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GENDERS

**IN A NEW CONFIGURATION OF HARD-BOILED FICTION:
LOUISE WELSH'S (2002) *THE CUTTING ROOM***

TRABAJO FINAL INTEGRADOR

**Licenciatura en Inglés con Orientación en Estudios Literarios
(Plan 2009)**

de

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Diciembre de 2020

Abstract

Crime fiction has been a significant vehicle to expose the preoccupations and anxieties of Western societies since its initial development in the early 19th century. Especially one sub-generic category of crime fiction, hard-boiled fiction, is considered responsive to society due to its aim to address emerging issues, such as race and gender nowadays, explicitly. *The cutting room* (Welsh, 2002) not only plays with hard-boiled traditions but also displays new appropriations of the form. In this work, I focus on the relation between the specific concern with genders and the development of this crime fiction sub-genre. As a result, and following Butler's (1990) approach to genders, I provide new insights into how the understanding of gender as the representation of two fixed categories, male and female, has changed towards plural categories. In view of those results, I sought to confirm my hypothesis that the representations of gender present in the novel disrupt the conventions of hard-boiled fiction but do so only up to a certain extent. I hope that the findings of this work could be useful for further understanding of the new configurations in hard-boiled fiction.

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Introduction

Louise Welsh is considered one of the “bloody women” (Hill, 2017, p. 52) that has transformed the traditionally male-dominated genre of crime fiction not only because she is a woman writing about an unscrupulous criminal underworld but also because her characters have a strong tendency to struggle with contemporary anxieties. But not only that. Welsh also challenges usual expectations of gender and genre. Set in an obscure and violent Glasgow, *The cutting room* (Welsh, 2002), Welsh’s first novel, plays with traditions and dismantles the generic crime narrative, reflecting its author’s fascination with the darker side of life, which some critics described as the “uncomfortable” aspects of the book (e. g. Garcia, 2015; Miller, 2006). Moreover, the novel also breaks the silence on sexual matters such as prostitution, the pornographic business, and human trafficking, and it does so through the lens of characters who do not necessarily fit traditional gender norms.

The cutting room (2002) has frequently been analyzed from a gender perspective and in view of its gothic narrative. Though Rilke has been described as a “genre-untypical” private eye (Wanner, 2015, p. 98), little criticism is available about the novel in terms of its hard-boiled configuration. In this work, I focus on the relation between that specific concern with genders and the development of this crime fiction sub-genre. Specifically, I try to evidence that in Welsh’s original representation of genders lies the power of *The cutting room* as a new configuration of hard-boiled fiction. In Chapter One, I present a conceptual framework that briefly introduces the main concepts underlying the research. In Chapter Two, I describe the corpus and its critical reception, and I outline the research questions and the methods used to support my hypothesis. In Chapter Three, I center the analysis on the representation of female characters. In Chapter Four, I provide a brief description of the transgender community and its significance for the novel and the genre under analysis. In Chapter Five, I study the representation of new masculinities as embodied in the private eye in the novel under

consideration. In Chapter Six, I provide concluding responses to the research questions I established for this work, and I discuss them in the light of the conceptual framework. A concise conclusion provides my final words on the matters of genders in *The cutting room*.

Chapter One

Conceptual Framework

In this section, I first explore genders, analyzing the new directions that cultural and literary theory are taking to study them and how ideas that have long governed the field have begun to be deconstructed. Discussions of the major scholars as well as an overview of concepts surrounding gender are essential aspects to understand this debate in contemporary theory. Secondly, I examine the potential of crime fiction to expose gender issues. Hard-boiled fiction as a subgenre within crime fiction is specifically analyzed in terms of both its development and the new gender appropriations of the form as displayed in *The cutting room*.

Genders in contemporary society

Constructing genders. In recent years, contemporary debates on gender and the creation of new queer and gendered identities have positively had an impact on the study of crime fiction. Therefore, an analysis of genders as socially constructed categories is essential for the study of gender identities and representations in hard-boiled fiction.

For years, most people and even medical experts have confused sex and gender and reinforced that *being a man* or *being a woman* is biologically determined. Benshoff & Griffin (2004) referred to *sex* as the word used to describe “the biological or chromosomal makeup of human beings” and defined *gender* as “the social, historical and cultural roles that we think of as being associated with either the male or the female sex” (p. 214). Following that classification, sex was limited to the categories of *male* and *female*; whereas gender came to be only related to the assumptions embodied by the notions of *masculinity* and *femininity*. Whereas male and female refer to scientific differences, gender identities are shaped by conscious and unconscious ideas, mostly influenced by ideological institutions and patriarchal cultures, about what means to be masculine or feminine. For example, according to the socially

constructed meanings attributed to gender roles, women are expected to be kind and sensitive, stay at home and be prone to the domestic sphere; while men are supposed to be stronger, more aggressive and more interested in the material world than women. In a similar vein, Glover and Kaplan (2000) avoided the association of the terms *sex* and *gender* with nature or culture, respectively, and concluded that both “are inescapably *cultural* categories that refer to ways of describing and understanding human bodies and human relations” (p. xxvi), which certainly goes beyond the traditional binary classification.

Instead of being an inherent identity attached to biological characteristics, gender is considered then a social construction. The absence of an inherent link between sex and gender leads to a deconstruction of the concepts of masculinity and femininity. In other words, being male does not automatically mean being masculine, and being female does not necessarily mean being of the feminine gender. However, the difference between masculinity and femininity has long been maintained as social constructs in most Western patriarchal societies. That difference is built on certain characteristics usually attributed to one gender or the other, as displayed in the list below, which has been assembled following different sources introduced in this conceptual framework:

Masculinity	Femininity
strong	soft
loud	quiet
though	empathetic
aggressive	gentle
provider	nurturing
dominant	submissive
rational	emotional

In this binary system, “positive” features are typically assigned to the dominant masculine group, while “negative” qualities are associated to women, which places femininity in a

subordinate position. Rethinking these concepts also leads to consider the power relations operating between genders. Moreover, it can also be stated that, despite the efforts and struggle to overcome this situation, in contemporary societies, those power relations will most probably reinforce the dominant heterosexual and patriarchal system.

Deconstructing genders. As early as in the 1990s, renowned American philosopher Judith Butler made outstanding contributions to the field of gender studies that also went in the direction of disrupting the binary logics of sex and gender. By that time, it was almost universally acknowledged that gender identities were not unitary and fixed but rather subject to social and historical variation. Furthermore, in *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990) defined gender in that way, describing it as

an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through *stylized repetitions of acts*. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (p. 140)

Gender becomes “performative” in the sense that it constitutes a repeated series of acts, words, and discourses based on, reinforced by, but even sometimes resisting societal norms. In *Undoing Gender* (2004), Butler added that “one does not ‘do’ one’s gender alone. One is always ‘doing’ with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary” (p. 1). However, such performances do not create and define fixed notions of masculinity and femininity but are mere ideas “open to disruption, variation and transformation” (Glover & Kaplan, 2000, p. x).

Genders in crime fiction. Current studies in the field of gender and queer theory insist upon the multiplicity of forms that genders can take, an assumption which has significantly

affected crime fiction. Horsley (2005), for instance, stated that “the figure of the detective has been reworked to bring sexual politics to the fore, challenging patriarchal authority and reformulating gender definitions” (p. vi). In that context, the study of masculinities can make an interesting case. For example, masculinity, once thought a monolithic category, could be somehow tested and classified in view of the many forms that it has taken in the social life over the years (Nixon, 1997), or it could be re-examined through the study of men’s bodies and the dynamic representations they might involve (Connell, 2005).

The genre has gradually offered alternative representations of female characters who were normally portrayed in terms of the binary oppositions listed above. The recovery of female subjectivity involves women occupying key roles; not only are they the investigative figures of the narrative, but in some cases, they are still victims but with the ability of becoming transgressors or even defining changes in the plot. Contemporary crime writers have used the “maleness” of the genre to represent independent female characters, attributing to them usually male qualities of character such as strength and independence.

In its inclusion of characters representing diverse gendered identities, crime fiction as a genre has been permeable to the transformations undergone by genders in contemporary societies. Welsh’s *The cutting room* does not only go beyond the traditional hypermasculine private eye and the passive female victim waiting to be rescued, but, in its representation of the typical underworld of hard-boiled fiction, it also confidently deals with issues of fluid sexualities, including voyeurism and snuff, and clearly stylized identities such as those of transvestite and gay characters.

Hard-boiled fiction in the tradition of crime fiction

The tradition of crime fiction. Crime fiction has been a significant vehicle to expose the preoccupations and anxieties of Western societies since its initial development in the early 19th century. Crime fiction can be defined as the larger generic category to which many sub-

genres such as detective fiction, whodunit fiction, and police procedural, among others, belong. In this kind of fiction, crime and a mystery to be solved are central elements to the plot, as well as an investigation, a detection, and criminals with their motives. Throughout the 20th century, crime fiction became extremely popular and was constantly adapted to novel forms, either as films or as TV series. Moreover, crime fiction writers have adapted the genre for a wide variety of purposes in view of new issues, such as race and gender, appearing in the socio-political agenda since the 19th century and throughout the 20th century. In fact, there is a consistent relation in crime fiction writing between generic changes and shifting socio-political conditions.

