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Martin Amis' *Night Train* and the Development of Female Characters in Detective Fiction

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Resumen:

Este ensayo se centra en los personajes principales de la novela de Martin Amis *Night Train* (1997), cuyo análisis se enmarca en una explicación de la evolución de los personajes femeninos en la novela de detectives. Hasta el siglo pasado, las mujeres habían ocupado un segundo plano en la ficción, siendo vistas como personajes débiles que no eran cruciales en el desarrollo de la historia. No es de extrañar que la figura tradicional del detective perspicaz sea un hombre que siempre encuentra la solución al misterio. Con el paso del tiempo, la representación de las mujeres en la literatura cambió, con mujeres escritoras que contribuyeron a este cambio de forma significativa y con la publicación de más novelas en las que las mujeres eran las protagonistas. Como explico en la Introducción, esto se aplica también a las novelas de detectives, que a veces siguen y a veces subvierten —especialmente en la ficción postmoderna— las convenciones del género. Mi ensayo presenta la novela *Night Train* de Amis como una ficción antidetectivesca construida sobre dos protagonistas femeninas fuertes, independientes y complejas, una en el papel de víctima y la otra en el de detective. A continuación, en la parte central del ensayo, se analizan estos dos personajes con vistas a ilustrar la creciente relevancia de la mujer en este tipo de ficción, y en la literatura en general, reflejando así el rol cambiante de las mujeres en la sociedad.

Abstract:

This dissertation focuses on the main characters in Martin Amis' *Night Train* (1997), whose analysis is framed by an explanation of the evolution of female characters in detective fiction. Until the past century, women in fiction had been side-lined, seen as feeble characters who were not central to the development of the story. No wonder that the traditional figure of the brainy detective should be that of a male who always finds the solution to the mystery. With the passing of time, the portrait of women in literature changed, with women writers greatly contributing to this and more novels being published with women as protagonists. As I explain in the Introduction, this also holds true for detective novels that sometimes follow, and sometimes subvert —especially in postmodern fiction— the features of the genre. My dissertation presents Amis' *Night Train* as an anti-detective novel built on two strong, independent and complex female characters that play the roles of victim and detective. They are then analysed in the central part of the essay in order to illustrate the increasing relevance of the female in this kind of fiction, and in literature in general, thus reflecting the changing role of women in society.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. *Night Train* and the anti-detective genre

The aim of this essay is to analyse Martin Amis' *Night Train* (1997), with a special focus on how female characters in detective fiction have evolved through the years, from initially having non-relevant roles to becoming the ones that carry the weight of the story. *Night Train* is Amis' ninth novel, a detective narrative whose main characters are two women: Mike Hoolihan, a tough and battered detective, and Jennifer Rockwell, a beautiful, brainy and seemingly untroubled girl whose death opens the novel. *Night Train* narrates the story of how the female detective, who has had a life of abuse and pain, investigates the death of Jennifer, an old friend's daughter who one day kills herself to everybody's surprise. The life of this woman seemed perfect, that is why her passing made no sense to anybody, especially to Mike, who admired Jennifer for everything she was and had. However, throughout the novel we learn that her life was as troubled as Mike's, and that the lives of these women, which at the beginning appear to be utterly different, seem at the end to mirror one another.

Night Train is written as a police procedural and initially all invites to see it as a work in the genre of detective fiction. However, as happens in a great deal of postmodernist works, the author here plays with the conventions of the genre and subverts many of them. In that sense, the novel can be related to what is known as "metaphysical detective fiction", or "anti-detective fiction", which helps to understand the work as a far from typical detective novel. Drawing on critics like Stefano Tani, Patricia Merivale and Susan E. Sweeney, who popularised the term in their studies of the genre, Bennet Kravitt highlights the view of the anti-detective or metaphysical detective novel as a narrative that "reverses the conditions we have come to expect of the whodunit" since "the anti-detective is never able to unravel the conundrum" (45),

sometimes even because a crime may not have been committed at all. Moreover, “the detective is far from immune to the consequences of the puzzle, he or she is overwhelmed by it” (46-47). As we will see, this is exactly what happens in *Night Train*, where what first seemed to be a murder is later on seen as suicide, but one in which the deceased had no obvious reason for killing herself. The investigation affects the detective to the point that she eventually takes her life, leaving many questions open as the book ends.

