



Hipertexto 20  
Verano 2014  
pp. 32-43

**The Detective Fiction in Spain:  
(Re)searching the Threshold of Early  
Mystery Narrative and Its Cultural Context in  
Quervedo's *El Buscón***

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"Happy is he who not only knows the causes of things,  
but who has not lost touch with their beginnings."  
(Chesterton 186)

"Oh, I [Stephanos] said. 'That's all quite simple.'  
'Yes. Isn't it wonderful when I [Aristotle] give you my reasons?  
Observation and logic.'  
(Doody 198)

Even though mystery and detective novels are very popular in Spain today, it is important to notice that we may discover some spring of the Spanish mystery narrative and the *novela policiaca* (police novel) in earlier works dated during the Spanish Golden Age.<sup>1</sup> In this period abounds the presence of detection practices, ethical principles, and moral lessons in the literature and especially in the narrative. Moreover, the features, attributes, and training of a detective has been present as part of a corollary of characters since medieval times, including a strong correlation between text and religion. The objective of this study is *not* to imply that some of these previous texts are examples of *detective novels*. On the contrary, the ultimate aspiration is to identify early narrative pieces and detection-starting points that contributed in the formation of what readers consider today the genre of the Spanish detection fiction. In "Shamus-a-um: Having the Quality of a Classical Detective," the authors remind us that "if mystery novelists who look to the past want to be as accurate in text as in texture, they need to understand just how people of an earlier time might react to a given situation" (Boyd and Higbie 19). To this end, revisiting the Spanish Golden Age era would facilitate this approach in mapping a panoramic historiography of the Spanish mystery novel, its undergo, and its interrelation to orthodox and heterodox narrative construction. For that reason this study will focus in what distinguishes a successful

<sup>1</sup> This period encompasses two centuries: the sixteenth century called the Spanish Renaissance, and the seventeenth century known as the Spanish Baroque.

and efficient investigator in recent times as compared to the fiction and detection characteristics displayed in *La vida del Buscón llamado Don Pablos* (*The life of 'El Buscón' known as Don Pablos*). The author of this novel is the Spanish writer Francisco de Quevedo (1580-1645) who studied at the Imperial School, a Jesuit Catholic institute located in Madrid, and attended the University of Alcalá de Henares. Quevedo became an autodidactic and independent scholar studying subjects such as theology and classical tongues among other disciplines. Quevedo's poetry and narrative employs the *conceptismo*, which is the style known by its use of multiple concepts and discourses.

We must begin with the fact that the term *detective* constitutes a very recent definition. Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Agatha Christie Mallowan have introduced the terminology related to this profession as part of narrative and literature within the past two centuries (Hughes 128). The British detective story has captured the attention of readers and it displays a long and solid tradition that began in the nineteenth century. At that time, detectives were official police members educated and formed to serve in their best capacity in the art of investigation and detection. It required training, discipline, academic knowledge, physical fitness, and language skills as Rzepka notices: "[w]ithin a decade, Scotland Yard's detectives had gained the public's confidence. They were helped by Charles Dickens, who in a series of enthusiastic articles appearing in his magazine *Household Words* described their activities in the seedier neighborhoods of London," and he adds that "Dickens also accompanied his featured sleuths, officers Whicher and Field, on some of their nightly investigations, and later used Inspector Field as his model for Inspector Bucket in *Bleak House*. Official police detectives became the new heroes of popular crime fiction" (90).

This vision of the detective as a reputable profession changed drastically during the following decade where science became the most profitable venue and its principles the most compelling evidence. On the other hand, the humanities and the arts developed into a different platform in which the theological aspects of their work and social interactions were overlooked by the emerging principles of scientific scrutiny: "by the 1880s, the genre of detection was similarly ready for the introduction of a professional 'scientific' detective not afraid to defy convention" (Rzepka 117). Consequently, the authors of detection narrative had to modify the structure and the writing of their novels to better suit modern audiences integrating science and art, methodology and curiosity, text and context.

