). This type of description contains, on its own, hardly any visual referents. That is because the narrator trusts the reader will add "evaluations or connotations" to that bare description by marking out "a strange, perilous world against other images that suggest a more familiar, peaceful world" (ibid.). Consequently, in most narratives, and especially in narratives related to the adventure tale, such as the detective story, the plot-space consists of two contrasting spaces: "a space for the principal characters to feel at home in and a space in which to live their adventures (the alien world)" (21).

In *The Beggar's Opera*, the default plot-space chronotope associated with a homely, peaceful, wondrous space seems to be Canada, in particular, and the Western world, in general—as opposed to "strange" and "perilous" Cuba. Even though Cuba is the country where the entire action is taking place, both the narrator and the characters think it necessary to keep repeating over and over again that the story is taking place in Cuba, which stresses how unusual and eccentric/ex-centric of a setting that is (*BO* 68, 86, 170, 203). Although Inspector Ellis is a Cuban living in Cuba, the narrator keeps emphasizing his being Cuban:

> Inspector Ramirez planned to sleep in late on Christmas Day […]. Maybe listen to his Christmas gift […], a CD of the terrific **Cuban** soprano Lucy Provedo.
>
> […] Like most **Cubans**, Ramirez and his family had stayed up late on Christmas Eve. […]. Then they all walked to the Revolution Square along with hundreds of thousands of **other Cubans** […]. (*BO* 33; my emphasis)

What the narrator does in this plot-space is implicitly contrasting Cuba with Canada. In *The Beggar's Opera*, the many suggestive, exoticizing action-space chronotopes give rise to a plot-space chronotope where Canada is seen as the opposite of Cuba. That plot-space chronotope translates, "[a]t the tertiary stage of metaphorical abstraction," as a cultural model that consists, again, of "oppositional pairs of near/remote and inside/outside" that serve as "interpretational axes for judgments on social cohesion and social upheaval" (Keunen 21). In the end, *The Beggar's Opera* only enhances the "hegemony-maintaining" function that is associated with the

traditional hardboiled detective novel (Reddy 165).[1]

Conde the American

If the goal of Blair's narrator was to stress Cuba's oddities, the narrator of *Pasado perfecto* wishes to underline its almost boring commonness. The opening scene in *Pasado perfecto* does not suggest in any way that the protagonist of the detective story, Lieutenant Mario Conde, is any different from the regular hardboiled straight, white male. Additionally, the novel's Cuban setting is not highlighted, except perhaps in the telephone conversation between Mario Conde and his superior, major Rangel: "You know that chief executives at vice-ministerial rank don't go missing like that **in Cuba**" (*Pp* 15; my emphasis).

Padura's story is set in 1989-1990, the onset of the *período especial*, the severest economic crisis Cuba has ever known. However, Padura's narrator and his focalizer rarely comment on those hard times. Unlike Ramirez, who seems to perceive Cuba through the eyes of somebody who has either been abroad or has known Cuba before the Revolution, Conde has nothing with which to compare Cuba. Consequently, when he walks down "the main street in his neighborhood" and notices the "overflowing rubbish containers" and the "wrappings from late-night last-minute pizzas blowing in the wind," he ascribes that unkemptness to the decay of time (*HB* 6). When he reflects on the past, such as when he notices that the street where "he'd learned to play baseball" has turned into a "repository for junk generated by the repair shop on the corner" (*HB* 6), he yearns not for a more orderly, cleaner Cuba—a Cuba he has never known—but for his youth, asking: "Where do you learn to play baseball now?" (*HB* 6). Padura's narrator makes heavy use of propositional information that is readily understood by the reader. For example, in *The Beggar's Opera*, the narrator points out that Cuban buses transport Cubans, are oddly shaped, and extremely crowded:

> [The cars] stopped for a red light beside a *camello*, one of the oddly shaped buses made from truck parts and salvaged buses for which Havana was famous. For a second, the large bus, crowded with hundreds of weary Cubans, blocked out the sun. (*BO* 65; emphasis in the original)

1 In *Time and Imagination*, Keunen chooses not to elaborate on the political implications of the Bakhtinian worldview chronotope. However, his fellow Flemish narratologist Michel De Dobbeleer does expand on that idea in "From Older Testimony to World Literature." He demonstrates how three different testimonies on the fall of Constantinople based on different ideological visions can yield three different plot-spaces and, therefore, three different worldviews.

Padura's narrator, on the other hand, assumes the reader has enough propositional information about Cuba to know that the buses are usually overcrowded. When Padura's focalizer states that "[Conde] ran to catch an *unimaginable* almost empty bus," the use of "unimaginable" is enough to communicate to the reader that to find an empty bus is unusual and that, therefore, overcrowded buses are the norm (*HB* 8; my emphasis).