Having provided a generic frame from which to approach the novel, and given the fact that my main focus is the study of female characters in the narrative, the next section within this introduction will consist of an overview through time of the role of women in detective fiction. Unless otherwise stated, the information I provide in what follows draws on Michael Sims’ *The Penguin Book of Victorian Women in Crime: Forgotten Cops and Private Eyes from the Time of Sherlock Holmes* (2011).

1.2. Women in detective fiction: from the classical detective story to Martin Amis’ *Night Train*

Throughout history, remarkably intelligent people have appeared as the main characters of detective stories, people such as Sherlock Holmes, who is defined by the use of logic, deduction and observation, and who solves complex crimes thanks to his ingenuity. We cannot find many female protagonists with those characteristics and as the centre of the narrative, but saying that there were not women in classical detective stories would be a fallacy: there were women, as well as representatives of ethnic minority groups, even if their roles in fiction were often stereotyped. As Carmen M. García claimed in “Private (Brown) Eyes: Ethnicity, Genre and Gender in Crime Fiction in the Gloria Damasco novels and the Chicanos Comic Series”:

While one could argue that the genre of detective fiction in the US has always been multicultural, populated by a cast of characters from very different ethnic backgrounds, it remains a fact that ethnic minorities have been restricted to a specific space in its traditional canon. [...] The association of these ethnic individuals or entire ethnic communities with violence and crime also foregrounded the role of the white, male private eye as an enforcer of moral laws, a restorer of order from outside the community, and a guardian of superior moral values. Similarly, the role of women in noir fiction has often been restricted to limited and limiting stereotypes: the femme fatale, the damsel in distress, and the secretary or assistant to the investigator. (70)

In other words, women in these stories were condemned to be the love interest, the victim, a sexy assistant, or the cop's wife, just people who were not crucial to the narrative. In addition to this, women were not only disregarded by the authors of the novels, who seemed to believe that their position in life was the same as the one they occupied in the novels, but also by the male characters. Some male protagonists exhibit questionable behaviour against women, such as Philip Marlowe, who treats Carmen as a child from the very beginning of Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (1939), and talks to her in a tone that he should not. Another clear example is once again Sherlock Holmes, the famous detective is in fact a very sexist one, and even though it is said in several short stories that he respects women there is plenty of evidence to the contrary. In the well-known *The Sign of the Four*, he says: "Women are never to be entirely trusted —not the best of them." (Conan Doyle 188). Besides, he devotes his life to work, relying on his brain rather than his feelings to the point that he states that he has never loved a woman and he will never do so because "love is an emotional thing" (234).

Nonetheless, the way women were portrayed in literature can be said to reflect the way women were seen in the 20th century and especially in the years of detective

fiction's Golden Age. Women were perceived as second-class citizens, they could not vote at the beginning of the century, they could not aspire to have a good job, and they needed a man to carry on with their lives; without them they would have no funds, and probably, people would not respect them for the mere fact that they were single women, or as they would call it, spinsters. Women were thought to be fragile and weak creatures; that is why they were not able to have certain jobs. Becoming a police officer or a detective were some of the occupations that they could not have access to, which made it more difficult to see them in those roles in fictional narratives. As Méndez García puts it in the previously mentioned essay: "Women were displaced into accessory roles, since it did not seem adequate for the fair sex to display neither the toughness and world-weariness that private eyes required, nor the menacing violence that they were forced to exude and often display." (72)

There are exceptions to this general trend, though, and not every detective story had a male protagonist. In the Victorian period some writers wrote some female-centred stories, such as W.S. Hayward, who anonymously published *Revelations of a Lady Detective* in the 1860s and in the following decades he kept on publishing novels with women as main characters. One of his most famous stories narrates in the first person the life of Madame Paschal, a countess who works as a detective despite her high social standing and education. At some point she even boasts that she is more intelligent than many others, which was not a usual statement for women at that time. However, these stories were ahead of their time since that was not what reality was like in the 19th century. In 1842 the first Detective Department was created in Great Britain (what is now the CID); however, women were conspicuously absent. It was not until 1883 that women started working in the Department, but their work did not need any qualification, they just had to register the moment of the arrest. In 1903 the first female