Nevertheless, the structure and form of the detective story has been present since the earliest centuries. In *The Detective Story in Britain*, Symons explains that "a detective story then is not a thriller. A detective story asks questions about Who, Why, and When; a thriller, dealing also in violent matters, simply tells us How" (8). Then the author adds that "this is no denigration of John Buchan, Eric Ambler, and many other admirable writers, but simply an acknowledgement of the fact that there is a difference in kind between the two forms" (Symons 8).

It is remarkable to note that the first chapter of *El Buscón* precisely relates to telling who the protagonist is and where he comes from (Quevedo 95-104). In this

segment the protagonist narrates *who* he is, *why* he became *what* he is, *how* he is, and *when* his journey from his hometown Segovia to the urban region of Castile took place in his story. Symons makes clear that “the pleasure the intelligent reader gets from reading detective stories is thus partly the fascination of engaging in a battle of wits with the author, something more nearly akin to a game of chess or a crossword puzzle than to the emotional rewards commonly looked for in reading fiction” (8-9). It is exactly what takes place in *El Buscón*. The modern reader must investigate and clarify within the text the motives (or multiple *leitmotivs* / *leitmotifs*) involved, and the *metafiction*, in other words the fiction within the fiction,<sup>2</sup> and the cost of the decision making process that have made a significant impact in the lives of the characters of *El Buscón*.

The genre of the detective novel in Spain evolved later than in England, France, and the United States. Scholars place the first detective narrative written in Spain as a mystery novel in the nineteenth century, *El clavo* (*The Nail*). Pedro de Alarcón (1833-1891) wrote it in 1853 just twelve years after the 1841 publication of Poe’s *Murders in the Rue Morgue*. Patricia Hart indicates in *The Spanish Sleuth: The Detective in Spanish Fiction* that “Alarcón laid the cornerstone for this small but highly interesting current in Spanish fiction with a tale of intrigue and detection” (17). The conclusion of *El clavo* contains a moral lesson to the reader. This first intent in writing a mystery novel imitates the style of parables in which the reader receives a concrete didactic lesson. To be sure, we observe a closed ending where the poetic justice prevails and overcomes the vice and the intrigue of the plot.

The interest in detective novels continued increasing in Spain and in some instances, the inclusion of Spanish characters in detection fiction was a usual practice: “after the 1887 appearance of Sherlock Holmes in *A Study in Scarlet*, interest in the genre mounted in many quarters, Spain included. Penny novels and serials involving detectives, cops, and robbers abounded, many were even set in Spain with Spanish characters” (Hart 18). At the end of the nineteenth century, Emilia Pardo Bazán (1851-1921) published the detective story *La gota de sangre* (*The Drop of Blood*) in Castilian even though she had written some of her literary production first in Galician, her mother tongue. In *La gota de sangre*, Pardo Bazán profiles the genre of detection as a style of life and affirms that the inspiration of her protagonist to search for the truth is the product of reading English detective novels that had been very popular and well received at that time in Europe. Pardo Bazán connected the theories of *naturalism* of Émile Zola to the law of *cause and effect* inserted them into *La gota de sangre*. The protagonist Selva is an *amateur detective* who decides to become the investigator in a case in which he becomes a suspect. Curiosity and mystery represent the most important elements of this story. At the end of the novel, the novice investigator has been successfully trained by reading English detective fiction to identify motives, intentions, intrigues, clues, and vindicate him of the false accusations and assumptions that made him a suspect at the beginning of the text.

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<sup>2</sup> In relation to metafiction, I refer the readers to *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*.