Classic detective fiction reaches back into the last decade of the Victorian era, mainly popularized by the contributions of Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930). Classic detective fiction is characterized by its basic structure of death–detection–explanation and by its focus on the process by which a wise detective interprets intricate clues and solves a puzzling case, usually involving corrupt police officers and politicians. However, classic detective fiction may not necessarily present a critique of the corruption of political institutions or of capitalist exploitation. The tradition developed through the “golden age” of British detective fiction, which produced renowned writers such as Agatha Christie (1890-1976), and finally evolved with the formal and ideological transformations built by post-Second World War writers.

Crime fiction produced during the 20th century experienced different historical contexts and ideological shifts. Moreover, new sub-genres emerged with its realm probably as response to changing social and cultural conditions. Referring to the variations of a genre fiction, Browne (1990) stated that “powerful genre fiction develops through the conventional by use of the inventional, then folds back upon itself and consciously reuses the formulas and conventions to create a new power of convention and formula” (p. 103). Welsh’s (2002) *The cutting room* could be said to have reinvented the genre in its treatment of issues that are felt

to be contemporary, such as human trafficking and gay or transvestite identities, yet it has also kept relatively loyal to the formulaic character of crime fiction.

Hard-boiled fiction. Though it is difficult to establish fixed labels as, over the past decades, writers and critics have used, varied, and constructed them in different ways, two of the more familiar sub-generic categories of crime fiction are *classic detective fiction* and *hard-boiled detective fiction*. A re-examination of classic detective fiction, characterized by a core of bourgeois values and domestic spheres, propelled those emergent writers to comment on a broader and more chaotic contemporary reality. As a result, hard-boiled detective fiction, or, for shortness, *hard-boiled fiction*, marked significant generic changes in crime fiction influenced by the dramatic events of the mid-20th century.

In his essay “The Simple Art of Murder” (1944), Raymond Chandler (1888-1959), who is considered a pioneer of the sub-genre, accused the classic detective novel of being “too little aware” (para. 8) of the real contemporary experience. Instead, he proposed the hard-boiled tradition focused on “social and economic corruption in American cities”, as well as on “the economic effects of the American Depression” (Horsley, 2005, p.6). Also highlighting the context in which hard-boiled fiction developed, Scaggs (2005) provided the following definition of the sub-genre:

The term “hard-boiled”, meaning “tough”, came to describe the hero of a type of detective fiction that developed in the United States in the interwar period. ... A type of fiction that was characterised, among other things, by the “hard-boiled” and “pig-headed” figure of the private investigator (...), a threatening and alienating urban setting, frequent violence, and fast-paced dialogue that attempted to capture the language of “the streets”. (p. 55-56)

Though not necessarily socially-committed, hard-boiled fiction is considered at least responsive to society due to its aim to address its current problems explicitly.

As contemporary reality changed during the last decades of the 20th century, so did hard-boiled fiction. Horsley (2005), for instance, noted that “from the 1980s on, there has been a significant change generated in the main sub-genres of crime fiction by the black and female writers, using the genre to address issues of race and gender” (p. 4). Generic transformations of the tradition have challenged what was generally seen as conventional hard-boiled assumptions, and contemporary writers have made visible variations through the inclusion of less conventional representations of color, such as the ones displayed in *Blind Man with a Pistol* (Himes, 1989), *Devil in a Blue Dress* (Mosley, 1990) and *Point of Darkness* (Phillips, 1994). Moreover, hard-boiled fiction has even allowed feminist appropriations of a genre frequently identified with predominantly white heterosexual male values and roles. An example of this was the successful lesbian detective novel *She Came Too Late* (Wings, 1986) described by an *Elle* reviewer with the following words: “Roll over Raymond Chandler, and tell Philip Marlowe the news: the lady has a pistol in her pocket” (1995, as quoted in Horsley, 2005).

The cutting room as hard-boiled fiction. Written in Scotland and by a woman, *The cutting room* displays some defining features of hard-boiled fiction, such as the description of a dangerous cityscape, represented by the turbulent side of the 21st-century Glasgow, and the clear presence of the private eye, the pervasive inspective figure of hard-boiled fiction. Wanner (2015) stated that “shifting focus from structural to sexual violence, Louise Welsh pushed the hard-boiled operative even further out of [its] traditional comfort zone in *The cutting room*” (p. 35). The protagonist of the novel, Rilke, could be said to represent the antithesis of the traditional “tough guy” or hyper-masculine private eye. The concept of *private eye*, a development of the term *private investigator* or “PI”, is used to refer to the hard-boiled investigator. The word *private* marks its most salient trait: his alienated nature. The term *eye* makes reference to the viewpoint of the investigator, who tells the story as a first-person narrator, and to his strong sense of observation (Scaggs, 2005). However, contact with the outer world is inevitable and, throughout the investigation process, Rilke comes across a series of

characters belonging to the criminal underworld in Glasgow. The private eye finds himself dealing with unscrupulous outlaws such as drug dealers, pornographers, and human traffickers presented as crucial pieces to uncover the case. Rilke wanders around gothic urban locations inhabited by junkies, prostitutes and transvestites, where he even eventually experiences homosexual sexual encounters with strangers.

New gender considerations as the sensitivity of the private eye to women's struggles or to gender identities disrupt the hard-boiled tradition in the novel through that constant play between the conventional and the inventional already mentioned above.

Chapter Two

Corpus, Research Questions and Methods

The novel and its writer

Louise Welsh's *The cutting room* tells the story of Rilke, a 43-year-old gay auctioneer working for a struggling firm in Glasgow. His expertise in finding antiques has developed his strong sense of observation, which, together with his curious nature, makes him the private eye of the story. Rilke's ordinary life is affected when he accidentally turns into a private eye after finding suspicious material in the wealthy residence of one of his clients. When an old aristocrat dies, his elderly sister requests Rilke to value and get rid of the dead man's belongings as soon as possible. In the mansion's attic, he discovers a vast collection of pornographic material, including a small library devoted to the topic, an envelope filled with snuff pictures, and a netsuke, a strange Japanese ornament, with a sex scene carved on it. Rilke realizes that some pictures involve the deceased owner of the house, but a handful of old black-and-white photographs depicting the brutal torture and murder of a young woman shocks him the most. Rilke is immediately drawn to investigate the origin of these photos, whether they are real or just taken in a photographic set, and who the girl in them could be. His obsession to find the truth leads him to wander the darkest places of Glasgow and to deal with the most dangerous dealers and gangsters of the city, as well as with a plethora of characters typifying the diverse sexual nightlife of the city.

Louise Welsh, the author of the novel, was born in Scotland in 1965. She lived in Edinburgh during her childhood but then moved to Glasgow to study at university. After obtaining her degree in History, Welsh opened a second-hand bookshop, where she worked for many years and which could have inspired Rilke's occupation in the novel. However, her desire to write led her to abandon the business and to sign up for a creative writing course launched by Glasgow and Strathclyde universities to become a full-time author. In 2002, she published

her first novel *The Cutting Room*, which won several awards, including the Crime Writers' Association John Creasey Dagger for the best first crime novel (2002) and The Saltire First Book of the Year Award (2002). Welsh is now the author of eight crime fiction novels, including *Tamburlaine must die* (2004) and *The girl on the stairs* (2012), and she is also Professor of Creative Writing at Glasgow University. Thus, Welsh has become one of the most renowned crime fiction writers in the English language, and one of the "bloody women" transforming the Scottish contemporary crime fiction scene (Hill, 2017).

Critical approaches to *The cutting room*

Perhaps mostly due to its unusual representation of Glasgow's mansions and buildings and of its darkest streets and alleyways (Harrison, 2003), *The cutting room* has usually been read from a Gothic perspective, and not necessarily highlighting its hard-boiled qualities. Tregnaghi (2014), for example, studies the novel having in mind traditional differences between the male and the female Gothic. In her view, *The cutting room* works in opposition to the typical male Gothic in that, through the strategies of fear and transgression and the motif of death, Welsh exposes contemporary abuses against women, mostly those concerning women at risk as a consequence of an oppressive male power. Tregnaghi (2014), also notices the absence of a narrative resolution at the end of the story and the lack of interference of the male protagonist in the concluding events, flaws which are also marked by Zalesky (2003). Together with the changes in his physical appearance, it is perhaps that inability to act that makes Welsh (2002) describe Rilke as "a troubled spectre" (p. 167) by the end of the story, which also complies with the gothic formula (Tregnaghi, 2014).