prison warden was hired, and ten years later, in 1918, the first police woman was employed, something that was not approved of by the opposition. Maud West set up her own detective agency in London in 1905 and then wrote about her cases in newspapers, but her case was exceptional, and so, the literary female detective had to do less with real life and more with an attempt to represent female empowerment, portraying women that could do anything in a patriarchal society who allowed them to do almost nothing. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that most of those fictional women sleuths began their careers as detectives in order to cope with problems in their lives. For instance, some of them start working because their partners cannot supply for them anymore or need money for others close to them, like Violet Strange, the girl detective created by Anna K. Green. She is a rich young lady, but she needs a job (which she hides from her husband) and money in order to help a disowned sister to achieve her goal in life, which is to become a musician. In this way, the fact that these women were working was seen as a heroic act rather than a rebellious one.

With the passing of time more and more women started appearing in fiction, but their roles in the narrative could still be questioned, whether or not they played the part of the detective. Even someone like detective V. I. Warshawski, a character from Sarah Paretsky's late 20th-century detective fiction, seems to be always shadowed by her looks, no matter her accomplishments or how good she is at her work. As the author of an article about the best detectives in fiction describes her: "Warshawski is a woman in charge: sexy, smart, and packing heat" ("30 Best Fictional Detectives"). These kind of descriptions are not provided for characters such as Sam Spade. The same holds true for the female as victim or love interest, with semi-naked women being portrayed in books and comics, over-sexualising them and showing them as, once again, inferior to men and defined by their good looks.

Even when a female detective is portrayed without sexualising her and as more equal to men, she is not as clever as them, or has the same position. The character of Mrs Marple from Agatha Christie's novels is a very smart and well-educated old lady; nonetheless, she is not like Hercules Poirot, who is a respected detective (and who also appears in around twenty novels and thirty short stories more than Jane Marple). She is an amateur detective, and even though she is not as important as other colleagues of that time, she is treated with respect, something that was not that common early in the last century. It is thanks to her, and to others like Nancy Drew –a fictional sleuth in a US mystery series– that women started seeing themselves in novels as more than a romantic partner. This fact certainly accounts for the success of such books, being Nancy Drew an inspiration to young girls since the 1930s.

After a first feminist wave starting in the late 19th century, a second wave arose in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. In this phase women fought for greater equality, they did not only want to vote or get divorced, they wanted to have the same possibilities, rights and options as men. However, even though significant improvements were achieved, there was still so much to do and such great need on the part of women to make their claims heard, that novels became a good extension of real-life feminist struggle. Indeed, and focusing on detective fiction, women claiming their space in the genre “have often followed the same course that historical, real-life reclamation of spaces by women have” (Méndez García 73). It is also important to mention that more and more female writers emerged and they started depicting women as deeper and complex human beings, dodging gender stereotypes and the traditional focus on sexiness when dealing with female characters. The same goes for some male authors from the late 20th century onwards, which has led to a context where it is not strange to find novels like Martin Amis' *Night Train*.

The main character and narrator of *Night Train* is a far from typical female detective who has had a really tough life. The case she investigates, centred on the death of a young woman, has at its core a victim that is a more complex character than it initially seems. This departs from the portrait of women in well-known narratives of detection, such as *The Big Sleep* (Raymond Chandler, 1939), where women were portrayed as spoiled little girls who did not know anything about life and the male detective as a tough man who had no respect for them because he found them foolish.

Interestingly, *Night Train* is exceptional when seen in the context of Martin Amis' literary production, as his books usually portray sexist narrators and misogynistic characters, and there is often an emphasis on women's sexuality and sexualisation. Women in other novels by him are seen as weak characters whose naiveté is brought to the fore, as is the detailed description of their bodies. Understandably, and as Mustafa Günes points out, "Amis's books are often despised by feminists, and they are either grouped within 'the ladlit' by feminists like Showalter or dismissed as appallingly sexist by the judges of 'The Man Booker Prize', Maggie Gee and Helen McNeil." (37) Additionally, some could argue that Martin Amis and other male writers illustrate a kind of sexism that was typical of the time when they entered maturity and that goes beyond their books to show also in their daily lives. The fact that Amis is an influential intellectual makes it all the more outrageous, as Jean Hannah Edelstein puts it in a *Guardian* article when commenting on Amis' misogynistic critique of Katie Price, a female literary rival of his:

It's always a little bit astonishing in these relatively enlightened times when someone who would like to be regarded as an important contributor to the cultural agenda relies on lazy, casual misogyny to attempt a critique. [...] While Price may not be troubled by Amis's remarks on a personal level, I am: because they speak to the continued endurance of a surprising tolerance for

misogyny from vaunted men of letters who came of age as writers in an era when the loathing of women for being women – rather than for being crap writers, or unkind people, or whatever – was still legitimate.