One of the most current well-known Spanish crime writers is the Catalan Manuel Vázquez Montalbán (1939-2003).<sup>3</sup> In his mystery novels, the reader encounters a profound social, cultural, and political commentary and his characters' profiles represent the day-to-day life of Vázquez Montalbán's hometown demographic population. However, the author chooses to write in Castilian rather than in Catalan, which fomented the genre of the detective novel, not only in Barcelona, but also in the general Spanish narrative. As a result, the detective novel flourished in Spain in the late 1970s and Vázquez Montalbán's works remain one of the most sold novels of mystery within the Hispanic world. Susana Bayó Belenguer in "The Carvalho Series of Manuel Vázquez Montalbán: A Passing in Review" offers a tribute to this author after his sudden death in 2003 and emphasizes the social insights of his works explaining that "a social critique which Vázquez Montalbán, perhaps more than any other writer, did so much to make an integral part of contemporary Spanish detective fiction" (19). This component of social and cultural analysis inserted in the detective writings of Vázquez Montalbán coincides with the social commentary brought into being in the detective novelistic production by Raymond Chandler (Davis 11). To this end, critics agree that both authors have created profound and meaningful characters, who make the plot more complicated and difficult to grasp and consequently more suitable for modern audiences.

Andreu Martín (b. 1949), from Barcelona as well and who writes also in Castilian, has captured the attention of the European readers through his psychological novels of mystery and crime. His well-developed characters represent the darkest states of mind and his plots focus on the contemporary life in Spain. Some of his works have become film productions. His most acclaimed series is called *The Flanagan*—produced in conjunction with Jaume Ribera (b. 1953) whose main character is a teenage detective in charge of investigating and solving mysteries in his own neighborhood (Davis 12). In this series we find a profound sense of family values, quest for justice, and community involvement based—in the most of the cases that this young detective solves—on the principles of unity, home ties, and community responsibility even though neither the series nor the author deliver the message as morally oriented.

Equally important are considered the works of Maria Antònia Oliver (b. 1946) from Majorca who has received international attention due to the creation of a strong, sharp, and self-motivated female detective named Lònia Guiu. Oliver is a follower of her contemporary pioneers, Sara Paretsky and Sue Grafton in the United States, whose protagonists are resilient, analytical, and self-driven female detectives.<sup>4</sup> The novels of detection of these female authors belong to *feminist literature*, nevertheless, a close reading and examination of their fiction production conducts the reader to identify in her

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<sup>3</sup> I refer the readers to *Transatlantic Mysteries: Crime, Culture, and Capital in the Noir Novels of Paco Ignacio Taibo II and Manuel Vázquez Montalbán* to further understanding of Vázquez Montalbán's corpus of crime narrative.

<sup>4</sup> Please refer to "From Feminism to Postfeminism in Women's Detective Fiction from Spain: The Case of Maria-Antònia Oliver and Alicia Giménez-Bartlett."

writings the same principles and values found in the detective novels published by male authors, such as perseverance, scrutiny, and a genuine methodological search for the ultimate truth.

In an effort to research the background of the cultural context and the history of the detective genre in Spain and search for any possible missing pieces, the methodology of this work will proceed in the following direction: the first section of this study will consist of an analysis of the term *detective* within the today's European and fictional context and its application to the case of the protagonist of *El Buscón*. The second part of this work will concentrate on how the findings of the protagonist lead the reader to evaluate the consistency or inconsistency in relation to the doctrines exhibited and practiced in the story. The ambivalence between the discourse and actions constructs the mystery within the text, and the protagonist's report is through the fictional narration delivers its message not only to the seventeen-century readers, but also to the readers of present historical periods.

It is necessary to indicate at this point that the text *El Buscón* belongs to the genre of the *picaresque* (*novela picaresca*) and it contains a social commentary. Without overlooking this approach, this current study attempts to propose a reading of the story through the detective fiction's lens. Beginning with the title of this novel *El Buscón* that indeed its translation into English is *The Searcher*, the reader will find a series of clues and narrative pieces that suggest or imply the presence of detection throughout the novel. Patricia Hart noticed referring to the spoof written in the twentieth century and called *¿Quién disparó?* (Who shot?) by Joaquín Belda that "[i]t draws on picaresque traditions in one scene while impaling a parodied victim with Quevedo-like skill in another" (21). These characteristics of the detection fiction stated in fashionable and current novels of Spanish modern narrative were already present in the narrative of the Spanish Golden Age. In order to understand the Spanish contemporary detective novel, it is advisable to return to the previous literary works to find the possible origins and document its cultural historiography accordingly.