Criticism on *The cutting room* has also especially focused on Rilke, and thus it has necessarily brought into discussion issues concerning hard-boiled fiction. Witty and self-aware, Rilke generates a sense of identification in the readers of the novel because he is presented as "an edifying character" (Harrison, 2003, p. 5). In that sense, in *The cutting room*, Rilke's

empathy to women's suffering, for instance, challenges the hard-boiled tradition, which is typically associated with a strong sense of misogyny and the depiction of women as helpless victims of male abuse. In a similar vein, Wanner (2015) notes, even though recurring to the most salient formulas of hard-boiled fiction i. e., sex, drugs and violence, *The cutting room* displays a "genre-untypical" private eye (p. 35). As his findings lead him to disclose an aristocratic pornography circle related to gendered exploitation and human trafficking, "rather than (...) hiding [this] behind the typical hard-boiled facade, Rilke shows some arguably 'unmanly' signs of how deeply troubled he is by such exploitation" (Wanner, 2015, p. 36).

Miller (2006) and Garcia (2015) seem to have moved a step forward in their critical approaches to the novel, and they have developed an interpretation of it based on the notions of depersonalization and labyrinth. Miller (2006) focuses on the phenomenology of personal relations and the gaze of the characters in *The cutting room*. Most characters show a depersonalized attitude towards others, but most of them also engage in pleasures of the aesthetic observation of those others, which is attested by the recurrence of photographs, films, and cameras functioning as a metaphor for that depersonalization. *Depersonalization* then signifies not only the objectification of the other, as is implied by the snuff pictures in the story, reducing the person to just a representation, but it also involves an expected indifferent view to the struggles of others. In this sense, Rilke, the private eye of the story, is constantly advised not to investigate dangerous organizations to find out the truth. Last, the concept of depersonalization could also be related to Tregnaghi's (2014) views that especially women's bodies in the novel are made vulnerable as *abjects* in a contemporary and patriarchal society with violence, hate, and dehumanization. Miller's (2006) analysis is broader and encompasses all genders in the literary work under consideration. Garcia (2015) notes how the notions of sex and gender are typically influenced by the norms of heteronormativity and the way in which bodies are gazed at, and he claims that most characters in the novel find it difficult to fit into the constructed concepts of sex and gender. When sex and gender are seen as fixed or stable

categories, those characters “who find accommodation within the term *queer* are perceived as people with failed genders” (p. 71). Moreover, most characters in *The cutting room* will actually fit the label *queer* and could be interpreted, in Garcia’s (2015) terms, as walking through the queer labyrinth, or, in Butlerian (2004) terms, as challenging the fictitious categories that establish a one-to-one relation between sex and gender.

At this point, it is interesting to notice how, one way or another, the criticism on *The cutting room* constantly revolves around the notion of gender. Either it has perceived the untypical or unmanly traits of the private eye in the novel or it has noticed Welsh’s (2002) denunciation of the abuse of male power against women. Criticism has even claimed that most characters in the novel are actually queer in terms of their fluid sexualities and their gendered identities. The hypothesis that can be derived from that specific concern with genders is that *it is precisely in its original representation of genders that lies the power of The cutting room as a new configuration of hard-boiled fiction*. Moreover, Welsh’s (2002) approach to genders seems to be what introduced the truly inventional in a novel otherwise apparently loyal to the formulaic character of hard-boiled fiction. In this context, then, this work aspires to find answer to the following research questions:

1. Which genders are represented in *The cutting room*?
2. How do these representations comply with or disrupt the conventions of hard-boiled fiction?

Methods

Once I had taken a decision as regards my research questions, I set for myself a series of objectives I would follow in the pursuit of a response to my queries. By May 2019, in my research project (Res. 380-CD-19), the best version of those aims read as follows:

- to analyze the performative qualities of characters belonging in different genders in *The cutting room*,
- to examine those traits in the light of theories of gender and in view of recent criticism on the novel, and
- to articulate a new reading and interpretation of the novel on the basis of the results drawn from 1 and 2 and in relationship with the categorization of the novel as hard-boiled fiction.

For the analysis of the novel, I kept to the central concepts derived from the theoretical framework introduced in Chapter 1. For an answer to the first research question, I carefully studied the *stylized repetitions of acts* (Butler, 1990, p. 140) of the characters that I considered representative of each gender present in *The cutting room*. In other words, I examined how genders were performed by those characters. At that stage of analysis, I focused my attention on the characterization of the main participants in the novel and, particularly on “how the facts about the characters emerge gradually, diversified, or actually conveyed by speech and action” (Lodge, 2011, p. 68). This explains the descriptive nature of the chapters in this work devoted to analysis and my preoccupation with providing samples of the characters’ speech and action that evidence the points I am trying to make clearly. Once those cases were collected, I proceeded to read and interpret them in the light of the theoretical (Butler, 1990, 2004; Connell, 2005; Glover & Kaplan, 2000) and critical material (Garcia, 2015; Miller, 2006; Tregnaghi, 2014) already studied for an initial comprehension of the issues under consideration. I tried to display this articulation between my readings and what I was finding in the literary work through sporadic references to the theory and the criticism I studied for this work throughout Chapters 3, 4, and 5.

It was when I was finishing the first stage of my analysis that my central hypothesis emerged: I sought to confirm that the representations of gender present in the novel disrupt the conventions of hard-boiled fiction but do so only up to a certain extent. The examination of

those degrees of change constitute the last section in Chapters 3 and 5, in which I explore the representation of each gender in *The cutting room* in relationship to the ways in which it has been usually embodied in the tradition of hard-boiled fiction. In order to do that, I compiled a list of the key characteristics of hard-boiled fiction based on Scaggs (2005) and Horsley (2005), and I paid special attention to those traits involving specifically the gendered representations of the characters in the genre under analysis. For a discussion of the novel, I articulated a final reading and interpretation of it, in which I tried to integrate the responses suggested for both research questions in an attempt to describe genders in the *The cutting room* as a new configuration of hard-boiled fiction.

Chapter Three

Women in *The cutting room*

Two clearly differing representations of women can be traced in *The cutting room*: women that have been weakened by the ruthless hegemonic masculinity described in the novel and those to which the patriarchal system have offered chances to become empowered and they have felt ready to get them. These two different types will be analyzed in this section, and the analysis will be followed by a partial conclusion on how both relate to the traditional configurations of hard-boiled fiction.

The weakened women

The patriarchal practices reinforced by hegemonic masculinity usually legitimize the dominant position of men and the subordination of women in society. As it has already been discussed, a patriarchal society forcibly represents women as “feminine”, or, in other words, attached to individual characteristics as submission, fragility, and domesticity. At a first glance, this is the pattern suggested in *The cutting room*.

While working on McKindless’s house clearance, Rilke finds in the old man’s attic a series of photographs displaying the torture and murder of a woman in the 1940s. The girl in the photographs is central for the development of the story since the auctioneer decides to investigate the identity of the woman and uncover the truth about the disturbing material. Seen from Rilke’s point of view, the description of the photographs reproduces in detail the ways in which the woman’s body has been tortured:

The woman has been cruelly treated. There are the raised marks of a whipping on her stomach and thighs. Her ankles, calves and knees are bound with bristly rope which digs into her flesh. Her hands are tight behind her back, presumably secured. (p. 35)

Noticeably, the visual enactment of torturous sexual acts inflicted upon a dying girl disturbs Rilke so much that he feels the need to recreate the scene clearly in his mind. Moreover, as they illustrate “a mutilated female corpse” (Miller, 2006, p. 76), the gory photographs stand also as the explicit expression of the dehumanization and abjection of the female body, and they belong in the visual genre generally known as *snuff*. *Snuff* has been defined by relatively informal sources as “a real (not staged) filmed murder, usually of raping and killing a woman, which, in some cases, is viewed for sexual arousal” (*Urban Dictionary*, 2019). Even though the circumstances do not allow their sexual arousal, not only Rilke but also every informant to whom he shows the photographs seem to be initially troubled but then reacting to the images as if allowed to contemplate them freely. It is no wonder then that most of those informants are men. Therefore, the photographs also act as a metaphor implying the power embodied by the male gaze. “The other [in this case, the tortured female body] is treated not as a person but as a representation” (Miller, 2006, p.79), and its *aesthetic* contemplation is permitted to men throughout the novel. “I felt peaceful. A little boat on a calm ocean” (p. 36), expresses Rilke after a long examination of the photographs. The description of his feelings when observing the photographs for the first time is complementary with the satisfying contemplation of Derek, an informant of the case, who notes that there is “something beautiful” (p.79) about them.

That permission to contemplate the women’s body without restrictions can be traced back to the early Renaissance since it was in those times when Western art started to use the female nude as a widespread genre. French philosopher Didi-Huberman (2005) noticed that, mainly in paintings by Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510), women were not only naked but also “perpetually slaughtered Venuses” (p. 78) in the sense that, even well into the late 19th century, they appeared in most cases sleeping or having been recently killed. Whereas the naked body is presented as a symbol of erotic beauty, it stands as an object of both admiration and horror. It can be stated that the woman in the photographs represents an absence relegated from the

patriarchal society: her death has become not only difficult to investigate due to the barrier of time but also a form of art present forever in the photographs offered freely to the male gaze.