Taking all this into account, one cannot but conclude that the particularities of *Night Train* when it comes to Amis' depiction of women makes the novel all the more interesting. The portrait of female characters in the context of this atypical detective story emerges as an issue that calls for analysis, and to this I will devote the following section.

2. NIGHT TRAIN: A CHARACTER STUDY OF TWO WOMEN

2.1. Mike Hoolihan: reopening painful wounds

In *Night Train* (1997) a police officer called Mike Hoolihan is the protagonist, and it is also her voice and her point of view that gives the reader access to the events. In spite of her masculine name and tough appearance, Mike is a wounded female with emotional baggage, a complex character with a difficult past, but also an outstanding detective.

As early as the beginning of the book, we are told that she is a woman that does not fit many female stereotypes and about the sexism she faces working in a patriarchal system. The police force has traditionally been male-centred, and most police officers even nowadays are men, so the difference between male and female cops was even bigger in the 1990s. Nevertheless, being a female does not seem to be an obstacle to Mike at first sight, and in the very first paragraph of the novel, where she is introduced, she describes herself as a police officer and then as a woman: “I am a police and my name is Detective Mike Hoolihan. And I am a woman, also” (Amis 8). It is not that she does not care about being a woman, she just believes that being a police officer is what defines her, as it is more important than any other quality or attribute that she may have. She does not talk about her physique much, but when she does it is only because she does not look like other females: “A few words about my appearance. The physique I inherited from my mother. Way ahead of her time, she had the look now associated with highly politicized feminist. [...] I copped her voice, too: It has been further deepened by three decades of nicotine abuse” (Amis 10). Not only her name but also other features, like her voice, make for her being mistakenly taken for a man: “This is happening to me more and more often: The sir thing. If I introduce myself over the phone it never occurs to anybody that I’m not a man. I’m going to have to carry around a little pack of nitrogen or whatever – the stuff that makes you sound like Tweetie Bird.” (Amis 50) In

spite of the sarcastic tone, Mike does not seem to bother about being one of the few female officers in her department because, even though she has had minimal problems with some of her colleagues, she believes she is well-respected by most of them, and she is right because Colonel Rockwell trusts her to the point of asking her to find out the identity of his daughter's murderer. He cannot think of a better person to do the job, as Mike knew Jennifer, although for that very reason her death has a considerable impact on her. Indeed, Mike is deeply affected by Jennifer's passing, so much so that she hesitates to accept the case because she had been on the edge of breakdown before –due to her past as an alcoholic and a victim of domestic violence– and she had decided to deal with crimes other than homicides in order to preserve her hard-won stability.

Mike looks up to Jennifer, she feels admiration for her, which may even sometimes look like jealousy. Mike believes Jennifer was everything she is not, a woman who had a good family and a boyfriend who loved her more than anything else, an interesting job where she was an eminence and the kind of beauty everyone would long for:

I have known Jennifer Rockwell since she was eight years old. She was a favorite of mine. But she was also a favourite of everybody else's. And I watched her grow into a kind of embarrassment of perfection. Brilliant, beautiful. Yeah, I'm thinking: To-die-for brilliant. Drop-dead beautiful. And not intimidating – or only as intimidating as the brilliant-beautiful can't help being, not matter how accessible they seem. She had it all and she had it all, and then she had some more... She was an astrophysicist, here at Mount Lee. Guys? She combed them out of her hair, and played the field at CSU. But for the last – Christ, I don't know – seven or eight years, it must be, she was shackled up with another bigbrain and dreamboat: Trader. Professor Trader Faulkner. (Amis 16)

In addition to this, it is important to mention that Mike's frequent remarks about Jennifer's body and physical appearance could lead to think that maybe it was not only

jealousy and admiration she felt, her fixation with Jennifer's breasts or legs denoting something more like sexual attraction than appreciation. Albeit we know she has had past relationships and she is living with a man now, the way she describes herself, Jennifer and her boyfriend could make us believe that she is attracted to both men and women. When Mike tells about her boyfriend for the first time she describes him in the following way:

But I do have a boyfriend: Tobe. He's a dear guy and I value him and I need him. One thing about Tobe – he sure knows how to make a woman feel slim. Tobe's totally enormous. He fills the room. When he comes in late, he's worse than the night train: Every beam in the building wakes up and moans. I find love difficult. Love finds me difficult. (Amis 34)

This is an odd way to describe someone you live with and supposedly love. Even her statement at the end of the quotation is strange, but only reveals the heart of a woman who has never really felt loved.