What is the meaning of a *detective* in terms or concepts within the European detective story? In order to become a detective in Europe, the candidate must have some type of college preparation, without having served in a law enforcement capacity. These individuals must be educated in the art of interrogation, interviewing, and be able to function as members within the scope of the daily activities of a region—or several regions—in order to identify possible alterations or anomalies concerning the upholding of the law and its requirements. Rzepka identifies the elements that contribute in the categorization of the detective genre by definition:

There are several ways to go about defining detective fiction. One is taxonomic. This means placing it in relation to other types of popular literature, such as love stories, Westerns, science fiction, spy tales, and so on. John G. Cawelti (Adventure) has grouped these types into larger categories called 'archetypes', which are convenient for making an initial distinction between two major kinds of detective fiction, 'Mystery' and 'Adventure'. (9)

In what follows we will use as a case study the novel *La vida del Buscón llamado Don Pablos*. Don Pablos<sup>5</sup> who is the protagonist of *El Buscón* constitutes a rustic and amateur detective who is notable to succeed in his endeavors even though he functions as some type of metropolitan and witty searcher. Don Pablos experienced many adventures and voyages that reflected some degree of education at the university level<sup>6</sup> evolving into an investigator and observer of the culture of his society. At the end of the text, the readers are able to formulate their own theories based on the information collected, compiled, and articulated by the protagonist of the story.

The reader finds in *El Buscón* a complete group of Gothic elements such as secrets, crime, mystery, suspense, clues, and lack of evidence depending on each of the adventures or cases that Don Pablos encounters in his journeys. Rzepka regarding the use of evidence points out:

The popularity of Caleb Williams, especially with its Gothic moods and tonalities, ensured its impact on writers both in England and abroad. In America, Godwin's book inspired Charles Brockden Brown (1771-1810) to write *Arthur Merwyn* (1799-1800), in which the eponymous young protagonist discovers a secret murder and is persecuted by a powerful foe. As in the novels of Ann Radcliffe, who was another important influence, Brown's point is not to challenge the reader to solve the crime by providing materials adequate to do so, but to maintain suspense by providing enough inadequate clues to keep the reader reading to the end. (56)

Francisco de Quevedo has combined the experiences lived by the protagonist of *El Buscón* with the contextual change of culture and religious values that was taking place in the Iberian Peninsula in the seventeenth century Spain. Rzepka states the relation between narratives of detection and the Sciences of History explaining the fact that as early "as the end of the seventeenth century, natural philosophers were intrigued by apparent geological evidence of the early cataclysms related in the Bible" (34). This also explains that "the influence of the Bible as authoritative historical narrative continued to manifest itself in secular notions of history long after the biblical chronology of the world had been rejected by the historical sciences" (Rzepka 36). Since this perspective, the protagonist of the novel *El Buscón* resembles some of the attributes of the modern concept of detective fiction within Europe. Don Pablos therefore was able to formulate his own conclusions based on his inductive methods and reconstructive historical interpretation of daily living experiences.

In this direction, the following inquiry arises: what does a *detective* mean as an instrument to find the truth in the narrative? *El Buscón* is divided into three books. All of them are full of incidents of crime, prison, robbery, dishonesty, and slyness. In the first

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<sup>5</sup> *Don Pablos* means in Old Spanish *Sir Pablos*. *Don* (m.) and *doña* (f.) come from the Latin *dominus* and are titles of nobility. This honorific title is still fashionable in some Hispanic countries today as a sign of respect and esteem.