Together with photography, film constitutes another way in which harm through illegal practices are inflicted upon women in *The cutting room*. Indeed, Derek, an amateur filmmaker employed by a local pornographer, explains to Rilke the mechanisms developed in the trade and narrates a repulsive but revealing experience when filming a woman:

It was horrible (...) I'd begun filming when I realized the woman didn't want to be there. Tears streaked down her face. She was crying without making a sound. She was foreign. Fuck knows where from. (...) I wanted to slapped her, tell her to look elsewhere, look at the man who was fucking her, he was the rapist, not me. (p. 235)

Through the detailed description of the woman's feelings, the young man makes special emphasis on the sexualization and the vulnerability of the female body to fulfill the triple sexual desires of the man having sex with her, the male gaze represented here by the camera, and the man behind it, embodying all the potential viewers of the scene. Thus perpetrated, visual rape becomes the cruelest act inflicted on women in terms of their physical and psychological domination. As the story unfolds, prostitution and pornography as forms of real rape become practices that dominant male groups exert on women through the use of violence and sound instruments for the perpetuation of the patriarchal system.

As in every patriarchal society, in *The cutting room*, the practices described above are accepted and concealed even by women. Such is the case in the novel of Miss McKindless, the alleged murderer's sister. The 80-year-old woman calls Rilke to carry out an estate sale following the death of her brother, establishing the odd conditions that the house must be cleared in under a week and her brother's attic emptied in private without involving more people in the task. Through these requests the readers somehow realize that Miss McKindless is aware of his brother's snuff tastes on pornography. Moreover, when Rilke encourages her to

sell a valuable collection of pornographic fiction, she strongly states: “I want to know nothing, see nothing” (p. 41), and orders him to burn everything immediately. Her obsessive attempts at erasing Mr. McKindless’ crimes are even present in her last minutes of life. In the hospital, Miss McKindless admits that her “brother was always involved with questionable people” (p. 203) and argues a defense on her complicity:

He was a lovely child. A clever, beautiful boy who could have been anything he wanted. When we were growing up and he was naughty I tried to protect him from punishment – and it was harsh punishment. As he grew older his misdemeanors became more complex, but I continued to do my best to shelter him from their consequences. (...) I am willing to take my share of the blame. (...) Remember, there were just the two of us. He was my only family. How could I abandon that child? (p. 204)

During her entire life she keeps a caring attitude towards her brother, and even after his apparent death she is worried about his reputation. Weakened by the hegemonic patriarchy, the elderly woman represents the emotional woman caring for the family in a motherly way and protecting the respectability of their domestic home, a role that is actually as devoid of her own agency as that one of the murdered women in the photographs.

The empowered women

In opposition to Miss McKindless and the murdered woman suffering exploitation in *The cutting room*, other female characters resist male superiority and dominance and even subvert gender binarism. Anne-Marie embodies the most salient case of resistance to hegemonic patriarchy. The young girl is an actress working at Camera Club, her own photo studio where she makes a living by posing half-naked. The male members of the club have the possibility to photograph her while she strikes different poses for photo-shoots.

When she is asked whether she can recognize the picture of Mr. McKindless as her client, she categorically answers: “I never talk to the clients. I’m the muse, untouchable and silent. I’d lose my power over them if I spoke. I’m a fantasy object. The moment they realise I’m a real girl I’ve blown it” (p. 89). Through her performance and its representation as an artistic endeavor, she is able to recognize and take advantage of the duality of being the object of the male gaze but, at the same time, being the one in control of the situation.

Assuming the male role in the family, Anne-Marie’s brother protects the woman from the devious behaviors in which some clients may incur. The exchanges between them give readers a chance to delve into Anne-Marie’s determination and empowerment. At some point, Anne-Marie confronts her brother’s reservations and softens the dangerous position of her job:

‘I’m the one in control. I don’t fuck anyone. (...) No one touches me. I don’t do a striptease. I pose. I make them wait while I go through a whole fashion show. I give them winter wear, day dresses, evening gowns, the lot. It’s only after I’ve modelled the swimwear that I take my clothes off.’ She laughed. (p. 93)

Anne-Marie highlights the importance of art in her performance, downplaying the sexuality implicit in the event of taking her clothes off. She does not feel abused by male observers. In fact, she actually enjoys the job. “Admit it, Anne-Marie, you enjoy it as much as they do, you get a kick out of it. You like the attention, posing away up there, showing them everything you’ve got” (p. 92). Her brother’s words offend the girl, who argues “why don’t you just get it over with and call me a whore” (p. 92). She perceives herself as an artist, not as an abject submissive to male sexual pleasure, and therefore she considers she has the right to enjoy it. Thus Anne-Marie stands as an empowered female character in an untouchable position, controlling men’s behavior and time, and even getting pleasure from the activity.

This brotherly relation may be read as the counterpart of the McKindlesses’ co-dependent union. The young siblings run a business together, but they act independently and

the original trait in the novel becomes the capability of the girl to have become empowered. On the contrary, for the McKindless the situation is completely different: brother and sister have depended on each other since their childhood. The old man is always in need of his sister to cover his crimes. Trying to help him, she has never had the possibility to be free and to accomplish her goals in life, as is the case of Anne-Marie. Anne-Marie, who is even trained in martial arts, never remains passive, obeying male orders; she sets her own rules.

In addition to the empowering attitude Anne-Marie takes in artistic posing, she is also the woman in charge of the narrative resolution in *The cutting room*. She is the informant who tells Rilke about Mr. McKindless' unconventional sexual taste since the man has been her client in Camera Club. Mr. McKindless looks for the young woman to take revenge and tries to stab her, but she is the one who finally kills him. On his way to the crime scene, Rilke is worried "remembering Anne-Marie's ordeal, the temptation she had felt to give herself up to the knife, her wish for revenge" (p. 268). Once in the place, he describes the scene of death:

the body looked small in death. Head thrown back, pale face raised to sky, lips frozen in a last ghastly grin, as if caught in a final yearning for life. A red sea glazed the rough pile of the carpet, spreading into a river, a slick scarlet trail that edged into brown, where a desperate, failing effort had been made to crawl towards the door. The bloodied hands clutched at the stomach, caught in the process of trying to force something back in. (p. 276)

In opposition to the initial description of the young woman's mutilated corpse in the photographs, in this concluding chapter, the male villain's body ends up belittled and "captured forever" (p. 276) once his picture is taken by a police photographer. This, in turn, sets a contrast with an empowered Anne-Marie who, even though trembling, is still conscious and alive. In

the climax of the novel, “Welsh plays with our generic expectation that Anne-Marie requires someone to save her, and that –if Rilke or the police are too late– she will be found butchered, in a suitable combination of sex and gore” (Miller, 2006, p. 82). Instead of falling into the crime fiction clichéd image of a vulnerable woman ending either dead or rescued by a hero, Anne-Marie defends herself against the old man’s threat, becoming once again the empowered woman who ultimately defeats the patriarchy.

There is also a minor female character in an official position of power in *The cutting room*, reinforcing Anne-Marie’s already dominant role. This is the case of Rose Bowery, the owner of the small business called Bowery Auctions, where Rilke is employed. Rilke describes her:

If Maria Callas and Paloma Picasso had married and had a daughter she would look like Rose. Black hair scraped back from her face, pale skin, lips painted torture red. She smokes Dunhill, drinks at least one bottle of red wine a night, wears black and has never married. Four centuries ago Rose would have been burnt at the stake and some days I think I would have been in the crowd cheering the action along. They called her the Whip; you might think she likes the name, she encourages it so. (p. 11)

Rilke’s reference to the strong female celebrities Maria Callas (1923-1977) and Paloma Picasso (1949-) highlights Rose’s personality, a mixture of a feminine and glamorous “diva” as well as a strong leader and businesswoman. Her resolute leadership in the auction market is remarked by Rilke, who calls her “the Whip” (p. 11). This type of personal trait is important in her business, as Rilke then explains their job involves a “ring”, an “illegal and ancient association of dealers who trade in the same class of goods” (p. 120). Such associations are mainly managed by unscrupulous male leaders working in the underworld depicted in the novel.

‘I love those Irish bastards’

‘You love their money’

‘I love their money. But I’ll tell you what I love almost as much, they fuck that cunt

Jenson. Tell you, Rilke, one day I’m going to expose Jenson’s ring’. (p. 124)

In reference to one the most important smugglers in Glasgow, she is determined to succeed and dismantle the illegal group that has been boycotting and threatening her own trade. Unlike Anne-Marie, who plays the role of the innocent girl, Rose adopts the “masculine” traits of assertiveness, strength, and sharpness to reach her own goals. Hard drinking and sexually active, she is neither the typical female character responsible for a family in a domestic sphere nor the victim of the oppressive male power. The 40-year-old woman reveals women’s experiences in the face of patriarchal systems of crime and business. As in the case of Anne-Marie, once more, Welsh takes some of her female characters beyond victimhood and into roles as empowered women, willing to face threats and attacks from men, which subverts normative gender expectations.