Additionally, Mike evokes in important respects the lesbian stereotype or, in other words, "the token lesbian cop": the woman that "once she's established as a lesbian she can act just like a male cop" (King). And this is, in a sense, what Mike does. To portray her, Amis takes time to show this "masculine aura" in the novel as related to Mike's name, her appearance, her voice, and her tough job. As already mentioned, police work has traditionally been regarded in all societies as a man's job, and even nowadays there is a great distance between the percentage of male and female workers, as Mike explains in the novel:

The jury is still out on women police. On whether they can take it. Or for how long. On the other hand, maybe it's me: Maybe I'm just another fuckoff. New York PD, for instance, is now fifteen percent female. And all over the country women detectives continue to do outstanding work, celebrated work. But I'm thinking these must be some very, very exceptional ladies. (Amis 21)

Although femininity is socially constructed, Amis exploits it so that the reader sees Mike as unfeminine, which could accentuate the idea of men's inability to portray women without indulging in stereotypes, while it could also be taken as an example of how literature and gender roles have evolved in the past decades. Mustafa Gunes, for instance, claims that the characterisation of Mike in the novel "necessitates a re-imagination of the mythical detective as a male and masculine; and the traditional understanding of the woman as feminine and female." (41)

A character like Mike Hoolihan may be seen as perpetuating the idea of women being weak, with the only exception of the woman cop, which is a poor claim to make about women. In Part One of the novel Mrs Rockwell makes the following statement: "Tom wants an answer. He's police. And I'm his wife. It's okay, Mike. You're a woman. But I think you're tough enough" (95). The fact that Mrs Rockwell refers to Mike's toughness as an attribute she has in spite of being a woman makes one wish for not only female protagonists but also sorority, and a portrayal of really supportive relationships between females. Some pages earlier, Mike herself admits to all the prejudices and the pressure she has felt as a woman police and seems to have almost been convinced at some point that this was not a job for her, precisely because she was a woman:

Many times, when I was in Homicide, I said to myself, *Walk away, girl. Ain't nobody stopping you. Just walk away.* Murders are men's work. Men commit them, men clean up after them, men solve them, men try them. Because men like violence. Women really don't figure that much, except as victims, and among the bereaved, of course, as witnesses. (Amis 21, italics in the original)

Mike, a woman, believes that her job is a man's job because of the brutality and the violence (that does not speak well about men either). Claims such as this one account for Mike's problems to be seen and to feel herself as a fulfilled person because she does

not fit patriarchal constructions of femininity. In some parts of the novel, she reflects on how much easier things could be if she really fitted into the stereotype:

I'm going to change my name. To something more feminine. Like Detective Jennifer Hoolihan. For a girl to have a boy's name, and to keep it – that's not so unusual. I've come across a Dave and a Paul who never tried to pretty things up with Davinia or Pauline. I've even met another Mike. We stuck with it. But how many grown men do I know who are still called Priscilla? (Amis 152)

In the novel we see different kinds of women: Jennifer as the feminine girl, Mrs Rockwell as the perfect wife and mother, and Mike Hoolihan as the woman who does not look like a woman and has to define herself in defiance of stereotypes. Gender-stereotyped perceptions are still prevalent nowadays, and different degrees of acceptance affect masculine women and feminine men. People still believe in the same gender roles that the novel tries not to follow, even if it sometimes fails to do so.