<sup>6</sup> The protagonist attended the University of Alcalá de Henares in the novel and he narrates his experiences as a student in this institution during the seventeenth century Spain.

book, Don Pablos narrates his childhood and the story of both of his parents, his father Clemente, and Aldonza, his mother. This introduction implies that his mother was a Moor instead of a Christian. This could be considered a major predicament in seventeenth-century Spain due to the Inquisition. Aldonza is called a *new Christian*, which means that she converted into Christianity (Quevedo 97). The text implies that this conversion might be related to pragmatic reasons instead of a genuine conversion—because of the persecution against Moors and Jews (Quevedo 95-104). The narrative in its original Spanish language refers very often to a detection terminology using adjectives, substantives, and verbs such as *the suspect*, *to suspect* (held her), and *trace her*, to name some of them in this specific illustration (Quevedo 95-104).

During this first book, Don Pablos met a young boy named Don Diego Coronel at school. Both of them decided to leave the institution and travel together throughout Spain. The last name, *Coronel* (colonel), implies or may symbolize membership in a commissioned force or police rank. Later in this section of the book, both young men studied at the university. The entire fifth chapter narrates in first person how the protagonist deals with the difficult stages of initiation among his classmates and roommates (Quevedo 141-48). The description is sordid and grotesque and reveals the customs of the epoch. Don Pablos arrives at the house of Don Toribio Rodríguez Vallejo Gómez de Ampuerto y Jordán who also claims to be a noble gentleman. Don Pablos must face at this summit in the story an underground reality built by a discourse of metafiction and inconsistencies. Quevedo introduces to the readers in this early stage both, the amateur detective and the culprit. Even though Don Pablos wanted to become an honorable gentleman and follow the Christian tradition, the text itself does not offer any acceptable model of Christianity, conversely, the discourse is based on metafiction and incoherencies; the plot is full of crime and violence. At the end of this first book both friends separate and Don Pablos decides to claim his inheritance because both of his parents are deceased at this point in the novel (Quevedo 162-66).

In the second book, the protagonist is on his way to Segovia to claim his inheritance. The main point to highlight in this second section is the constant mentioning of the search for the truth by all the characters and narrators. Don Pablos has learned to identify and address the difference between nonfiction and fiction within the text (Quevedo 167-217). At the end of third and last book, the protagonist decides to move to the Indias—name used to identify what is known today as Spanish Colonial America—in order to become a real *Christian gentleman* (Quevedo 306-08).<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, the character proclaims in the end that he has not found any Christian model in the new continent either. It is important to express that the main obstacles in finding a real Christian role model is not conditioned or associated to a geographic space, instead is closely related to the lack of praxis of the stipulated principles. The book concludes with the following statement in the voice of the protagonist: “[Don Pablos] thinks that he was worst [in the Spanish Colonial America known as the new

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<sup>7</sup> In Spanish, we read in the voice of Don Pablos: “sino cansado, como obstinado pecador, determiné, consultándolo primero con Grajal, de pasarme a Indias con ella, a ver si, mudando mundo y tierra, mejoraría mi suerte” (Quevedo 308).

continent] because nobody advances just moving from one place to another without readjusting his or her ways of living and his or her own customs” (Quevedo 308). Throughout the novel, the readers discern a development and progression in the characterization of Don Pablos. At the beginning of the text, the protagonist’s assumptions and deductions are based on the discourse of the other characters instead of their actions, which led—in the majority of the instances—to incorrect or incomplete conclusions. At the end of the third book, Don Pablos’ analysis possesses depth, it is more profound and is much closer to the complexity of his historical and cultural reality.

Quevedo creates some kind of anti-hero at the beginning of the novel and transforms his character into a hero at the end of the text. The protagonist decided to look for a change of mind, a change of heart, and a change of life, just like the biblical Paul did switching from persecuting Christians to be one of the most important pillars of Christianity. Paul also was transformed from a popular anti-hero to a biblical conqueror that is able to accept his own limitations. Ross Macdonald signifies the characteristics of an exemplary modern detective as follows:

The two best private detectives I personally know resemble him [Archer] in their internal qualities: their intelligent humaneness, an interest in other people transcending their interest in themselves, and a toughness of mind, which enables them to face human weaknesses, including their own, with open eyes. Both of them dearly love to tell a story. (305)

According to the conclusions of Don Pablos, a true *searcher* would become an instrument to find the ultimate reality within the fiction of the narrative. The fictional story precisely resides in the lack of symmetry and congruence between clues versus interpretations, facts versus opinions, solid evidence versus speculations that take place in the text since its beginning to its conclusion.