Victims or Transgressors: Women in *The cutting room*

The representation of female characters as submissive to the male imperatives in crime fiction has exposed the historically maleness of the genre. Writers have included in their works the clichéd versions of the female *victim* or *transgressor* to present the dichotomous nature of women as either good or evil from a male perspective. Welsh seems to know these clichés perfectly well, and in *The cutting room* she takes hard-boiled fiction a step further, reinventing those figures traditionally associated with women but offering a 21st century version of them.

In the novel the young girl in the photographs stands for the vulnerable target of a sexual predator, which somehow mimics the obsession of crime fiction with the female victim. The beautiful murdered woman, which has been a historical crime fiction motif since early classic

detective fiction in the 19th century, is dead even before the story starts, and, as it has already been described, offered to the male gaze for contemplation. While observing the *snuff* photographs of the sexually assaulted girl, a fascinated male character notes: “The innocent drained of blood. The victim of vampires. ‘The death of a beautiful woman is the most beautiful thing in the world’. Edgar Allan Poe said that” (p. 80). The comment, though, goes further than signaling the character’s informed allusion to the American writer. It marks not only Welsh’s crediting Poe (1809-1849) with “inventing” the modern detective genre but also her deliberate appropriation of his poetic woman, dead and beautiful, in her own version of hard-boiled fiction.

However, in *The cutting room* there is a twist in the representation of the death of the beautiful woman. As in crime fiction in general, her snuffing has been cruel and violent: she has been captured, raped and murdered by a powerful male aggressor, which in turn displays the passivity and objectification of the girl attacked by the action of the male exploiter. Yet, even though the crime takes place in the 1940s, it is in the 21st century that the private eye has to reveal the still present underworld of sexual exploitation against women. There are still female victims whose captivity, rape, and murder have to be investigated and whose death will not always find the justice they deserve because they often occur with the compliance of the large institutions of the current political and economic system. In the hands of a female author, this appropriation of hard-boiled fiction focused on the central concern of violence against women can be read as a form of protest.

In a similar vein, the figure of the *femme fatale*, whose substantial use in crime fiction has been credited to Chandler (Horsley, 2005, p. 81), seem to have been appropriated differently by Welsh. In classical hard-boiled fiction, the *femme fatale* plays a central role because she commits criminal acts, usually killings, in order to achieve her goals with a deliberate intention, thus becoming a “sexy manipulative woman, associated with ‘the nastiness’” from which the private eye has to escape from (Horsley, 2005, p. 81-82). Even if

in *The cutting room* none of the female characters are construed within that clear framework of misogyny, Anne-Marie could be read as a *femme-fatale* turned transgressor.

On the one hand, the young woman, displays the typical characteristics attributed to the figure: manipulative sexuality and dubious morality, independence, toughness, and transgression. Yet, she is never represented in terms of her “evilness”. On the other hand, the same traits associated to the *femme fatale* that disturbed patriarchal assumptions of order and control in traditional hard-boiled fiction are now taken to depict an empowered young woman, capable of living and enjoying her own sexuality even at the expense of men, whom she charges for her nude photos. Moreover, Anne-Marie is allowed in *The cutting room* not only to disturb the patriarchy but even to metaphorically end it with the final killing of the evil McKindless, a scene which is practically unthinkable for traditional hard-boiled fiction.

Chapter Four

The transgender community in *The cutting room*

Based exclusively on an analysis of the chapter entitled “TV land”, in this section, a brief description of the transgender community as seen from Rilke’s perspective is offered. The account is followed by a reflection on the role of Rilke as an external observer of the scene and its significance for the novel and the genre under analysis.

The scene at the Chelsea Lounge

Transvestites constitute a recurrent backdrop to the actions on stage in *The cutting room*. However, there is a chapter in the novel specifically devoted to the description of what Rilke labels *the transgender community*. In “TV Land”, Welsh introduces, through Rilke’s observations, the population clubbing at the Chelsea Lounge, a transgender nightclub in Glasgow. There, “everyone was in women’s clothes apart from me [Rilke] and a portly middle-aged man in a terrible jumper, talking intently to two of the most exotically dressed girls” (p. 107). Here, Rilke feels driven to remark on the transvestites’ feminine outfits, but, interestingly, he respects their gender identity by calling them *girls* and is quick to notice the attraction they seem to exert on men. Acting as an external observer and judge, Rilke describes drag performance throughout the entire chapter. I understand *drag* here as any “person who ‘performs’ a gender that does not ‘match’ their ‘sex’” (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004, p. 8).

The Chelsea Lounge is initially described by Rilke as “a club for dubious gentlemen, designed by a Georgian poof with a Homeric bent” (p. 99). The description not only reinforces the idea that the people at stake are in fact men engaged in seemingly seedy acts but also sets the extravagant setting in which the whole action will take place. As the auctioneer and his employer Rose arrive at the place, readers are offered Rilke’s first impression of his transvestite friend Leslie at the Chelsea Lounge:

Les raised his hands in a *ta da!* showgirl gesture giving me a full-toothed smile, opening his eyes wide as Josephine Baker. His white-blond wig was layered into soft ringlets which sprawled in artful disarray across his shoulders. His red dress had a 1940s feel, broad shoulders tapering into an alarmingly tight waist, cinched by a black patent belt, a plunging neckline with the illusion of a significant bust. (p. 102-103)

Together with the intentional repetition of the possessive adjective *his*, the attempt at exaggerating feminine characteristics is clear throughout the quotation, as is the fact that those traits are tried to be conveyed almost exclusively through gesture and clothing. This, in turn, validates Solana's (2014) assertion that transgender acts "reveal, through the hyperbolic imitation, the performative structure of all gender" (p. 2). Moreover, Rose, Rilke's employer notices at once that "hyperbolic imitation" since she believes that Leslie exotically emulates and mocks the female gender. Rose observes Leslie's acts as a set of cultural ideals of gender commonly associated with women, and, as a consequence, she describes him as "way overdressed" (p. 97) and wonders if "he's just making fun of women" (p. 97). She is evidently pointing at the generally criticized "hyperfemininity" usually said to be embodied by transvestites.

However, the Butlerian (1990) theory on performativity refers to the imitative status of all genders which repeat a series of socially regulated ideals or norms. Thus, all gender identities, not merely the hyperfeminized transvestite, are instituted through a stylized repetition of acts, and therefore the "feminine" characteristics Rose judges exaggerated in Leslie are neither the expression of an inner essence constituting an original or natural gender nor necessarily that exaggerated *per se*. Opposite to Rose's, Rilke's perception of transvestites goes in that direction when, after a long and detailed description of the way he imagines them undressing, he concludes: "But while they are at the Chelsea Lounge, dressed with care, they are the girls" (p. 102). He acknowledges the performative quality of gender but somehow

rejects judging it hyperbolic. In his usually neutral expectations on the world, he deems gender performance as part of life: “dressing never hurt anyone” (p. 102).

Now, it can also be claimed that Leslie’s performance at the Chelsea Lounge goes further than Rose’s and Rilke’s opinions and that it stands as an example of the political role of transvestites who resist any fixed categories of what is either masculine or feminine. Furthermore, Rilke seems to be aware of his friend’s stance, and, as he observes Leslie’s body style, pose, and gestures, he concludes that “dressed, from a distance, he can be anyone you want him to be” (p. 52), a comment he reinforces later on in the novel when he claims that “no one would mistake him for a woman, but, for a man in a dress, the effect was pretty smooth” (p. 103). In his ability to be anyone you want him to be or, perhaps even better, anyone *he* wants to be lies Leslie’s power to subvert assumed gender categories and show that binary oppositions do not essentially exclude one other but may also be open to multiple combinations with each other and with any other category. Not only Leslie but anyone can apparently be, in Rilke’s reasoning, either a woman or a man in a dress. In Leslie’s body, gender categories are denaturalized, and his body is assigned the clearly “political role of the drag parody” (Solana, 2014, p. 8), a resistance to cultural assumptions of gender that is even reflected in his name since, as can be noticed immediately once the character is introduced, *Leslie* may ambiguously refer to a man or woman.

By the end of the chapter, Rilke, an acute observer of the reality around him, takes the readers to even further and deeper observations than the ones already reached in this section, i.e. (a) that drag could be taken as the ultimate token that gender is basically performed, and (b) that it constitutes an essentially political act. First, Rilke reflects on the transvestites’ embodiment of hyperfemininity and, after exemplifying the case of a man who, instead of exposing a covered homosexuality, reveals his role as a “happily married heterosexual man” (p. 102) when not in drag, he states that “most of the girls are not gay. They are part of what we call the *transgender community*” (p. 102). In this way, he labels the population at the

Chelsea Lounge well beyond man or woman, gay or transvestite, and he plunges directly into queer theory, and argues there is no essential equivalence between transvestites and homosexuality. Second, he realistically concludes that the girls' bodies limit the feminine roles they try to perform:

There are things that cannot be hidden; (...) they could stare at fashion plates, visit the beauty salon, buff their body bare of hair, but they would never be anything but a man in a dress. Poor Cinderellas, never to be transformed. (p. 107)

The subversive drag act consists in the performance of the acts a person feels attracted to, though there is a "dissonance" between their body and the gender that is being performed. A transvestite, in this case classified by Rilke as *a man in a dress*, represents an individual in the problematic space of failing to comply with discursive regimes of gender (Garcia, 2015). These Cinderellas want to be called *girls* at the Chelsea Lounge, but once in their daily lifestyles, they have to continue performing their roles as men. Rilke describes one of them as a "large girl in a red velvet dress who looked as if she might spend the daylight hours cementing bricks" (p. 108). The description may be read in two opposite though perhaps complementary readings. Rilke appears to acknowledge both the girl's femininity through her wearing a red velvet dress and a rough masculinity described by the reference to her being a construction worker, the *manly* job he imagines for her. Yet, his somewhat pejorative comments could be interpreted as Rilke's judgment of the girls' enactment of their gender as mere performance without substance, just as the title "TV land" used to describe the scene at the Chelsea Lounge seems to suggest.