By getting immersed into Jennifer's life in the course of her investigation, Mike's already-mentioned problems with gender identity and sexuality are rekindled and other wounds are reopened, which make her a complex character with more depth than many classic detectives. Those wounds have to do with a difficult past, starting at childhood with an abusive father and foster care:

My father messed with me when I was a child. Out in Moon Park. Yeah he used to fuck me, okay? It started when I was seven and it stopped when I was ten...I was fostered some, but basically I am state-raised. And as a child I always tried to love the state the way you'd love a parent...What I've wanted is a father. (Amis 126)

She had her childhood stolen and that had consequences on her adult life, a life that was filled with misery and alcohol and drug abuse: "I was detective Mike Hoolihan [...]: A police and an alcoholic" (Amis 109). But at some point Mike found someone, Colonel Tom Rockwell, who helped her rise and start again. She became a different person and

even found a boyfriend, Tobe, who did not mistreat her as her previous partners had done. And yet, the past dies hard and she has not really worked through it. Thus, she has been clean for some time but once she starts investigating Jennifer's case she considers the idea of starting again. Mike is not the only detective to have addictions. For instance, it is well known that Sherlock Holmes used cocaine, morphine and, like Mike, he took these substances to escape reality. By contrast, though, Sherlock's life and career are not deeply affected by the use of these drugs, it is even mentioned that they calm his hyperactive brain. By contrast, Mike is castigated by that and her past haunts her until the very end of the novel. The reader does actually witness through the narrative how Mike crumbles down and becomes unstable and vulnerable again on being faced with the darkness surrounding Jennifer's death, whose enigmas do in turn lead her to think more intently about her, what she was and what she is. This being so, the novel ends with the powerful suggestion that she is consciously walking to her own death by having a last drink. The "night train" in the novel is, among other things, a metaphor for suicide, and Mike decides to take it after being confronted with Jennifer's perfect existence and the challenge to understand why someone who had everything would wish to die. She believes that Jennifer's story is not like hers, and that it is she that has powerful reasons for taking her life. However, as is often the case with deaths in detective novels, appearances here are also deceiving.

2.2. Jennifer Rockwell: all that glitters is not gold

At first Jennifer seems to be like other victims in this kind of novels, the gorgeous woman with the perfect life whose existence is cut short by death. As in other crime stories, the victim comes from a comfortable environment, she had a loving family and a good social position, no financial problems and a successful career. However, even though her boyfriend is initially seen as a suspect, everything suggests that her death was a suicide. This does not seem right to the victim's father, Colonel Rockwell. Even if it is believed among policemen that suicide is more frequent among women –“It's like we say. Men kill other people. It's a guy thing. Women kill themselves. Suicide's a babe thing, Mike.” (Amis 53)– Tom Rockwell cannot believe that his daughter could have taken her own life. But Jennifer was not what she seemed to be, which accounts for the title of this section and the idea that appearances are not to be trusted. All her life was a façade. This is something we see in many other detective novels, for instance, in Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories nobody seems to be what they want others to believe, and that is what makes a good detective story, people want to discover what there is behind a character, people want twists. This is exactly what happens in this novel. Nobody would expect Jennifer to be similar to Mike, but she is, we can even say that there are key aspects in which the lives of both women mirror each other. However, while everybody knew about Mike's problems and her tough life, people thought, as Mike did, that Jennifer had a happy life, so much to live for. She fooled everyone, even her mother says in Part One of the novel that she did not really know her daughter, as she thought she was something she clearly was not: “See, Mike, we were looking for a why. And I guess we found one. But suddenly we don't have a who. Who was she, Mike?” (Amis 94)

What Amis does to Jennifer's character is to give her a depth that many victims lack in other novels. This sends the detective, as Jennifer's mother puts it, in search of a "who", the victim being the enigma herself, her story and her complex character. She is dead because of her problems with her own self, not with an outsider, and so the process of investigation moves from the idea of murder, to the puzzle of a suicide for no reason, to an attempt to understand Jennifer's motives. This happens little by little, as Mike investigates this atypical case in a traditional way, as classic detectives did:

What she has collected so far about Jennifer's suicide – type-recording, notes, bunch of folders, hand-notes, testimonies, eye-witness reports and official documents – indicates that Amis obviously represents Mike as a traditional crime investigator who collects all the possible information and documents to solve the mystery behind the crime by coming to a truthful conclusion about the crime. (Günes 220)