A third query should be taken into consideration then, what does *mystery* represent in the Spanish Golden Age? The text of *El Buscón* is full of irregularities that transform the plots of the narration into the affinity of mystery, which keeps the action moving back and forward. J. R. Christopher in “Poe and the Tradition of the Detective Story” explains:

[p]uzzle stories and mystery stories existed before Poe. “The Story of Bel” in the *Apocrypha* is a clear example. There is a locked room from which the food-sacrifices to the idol Bel have been vanishing; the prophet Daniel sprinkles flour on the floor to find out who has been taking the food and from whence he or they come (it turns out not to be Bel). (19)

Discrepancies and contradictions were conventional and integral aspects of the classical and modern detective stories. These elements built the plot, shaped the characterizations, and led the reader to possible hidden motives, assumptions, and interpretations of the crime(s). Symons infers the incoherencies in the early works of Doyle in contrast with his historical novels written in an unsullied fashion without discrepancies “[w]ithin a very short time Sherlock Holmes became a legend so vivid that



criminal or emotional problems were addressed to him for solution, and pilgrimages made in search of his consulting rooms at 221b Baker Street” while “Doyle wrote many of the early short stories quickly, without worrying about consistencies of date in the history of his hero or of his faithful chronicler, Doctor Watson” (15). These principles may be relevant as well to this study. According to the discourse of Don Pablos, his parents represent some kind of mystery in his hometown Segovia. His mother became a Christian and people do not accept her because of her foreign background. Her origin is a mystery and the text does not provide enough information about her. Readers find here the first—of multiple irregularities—because Don Pablos specifies many details about his father, but he omits important aspects about his mother’s past. The structure of the narration takes place in first person and it loses its evenness. On one side, readers discover a large amount of details regarding Don Pablos’ progenitor, but the author of the novel omits vital information about the narrator/protagonist’s maternal side. Her life is some kind of enigma and it represents inscrutability for the narrator, the people of the town, and for the reader. Maybe the protagonist just prefers to distract the reader with irrelevant particulars, focuses on the importance of his autobiography and strengthens his own *discoveries*, so the reader loses track, and forgets this question about his mother’s conversion into Christianity. The readers will probably never know. However, this dichotomy offers texture and substance to the story and informs the reader about cultural and social aspects of this period in time:

Texture also includes authentic period behavior—often much trickier to research and to recreate. It is one of the most important elements, however, because it belongs not only to a book’s texture, its feel, but also to its plot, its text. The behavior of one character toward others and the relationship between a person and society are the generators of the text. (Boyd and Higbie 19)

Perhaps the most radical incongruence found would be the use of the name of God in a light manner throughout the entire text. This misuse of the sacred name of God within the context of the religious culture of the seventeenth century Spain and the interrelations among characters portrayed in the novel reveals an absence of alignment with the Christian traditions specified in the religious and cultural context of the Early Modern Spain.