Rilke's dualism and Leslie's power

As it has already been evidenced, the scene at the Chelsea Lounge is presented to the readers through Rilke's eyes, and, as stated at the end of the previous section, his perspective

seems to move throughout the chapter in a pendular fashion between his acknowledging the girls' assumed gender and his discarding the chance that they can embody any type of gender combination they want, due to their ultimately being *men in dresses*.

Similarly, Rilke's position as an observer seems to be decidedly dualistic. On the one hand, Rilke comfortably hangs around the transgender club and has a close friendly relation with Leslie. These habits are clearly opposite to those in traditional hard-boiled fiction, in which private eyes such as Marlowe are usually immersed in heteronormative and even misogynistic contexts. Moreover, in Chandler's collection of narratives involving the famous private eye, it is possible to perceive "the fascinated disgust Marlowe expresses for effeminate men" (Horsley, 2005, p. 82), an attitude which runs contrary to Rilke's and his surroundings. Interestingly, in *The cutting room* Welsh offers its readers not only the transgender context of the Chelsea Lounge but also a group of secondary characters who are not relevant for the plot but add to the deconstruction and re-evaluation of various concepts of gender. On the other hand, Rilke's perspective on the place and its population sometimes reads as still quite chauvinistic. At some point, the Chelsea Lounge is called by Rilke a "den of iniquity" (p. 101) and the people who are initially called plainly *girls* become "girls": "after abandoning the night club, the 'girls' remove their wigs, clean away their faces, take off their dresses and get their man-clothes again on their way home" (p. 108). In this way, Rilke acts as an external observer, reinforcing "the 'outsider' status of the PI characteristically present in traditional hard-boiled narrative" (Scaggs, 2005, p. 59). As in the case of Marlow, with Rilke, it is the viewpoint of the private eye that forms not only the focus of the narrative but also the stance to other characters as well.

However, Welsh does give a voice to the transgender community, and that voice is embodied in Leslie. Even though Rilke reaches the club in an attempt to get more information

about McKindless and remarks that he “wasn't interested in talking to anyone apart from Les” (p. 109), Leslie openly rejects his interrogation and he commands “listen to Aunty Les and drop the Philip Marlowe impersonation” (p. 104), in an evident reference to Chandler's (1944) pioneer private eye of hard-boiled fiction. Thus, Leslie opposes Rilke as an embodiment of the macho type and asserts his non-binary gender configuration by calling herself *Aunt Les*. In “TV land” it is Leslie, not Rilke, who has a right to power and subversion, to embody, to perform, and to speak.

Chapter Five

The male body and the male gaze in *The cutting room*

This chapter is focused on Rilke, the main male character in *The cutting in the room*. Passing reference is made to other men in the story, but the overwhelming presence of the private eye throughout the story as a paradigm of masculinity was central in the decision to limit the analysis to the representation of the protagonist of the novel and his gaze as a male character.

Rilke as a macho knight

Throughout his quest to find the truth about the brutal murder of a young woman, Rilke discloses to the readers the ways through which the key political institutions in Glasgow, together with illegal crime associations, establish asymmetrical relations of power that define women's inferior status in society. As already evidenced by Tregnaghi (2014), in *The cutting room*, women are turned into "object beings" by the social structures of male power, or, in other words, they are dehumanized through the almost exclusive focus on the female body as a sexual object, as implied by the snuff photographs taken during the murder. About the event and the photographs, however, Rilke claims, "I've no idea who she was –just a lassie– but she was somebody and I can't leave her there" (p. 49). Rilke stresses the fact that the victim is *somebody*, a human being, and in this way, he alters that dehumanizing attitude towards the murdered girl in the photographs and qualifies her as a "subject". Moreover, when asked about the reasons for his persistence on investigating the case and even prevented from doing so several times throughout the novel, the protagonist notes that he wants justice for the victim just because of the mere fact that she was a human being, somebody who cannot be left there.

Therefore, Rilke acts as a warrior knight, an archetypal image mainly associated with

the masculine aspects of the character. The archetype was defined by Munt (1994) as “the representative of Man, ... the focus of morality, the mythic hero. He is the controlled center surrounded by chaos, and an effective reading must involve identification with this mediator of action [and] truth” (as quoted in Miller, p. 84). Against a dominant heterosexual and patriarchal society ridden by crime and disorder, Rilke is concerned not only with the justice owed to the dead girl but also with the welfare of prospective female victims. As the novel progresses, not only is he interested in the girl in the photographs but also in other women who suffer the violence inflicted by an oppressive male world, including the judiciary and the police, which act together as the villain in the story. This is the case of his main informant Anne-Marie, one of McKindless’ victims, and Miss McKindless, the murderer’s aging sister, whom he even visits in hospital. The vicissitudes he has to stand in his quest for truth and justice and his unrelenting defense of women, mostly represented as powerless, definitely make him embody a contemporary knight, siding with morality against a decaying world of crime and degradation.

Moreover, this representation of his masculinity is reinforced by the, though sexualized, mostly emotional and empathetic ties he creates with women. An encounter with the above-mentioned Anne-Marie is mainly rendered in an atmosphere charged with romance and tenderness. At that moment, he wonders, “How many years since I had been with a woman?” (p. 224), and, as he recalls it, he expresses,

I put an arm tentatively round her shoulders and she leaned into me. The strangeness of holding a woman, delicate, fragile, a hollow-boned bird (...) Tongue touching tongue, tenderly, tip to tip. I opened my eyes and saw that hers were closed. I ran a finger down her spine. She moved closer, small breasts pressing into my chest. (p. 219-21)

Rilke’s description of this supposedly sexual encounter exposes his current unfamiliarity with heterosexual relations and his representation of women following a traditional view of femininity. The woman in the passage is small, delicate, and fragile; their

kissing is tender. This, in turn, strengthens his role as warrior knight in that, touched by the unfortunate situation of the woman, he assumes an entirely protective stance. Indirectly acknowledging that a sexual affair will not be possible, he notes that, before leaving her, they “kissed a platonic goodbye” (p. 221).

Nevertheless, the tender and romantic atmosphere of his private encounters with women can be positively contrasted to his powerfully masculine reaction when powerless women are in need of his help publicly. In the chapter “TV land”, Rilke is at a transvestite club, when he suddenly realizes that Sandy, a drag queen present in the place, is being forced to pose for a cameraman. He tries to save her from the gaze of the video camera and from public mockery and fights with the man in charge of the film. Rilke himself describes the aggressiveness employed in the quarrel: “I gave him a swift kick, catching him off centre, wresting the camera from him as he toppled” (p. 114). In this case, Rilke stands out among the people, the majority of them transvestites, protects Sandy, and confronts the only man in the scene who is likely to fight back. Rilke’s use of violence in public follows the traditional representation of the masculine hard-boiled private eye, in which, as claimed by Connell (2005) in relationship to most masculinities, men make their masculinity visible through their bodily performance, by using force and occupying a space, or, in other words, having a strong physical presence in the world.

Thus, Rilke embodies the warrior knight rescuing the defenseless female victim, and, even though in this case the role is taken by a member of the transgender community, in Rilke’s repertoire of representations, she classifies as *girl*. His embodying the hero, however, is clearly rejected by his friend Rose, who had observed the scene in horror:

‘Oh, very macho.’

‘I suppose so.’

‘Quite the macho guy all around, aren’t we?’

‘If you say so.’ (p. 116)

The verbal exchange emphasizes two opposing ways of assessing the performance of masculinity. While Rose qualifies Rilke's act as "very macho", Rilke merely acknowledges his explosive and aggressive masculine "nature". In this context, *macho* is used to represent a tough masculinity, typically associated with a readiness to resort to violence to solve problematic situations. After hearing Rose's remark, though, Rilke himself focuses on the morality of his actions, and he explains that he has proceeded as he believes to be fair: "They were making a fool out of that girl. I couldn't stand any longer. She couldn't see what they were doing to her" (p. 117). Even though for him it appears to be the norm to act impulsively and aggressively, his line of reasoning is not enough to calm an irritated Rose, who seems to be used to Rilke's displays of rough masculinity, and she concludes, "So you decided to be the knight in shining armour" (p. 117). For Rose, then, Rilke's self-representation as a warrior knight helping the powerless does not necessarily imply he is allowed to use violence. Rilke, on the contrary, just perceives his violent reactions to be part of his naturalized maleness.