Thanks to the narrator's assumption that the reader will readily understand this type of propositional information, the distance between Padura's characters and the reader is much smaller than the distance Blair's narrator creates. This can be mainly attributed to the *ethnotexte* of *The Beggar's Opera*: its many extensive ethnographic descriptions. According to Lawrence Fontaine-Xavier, narrators who pay great attention to the *ethnotexte* tend to perceive their readers as "ignorant of the practices represented in the narrative" (125; my translation). The readers' actual knowledge on the matter is not really considered: they are simply "not supposed to be familiar with the practices at hand" (ibid.). Fontaine-Xavier therefore concludes that by assuming the role of "*pédagogue*" the narrator intends the *ethnotexte* to have an alienating effect on the readers (126). One might argue, of course, that Blair's largely Canadian reading public is less likely than Padura's initially Hispanic readership[1] to be aware of Cuban quirks and particularities. However, even in the English translation of *Pasado perfecto* there are no ethnographic descriptions of Cuba, no explanatory footnotes or, even, additions of italicized Spanish and/or typically Cuban words. Because of this approach, Padura's detective novel manages to steer away from turning into what Browne calls "an economical form of physical and cultural tourism, a trip to exotic societies and a meeting with strange people and ways of life, with exposure to but safety from danger" (8). However, although *Pasado perfecto* cannot be accused of economical tourism, the contrasting of world constructs on the level of the plot-space is still present. If, in Blair's novel, the default plot-space chronotope is Canada, as opposed to Cuba, in Padura's novel it is Cuba's supposedly proletarian society that is opposed to the privileged happy few. Conde's investigation might seem to center on the disappearance of the wealthy and high-placed Rafael Morín, but the plot's real focus is Morín's wife, the spoiled ambassador's daughter Tamara Valdemira. Contrary to Morín, who worked his way up, she was born with a silver spoon in her mouth. And that is not the socialist way.

Pasado perfecto is as much a detective story as it is a romance since, during the course of the story, the sleuth falls in love all over again with the grieving wife

1 *Pasado perfecto* was first published in Mexico in 1991. It was published in Cuba in 1995. The reasons for this delay are unclear.

of his assigned victim. Much time is spent on flashbacks, where Conde relives his teenage infatuation with Tamara. As the title *Pasado perfecto* ironically suggests, his encounter with the grown-up Tamara forces him to reconsider his youth and to conclude that it was not so perfect after all—much like his present. When Mario Conde pays Tamara a visit to enquire about the details of her husband's disappearance, he cannot fail but notice how comfortably she lives, compared to the average struggling Cuban of the early nineties. Her grand, colonial house is "far beyond the reach of the average policeman" (*Pp* 40). And so is her lifestyle. When Conde discovers the many expensive gifts Morín brings back from his travels to his wife, his mistress and his mother—who, for example, received a bottle of Chanel N°5 on New Year's Eve (*Pp* 107)—he seems to be more appalled by their capitalistic attitudes than by the fact that these presents were, most probably, bought with embezzled money. When Tamara cannot stand Conde's socio-communist zeal or the preaching undertone of their conversation anymore, she bursts out: "Why are you so bitter? Why do you refer to yourself with so much self-pity, as if everybody else were a bastard, as if you were the poorest and purest of us all?" (*Pp* 91). This class struggle is the foundation of *Pasado perfecto*'s plot-space chronotope and, therefore, it influences the morality of Padura's worldview chronotope.

As Sean McCann explains in *Gumshoe America*, the hardboiled genre sprung up in 1930s America as a result of Roosevelt's New Deal policy. Setting themselves off against their former aggressively capitalistic model, Americans wanted to create "a common welfare" by putting an end to "heedless self-interest" and by bringing "private autocratic powers" into "subordination to the public's government"—goals that are somewhat reminiscent of Cuba's socio-communist tenets (McCann 5–6). The 1930s sleuthing hero fighting against societal corruption and the "limits of narrow institutions" was meant to inspire the Americans and call upon their civic sense—their "latent, collective spirit"—to solve society's crimes and abuses (6). Incidentally, this was also the objective of the revolutionary, rashly political Cuban *novelas policíacas* that started appearing from the 1970s onwards and to which Padura's work still belongs, to some extent (Acosta; Oakley). However, Padura himself admits to choosing to avoid any overt political discourse in his novels by emulating Dashiell Hammett—one of the founding fathers of hardboiled fiction (Oakley 31-35). Following the lead of writers like Hammett who promoted New Deal liberalism through their "re-familiarizing" narratives, Padura subtly express his support of the Cuban regime, while still allowing the detective story to take center stage. Padura's Lieutenant Conde thus demystifies and reiterates the power of Cuba's leaders and reaffirms the validity of the existing social order (cf. Pepper 2010).

Conclusion

The abovementioned analysis is case-specific and does not pretend to be able to formulate any concrete statements about the place of ethnic detective fiction in the field of world literature. However, the article does underscore the divergent discourses that can hide under a seemingly unified subgenre, dreamed up in the name of world literature. Taking the chronotopic line-up of Blair's and Padura's Cuban crimes and culprits into consideration, the question that remains to be answered is whether both novels can be seen as belonging to the vague category of ethnic detective fiction. As the analysis conducted in this article has shown, they cannot. On a purely generic level, both novels do follow the same hegemony-maintaining pattern that characterizes the traditional hardboiled novel. However, on a poetic level the differences are insurmountable. The chronotopic comparison of both novels demonstrates that Blair's action-space, plot-space and worldview chronotopes are the complete opposites of Padura's. Blair's goal is to condemn Cuba's dictatorship by implicitly opposing it to Canada's political system (*BO* 99). On the other hand, Padura's objective is to recriminate the *compañeros* who, like Morín, think they have the right "to gamble with what's mine and yours and the old man's who's selling newspapers and the woman's who's about to cross the road and who'll probably die of old age without knowing what it is to own a car, a nice house, to stroll around Barcelona or wear perfume worth a hundred dollars, and is probably off right now to queue for three hours to get a bag of potatoes" (*HB* 203-4). Neither Padura nor Blair subvert the basic tenets of the hardboiled detective genre, but their focalizers do express two opposite worldviews. *Pasado perfecto* conforms almost entirely to the premise of the original hardboiled novel, whereas *The Beggar's Opera* seems to move away from the detective novel into ethnographic travel fiction. In the end, it would seem the only thing holding both novels together is their shared label of multiethnic, international, minority, multicultural, cross-cultural, ethnic detective fiction.

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