The seal of Christianity which has been called in popular culture the *Golden Rule* is totally omitted of the actions of *El Buscón*’s story, even though is present in the character’s discourse. “Love thy God”, a vertical and ascending line of performance must function in juxtaposition by “and thy neighbor as thyself”, a horizontal and down-to-earth line of action. This rhetorical image of the *cross*—vertical and horizontal practicality—represent the most significant and visible sign of Christianity according to the narrative of the Bible (The Bible, Luke 10.27). The absence of this principle misleads the protagonist of *El Buscón* in finding the truth. The text contains multiple blasphemies and mistreatment among characters and the protagonist is unable to achieve his goal of becoming a Christian gentleman. This clash presents ambivalence because the apprentice detective who is searching for the truth that can free him from his actual condition is—in reality—steered along the opposite path. In short, *mystery* represents in the Spanish Golden Age the realization that the truth is not necessarily

present in the religious discourse. The reader of the seventeenth century as well as the modern reader must use the techniques of puzzles and crosswords and be properly educated in the reading process to identify the truth in the actions displayed in *El Buscón*. Only then, the text becomes the truth and the discrepancies become the subtext that requires a deeper examination. The amateur reader will not look for correctness in the characterization, but indeed, the proficient reader must be able to recognize the incongruence present in the plot, organize the pieces, evaluate the evidence, search for the truth, and solve the mystery.

Taking into consideration the structure of the modern detective story and the content found in *El Buscón* by Francisco de Quevedo, this study concludes that Don Pablos—a novice investigator—using a religious discourse must be investigated by the well-trained and well-prepared reader—as well. The main character allegorizes multiple voices instead of one voice in first person. In the Spanish language, it is *not* usual using the name Pablo in plural (*Pablos*), which indicates that the author named his protagonist as part of the *searcher's* characterization: one character and the multiple displays, stories, concepts within the text (*conceptismo*).

In *El Buscón*, Quevedo invites the readers to engage in the process of detection. The reader will become the ultimate examiner able to solve the mystery implied in the fiction through questions, observations, and their own formulations. Don Pablos' conclusions, at the end of the third book, and his insights of the Spanish culture and later the new Spanish American continent culture—even though America does not constitute part of the narration, but functions as a closing reference—denotes the need to ponder the missing pieces of information to be in a better position of determining the construction of a more complete cultural framework. Maybe Don Pablos never found the truth, but the readers might be able to fill in the gap by compiling the facts versus the sermon, and analyzing the religious discourse versus the actual events. Rzepka points out that “detective writers in turn began to look for ways to engage their readers’ inductive and analeptic powers of invention in pursuit of this goal, instead of inviting them to sit back and watch professional investigators exercise theirs” (37). Francisco de Quevedo practices this theory in the Golden Age period. *El Buscón* offers to the readers a scope of the cultural reality through the fictional story. The text contains within its plot the argument and the counterargument, the point and the counterpoint, the culture and the counterculture all present in the secular and non-secular life of the seventeenth century Spain. Some of these aspects may lead to the origins of the scientific historical reconstruction that took place during the nineteenth century when the so-called *Golden Age* of detective fiction established its position as a genre of fiction in the history of literature.

This study of a novel based on characters of the Early Modern Spain would provide the beginning of future dialogues related to this approach and may clarify aspects of the modern detective fiction published in Spain today. Researching the possible origins of the detective fiction as a tool of textual texture illustrates the practical aspects of this genre and the construction of a society through its culture and literature “at least part of the fun for the reader is that sense of actually being conveyed to

another time and place, and part of the fun for the writer is to make that place as vivid as possible, a vividness that comes best from the employment of careful research” (Boyd and Higbie 19). The reader not only exercises and develops new analytical skills through the practice of investigation and the reading of mystery, detection and adventure, but also learns about the past and its manifold of cultural capital and context(s).

Regarding the canon in the detective story, John G. Cawelti observes a radical change in what is considered *literature* in the last two decades explaining that “now, not only are certain practitioners of the detective story such as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler widely included in those classroom anthologies that effectively define the literary tradition, but the genre itself has achieved a new cultural centrality, both in America and in the world” (5). In researching the possible starting points of the detective genre, the scholars and readers would gain a valuable knowledge that includes important aspects of the construction of a society: individual and community values, personal interrelations, language and communication, cultural landscape, and established beliefs. This exercise serves as a literary tool in becoming—to some degree—well prepared readers and being able to enjoy as well the diverse paths that the correlation among history, literature, and prevalent culture might grant—then and now.

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