Moreover, there are numerous instances along the novel in which Rilke's masculinity is made visible through his aggressive behaviour and his blatant dominance over others. For example, he defends himself against his close friend Leslie self-confidently mastering an argument between them through physical harm, which he describes in detail: "I turned and grabbed him by his jumper pushing him up against the wall, bringing my other hand up to his neck, pressing against his Adam's apple, crushing the breath out of him" (p. 166). On an occasion in which a religious fanatic apparently troubled by Rilke's homosexuality hits Rilke in a seedy porn store, he instinctively acts in self-defense: "I tilted his balance until he gave a gasp... then, brought his face to mine... and dashed my forehead against his nose, hearing the crunch as cartilage crumbled" (p. 176). In this encounter, Rilke's aggressive maleness is reinforced by the emphasis he places on the accurate description of the force he inflicted over the different parts of his male opponents' bodies.

Similarly, Rilke's sensibility towards women in intimate contacts already described in line with the knight archetype can be clearly contrasted with the macho toughness displayed in the sexual encounters with younger men recurrent throughout the novel. One of those sexual exploits is depicted in the following terms:

I judge him to be about twenty, slighter than me, good muscle tone, but I knew I could take him in an unarmed fight (...) When he was close enough for our breath to merge he stopped, passive, waiting (...) I stood still, playing master, forcing him to make the first move. (p. 149-150)

The reference to an "unarmed fight" marks, once again, his awareness about his male superiority, "mastery", and naturalized right to rule using force. At the same time, Rilke explicitly exposes the inferiority of his partner as described by the words "slighter" and "passive". These traits are similar to those he uses to describe women, but, in the case of younger men, they do not move him to tenderness but usually to blatant, though imaginary, abuse: "I imagined myself in a movie I'd seen ... raping this boy ... taking him against his will" (p. 153). Glimpses of real life in relation to the investigation on the case of the abused girl in the picture emerge in this moment and Rilke thinks about the satisfaction of harming the other. Wanner (2015) explains the contradiction of Rilke's attitudes in view of the masculinity he is performing in each case in the following terms:

when we witness him having rough sex –during which he, too, uses another person weaker than himself– we see that even this sensitive man's public persona hides an unexpected penchant for masochism and a stereotypical yet equally unexpected male, sexual aggressiveness. (p. 39)

Thus, Rilke's intimate sensitivity and moral concern about women, which align him with knightly attitudes, go against his public bodily performances and his private instances of sexual activity. Even though both ultimately reinforce a dominant masculine superiority, Rilke's

aggressive, even sadistic, performances can be read not only as naturalized displays of maleness but also as visceral reactions nurtured by his inability to fight against the powerful criminal organizations involved in human trafficking and prostitution which will prevent him from solving the case.

Rilke as poof

As it can be easily inferred from the previous section, the binary divide between masculinity and femininity that reinforces apparently natural ways of categorizing human beings still rules male and female representations in the 21st-century hard-boiled fiction. However, and despite his macho warrior attitude, Rilke, the narrator and main character in *The cutting room*, seems not to fit into these constraining gender categories, and the straight/gay binary understanding of sexuality leaves him outside the heterosexual normative framework. In that vein, Butler (1990) applies the terms *intelligibility* to the binary logics by which subjects accept and live in accordance to heterosexuality as a natural and social norm and *queerness* to the third space that explains the ways of being and thinking of people who do not conform to those prevailing expectations about gender. “‘Queer’ are perceived as people with failed genders, ... ‘incoherent’ or ‘discontinuous’ gendered beings, as opposed to those that are ‘intelligible’” (Garcia, 2015, p. 71). On certain occasions, Rilke perceives himself belonging on that third space and not necessarily in the socially constructed realm of men in terms of fixed masculinity, as restricted only to heterosexuality.

“The straights think that we have some kind of radar, that there are signals we give off, a mode of dress, style of conversations” (p. 68), declares Rilke. Positioning himself in a sphere different from that of “the straights”, Rilke marks his identification with a queer gender as demonstrated by the use of an inclusive *we*. Here, it must also be concurred with Garcia (2015) that “it is not just the skill of the viewer so much as the telltale signs most gay people project, the set of traits that make them unmistakably one” (p. 84). Rilke explicitly acknowledges there

is “a mode of dress, a style of conversation” (p. 68) as clear indications of his gender and sexual orientation, thus making both performative in the Butlerian (1990) sense of the term already introduced in this work.

At the same time, Rilke acknowledges the gaze of people on his sexuality as perceived by the use of the word *radar*, in an almost evident allusion to the concept of *gaydar*. Most recent work on queer studies label *gaydar* the supposed ability of gay people to detect one another’s sexuality or of heterosexual people to judge gays by the same means. Rilke is so conscious of the gaze of other people, either gay or straight, on his own personal traits or “signals” (p. 68) that he makes it truly evident for his readers all along the novel. While walking on the street, he once notices the judging gaze of a stranger: “A drunk careened past me, hands in his pockets, head down, making his way home with a drunk man’s radar. ‘Ahway ta fuck, you ould poof’ he muttered” (p. 26). The stranger’s view is then presented as a powerful tool for recognition that picks up Rilke’s behavior and tags it to queerness using the term *poof*. According to the Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary (2019), *poof* is the British informal and offensive way of calling a homosexual man. Rilke’s queer masculinity is therefore through the stranger’s remark as subordinated to the intelligible heterosexual world.

There is another case, though, in which the term *poof* is used differently. While discussing “the female mind” (p. 139), another auctioneer marks a clear gender distinction between him and Rilke: “The female mind remains a mystery to me. Aye sorry, I forgot you were a poofter. No offence, like” (p. 139). Thus, he immediately associates Rilke’s queerness with femininity, as if subjects not belonging to the masculine gender were part of an opposite and unifying category. Rilke answers a brief “none taken” (p. 139), realizing this situation is just part of the dominant intelligible forms of perceiving masculinity and femininity. This way of classifying genders can be aptly “linked to the assumption our culture generally makes about the mystery of sexuality: that opposites attract. If someone is attracted to the masculine, then that person must be feminine” (Connell, 2005, p. 143). Uttering his intention to cause no

offence, however, in this case Rilke's co-worker publicly acknowledges at least the possibility of queerness, a recognition that was unthinkable for traditional hard-boiled fiction.

Acknowledging his queerness, Rilke frees himself from the oppression of trying to fit the binary understanding of gender and sexuality and seems not to be affected by the judging gaze of heteronormativity. Moreover, he even appears unconcerned about his having sex in public. In Chapter 3 "A walk in the park", the narrator describes a dark square occupied by "junkies" and prostitutes. In this outdoor place, Rilke has sex with a stranger and, through his words, implies the familiarity with this sort of encounters.

He led me up a pathway towards a bench sheltered in the lee of a tree. (...) When he turned I saw a well-set man of around thirty. I couldn't make out his features entirely yet. (...) His right hand was in his pocket, I thought I could make out the bulge of his erection. (...) I tensed, and my free hand formed into a fist. Then he was on his knees and it was the usual routine. (p. 28)

Even though the scene is striking in terms of its narration of open sexuality, it is interesting to notice that, once again, the subtleties of the narrator and main character recur to the description of specific body parts to mark his position in the world. Notice, for example, the hand of both men and the explicit references to the younger man's penis and to oral sex, which takes the reader far beyond the merely discursive discussion of queerness as a concept and into the actual world of gay sexuality as another instance of performing gender.

The police, which in traditional hard-boiled narrative mostly functioned as the representation of hegemonic male power, in this case, extends a helping hand to Rilke's recurrent homosexual behavior:

So, Rilke. Can you not learn some discretion? Are there not clubs you can go to if you want to do that kind of thing? Would it not be pleasant for you? A wee gin tonic, a trot around the dance floor then back to a bachelor pad for whatever it is you want to do. Are you not getting a bit old skulking about in bushes? (p. 30)

Inspector Anderson seems to be accustomed to Rilke's presence at the police station and requests him to be more discreet in the midst of a pleasant conversation. However, the police officer does not dare utter homosexual sexual activity, as shown by the phrases "do that kind of thing" (p. 30) or "whatever is you want to do" (p. 30). Moreover, he also suggests he should have sex in a private space, such as an apartment, and not displaying his sexual orientation openly. This, one way or another, shows the force of heteronormativity and its aspiration to not make visible any kind of action that defies its binary logics.