As the idea of a murder is discarded in favour of a suicide, Mike discovers that Jennifer was taking lithium, a mood stabilizer that is also used for bipolar depressions. This relates to what Jennifer herself told her boyfriend Trader in her suicide note: "You knew me ten times better than anyone, but I wasn't quite what you thought I was. Almost a year ago I started getting the sense that I was losing control of my thoughts" (Amis 168). In the same line, Mike also finds out about an affair she was having with a man that meant nothing to her, which questions her love for Trader, and a meaningful error she made in her job, in the calculations about the age of the universe, which would have had a terrible impact on her career. In addition to this, the detective learns about Jennifer's obsession with buying expensive things such as paintings, which could lead to financial problems, and a book about suicide that she was reading. As Brian Duffy explains:

What Mike found was an emerging, typical suicide pattern, a concatenation turned up by basic detective work, culminating in the suicide note that confirmed that here was a life which appeared to be lived in a clear blue sky but which was in fact blighted by an illness that became unbearable and uncontrollable. So Jennifer Rockwell killed herself. (Amis 316)

But even if what Mike finds out was not what she expected, she is puzzled even further when she eventually realises that, before killing herself, Jennifer had carefully built a big lie. Her motives were not the ones Mike thought: Jennifer had tricked them all, all the clues that the detective had followed were fake, a plan devised by Jennifer intended to provide answers, and comfort, to those she left behind. As Mike faces this, the victim leads her to ponder on her own problems, which makes them surface, in this way making it easier for the reader to know both characters and to establish connections between them because what Mike eventually sees in Jennifer is the same dissatisfaction and unhappiness she is familiar with, but which she had never perceived in Colonel Rockwell's daughter. As she gets closer to Jennifer in this way, she understands that what to her was a perfect life did not measure up to Jennifer's standards. She achieved goals but could not avoid a feeling of dissatisfaction and emptiness that prevented her from finding real pleasure in anything. This discovery shatters Mike completely, all the more so as she is aware of how much this can hurt the girl's family. That is why Mike does not know how to approach Colonel Tom to tell him the truth, and she wonders if it is worth revealing things that will only intensify the Rockwells' suffering: "I have nothing to tell Colonel Tom except lies: Jennifer's lies. What else can I tell him? Sir, your daughter didn't have motives. She just had standards. High ones. Which we didn't meet." (Amis 212)

In sum, Jennifer's case affects Mike in a way that it should not have, at a personal level, not only because of Jennifer's death itself but also because she finds out

that she was as lost as her, and that maybe suicide is also the only way out for her too. So, at the end of the novel, after meeting Colonel Tom and having a conversation with him about her daughter, she heads to the bar apparently determined to take her life. The novel thus seems to close as it began, with another suicide, in this case through alcohol: “There-finished. All gone. Now me I’m heading off to Battery and its long strives of dives.” (Amis 214)

3. CONCLUSION

This dissertation has analysed how the role of women in detective fiction has changed through the years and how the female protagonists in Martin Amis's *Night Train* (1997) are part of that change. In the past, females in literature were usually secondary and flat characters, which led many women to write detective novels with female protagonists, even though those stories did not always mirror the society of their time. That society was a patriarchal one, so women were seen as second-class citizens whose lives revolved around men. The number of women who were capable of living a good life without a man was small, and all the inequalities and the long-standing exclusion of women from all but the domestic sphere became the target of several waves of feminism. Significant changes started to take place in the 20th century, which also found a reflection in the literary scene, with women playing more central roles in narratives that subverted or questioned gender stereotypes. That subversion of stereotypes sometimes blends, in postmodern literature, with the play with and rewriting of generic conventions. This is the case with Amis' *Night Train*.

Night Train's main characters are both women: the detective and the victim. Mike Hoolihan emerges as an unconventional police officer who straightened out her life thanks to the Rockwell family; and Jennifer is initially portrayed as the perfect daughter of the Rockwells, found dead after what seems to be a suicide. Both characters depart from the way in which women were usually portrayed in classical detective fiction, as they are not weak or sexualised, but complex and strong females who are not diminished or shadowed by a male character. In *Night Train*, Amis delights us with detective Hoolihan's slyness, typical of the most admired fictional investigators. The author also gives depth to the victim, which contributes to having a detective that grows more and more complex as she is challenged by the complexity of the girl whose death

she investigates. In addition to subverting the traditional features of the genre and its closed and neat ending, Amis also departs from the way in which he portrayed his female characters in previous novels. The two protagonists constitute the core of this puzzling detective story, and they reflect not only the evolution of the genre and of females in (detective) fiction, but also women's changing role in real life, at a time when they have gained important battles in their fight for being considered equal to men.

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