However, a key revelation in this scene is the repetitiveness of Rilke's sexual action performed in public places. For Butler (1990), what is central in performativity is the repetitiveness of the acts that are constantly performed, which produces a series of effects and become the expression of gender identities. Rilke's recurrent behavior in terms of sexual encounters in public locations with strangers is visible throughout the entire narrative. For instance, while he is in a gay bar searching for information to solve his case, he meets a man and they have sex in the public bathroom: "His name was Ross and he worked with computers (...) I delivered the tray of drinks, then met him down in the basement toilets" (p. 105). A similar action occurs when Rilke meets a young man in the city and, delighted by the youngster's sensual appearance, he crosses the street and goes to his place:

The door to the apartment was open. I pushed it wide and glanced down the dark, narrow hallway. The place looked derelict. (...) I walked towards a light at the end of the corridor, ready for anything, ready to run if need be. (p. 149)

Once there, they looked each other and have sex at once. “He smiled a lazy smile, rose slowly, and came towards me” (p. 149). As with his usual displays of tenderness towards women and of public violence in front of men, signaling his more traditional masculine side, the repetition of homosexual activity in public places clearly positions Rilke in the queer sphere as well.

In sum, Rilke is the character in charge of registering human sexuality beyond the gay/straight binary. He mostly “acts like a man” as reflected in his embodiment of a traditional macho private eye and observed in his intimacy experienced with women. However, from the point of view of hegemonic masculinity, he stands out as queer since “the masculinity of his object-choice subverts the masculinity of his character and social presence” (Connell, 2005, p. 162). Rilke’s behavior exposes the complexity of representation of a general and unique gay identity, as hegemonic masculinity may propose. Rilke discursively acknowledges his queerness and feels free to act just guided by the feelings of each particular moment instead of suffering the pressure of established normative assumptions on gender. Even when the police, an institution long characterized by sexism and homophobia, imposes its social norms, Rilke resists its expectations, as it is clearly visible in the repetitiveness and public display of his acts. If gender identities “are not unitary and fixed, but rather are subject to social and historical variation” (Nixon, 1997, p. 295), then Rilke clearly embodies the contradictions of contemporary conceptions of sex and gender.

Rilke as a private eye

The set of expected traits of hard-boiled private eyes are present in *The cutting room*. Rilke’s actions, for example, concur with those of traditional crime fiction’s private eyes in that all of them struggle to exert control over the chaos of contemporary experience. So, in order to act as the “tough-guy” in scenes of disorder, Rilke frequently develops an unscrupulous conduct and exposes his own anarchic and violent tendencies, as was previously exemplified

in the study of Rilke's masculinity. Adopting a "Philip Marlowe impersonation" (p. 104), Rilke drinks and smokes a lot, lives a dissolute single lifestyle, and rejects any help of the organized forces of law and order such as the Police Department. Yet, if the representation of men as portrayed by the original hard-boiled private eyes offers "an image of the male body as raw power and indestructibility" (1997, as quoted in Horsley, 2005), Rilke seems not to fit those characteristics: his spectral appearance and only sporadic displays of physical toughness portrays an investigative figure that, even though "macho", lacks the unbeatable strength and power of the customary private eye.

Moreover, it is not only at the level of physicality that the traditional hard-boiled private eye gets blurred in *The cutting room*. The private eye was usually characterized as reflecting "marked antifeminist and homoerotic tendencies, evident in anxieties about gender (fear of the 'dangerous woman') and the longing for a male ideal—the lone male, strong, ruggedly handsome, and resisting the confining, emasculating spaces of a domestic life" (Horsley, 2005). These gender assumptions deeply attached to the genre are generally not taken by the protagonist, who, even though perhaps would not be labelled *feminist*, usually shows "unmanly" signs of how deeply troubled he is by women's suffering and how tender he can be with them, as shown in the first section of this chapter.

Similarly, the anxieties about gender in terms of homoerotic tendencies are not veiled in *The cutting room* but blatantly exposed through the figure of Rilke. In that vein, a key subversion of habitual hard-boiled assumptions happens with the representation of the male body as an object of desire. While in traditional hard-boiled fiction this image is mainly centered on female characters wanted by the male gaze, as is the case of the *femme fatale*, in *The cutting room*, it is mostly men who are described in terms of sexual attractiveness. Rilke, for instance, expresses the visual pleasure he experiences when observing Derek: "Youth wrapped in the flag of the Empire. He was handsome. Dark like the black Irish, saturnine. Shoulder-length hair, sensitive mouth, pale-blue eyes, translucent and impossible" (p. 67). The

focus of his gaze falls clearly on the youngster's beauty and desirability. On the contrary, when a girl is the focus of the male gaze, as is the case of Anne-Marie in her Camera Club, she is portrayed as an empowered woman taking advantage of the centrality of her body. Rilke, for example, is not able to take pictures during Anne-Marie's sensual performance:

I was spoiling the ambience. Upsetting the balance, watching the watchers. The model changed position and I lifted my camera, caught the girl in the square of the viewfinder and held her close. I felt like an assassin. The eye behind the lens. My mouth tasted of ashes. I swallowed, pressed the button and the flash exploded. (p. 87)

Once again, the private eye of the story is an outsider observing the rest of the observers, but now aware of the criminal acts of the male audience. He uncomfortably feels like an "assassin", using the camera as an instrument to damage the woman.

Rilke's sensibility and empathy to female characters, together with his freedom in the appreciation of the male body, "demonstrates how Chandler's hard-boiled original can avoid ossification. All he has to do is move with the times, ... moving out of the macho's comfort zone" (Wanner, 2015, p. 40). The protagonist in *The cutting room* seems to have done precisely that, displaying not only a contemporary configuration of masculinity but also a new construction of the private eye adapted to the societal changes brought about by the 21st century.

Chapter Six

Discussion

In this section, I offer concluding responses to the questions I established for this work, and I discuss them in the light of the conceptual framework set for this research at the beginning of this text.

The representation of genders in *The cutting room*

In search of an answer to my first research question, I considered which genders are represented in *The cutting room*. As a response to that query, I can state that in *The cutting room*, most of the characters destabilize and denaturalize the *masculine/feminine* gender division and the *male/female* biological sex classification determined by the heterosexual normative framework. Following Nixon (1997), it could be claimed that the novel openly suggests a movement from an understanding of gender as the representation of two fixed categories, male and female, towards a configuration of each one of them and of them in permanent blending as a series of pluralities. Indeed, their representations expose how gender identities are “open to disruption, variation and transformation” (Glover & Kaplan, 2000, p. x) and subject to social and historical variation. Therefore, I propose a response to my initial research question that includes *plural femininities*, *plural masculinities*, and the incipient presence in the text of *the queer experience*. All of these are conveyed through the stylized repetitions of acts examined throughout this paper.

Most female characters in *The cutting room* challenge the notion of gender as the social, historical and cultural roles that society thinks of as being associated with either the male or the female sex (Benshoff & Griffin, 2004). What emerges from reading their stories is a world of *plural femininities* that debunk the reductive and monolithic notion of being a woman, even if characters like Miss McKindless do comply with the traditional representation of women, long rooted in heteronormativity and still present in modern

societies as the passive and caring “mothers” protecting the domestic sphere and its male members.

On the contrary, other women are eager to challenge expected feminine behaviors. Rose, for instance, stands as the opposite of the “good mother” archetype, which encompasses living alone, having no children, and being the owner and leader of an auction business as well. Moreover, the dangerous environment and devious male coworkers surrounding this determined woman never prevent her from achieving her business goals. At the same time, acting as a strong, proactive, and successful woman, her supposedly male spirit, does not hinder her interest in wearing makeup or appearing sexually attractive to men, usually related to a more traditional view of femininity. Similarly, Anne-Marie is a young woman who disregards the “whore” label her brother tagged on her and she openly enjoys the sexuality that she even performs for a living. Both women represent the figure of the resolute, empowered, and autonomous yet feminine woman of the end of the 20th century, and their genders are the reflection of the articulation and interweaving of different attributes, which have been long attached exclusively to either men or women.

However, either weakened or empowered, there seems to be in *The cutting room* no chance in the case of women of embodying plural femininities in one single person. Despite the plurality of representation, the characters still seem to be stuck in either one or the other extreme of the cline without being able to live and perform plural femininities, a quality that is reserved for the male protagonist and his capacity to embody a straightforwardly plural masculinity.

Hence, Rilke confirms the assertion that “masculinity is not a fixed and unitary category” (Nixon, 1997, p. 300-301). In *The cutting room*, he is the paramount representation of a 21st-century man challenging the assumption that to be a man is to be read as masculine and as heterosexual and confirms the premise that here is more than one version of masculinity. Queering masculinities, Welsh (2002) cleverly portrays a

protagonist whose heroic and “macho” attitudes are complementary to his sexual encounters both with men and women throughout the narration. Rilke does not conform to the norm of “intelligible genders (...) which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice and desire” (Butler, 1990, p. 23); the private eye acknowledges the plurality of experience, lives through his queer gender identity, and is accepted by friends and coworkers. A final point to consider, though, is that, whereas policemen embodying male authority seem not to show prejudice towards Rilke’s sexual tendencies but advise him to keep them private, female characters are allowed to offer their views freely on his gender performances, which clearly opens for readers the realm of the female gaze. This ultimately confirms Butler’s (2004) view that one does produce his or her own gender alone but with others, and this becomes far more noticeable in the queer characters themselves.

Apart from Rilke, a series of minor characters definitely expose a similar experience with “gender trouble” (Butler, 1990). Therefore, drag in *The cutting room* becomes the pivotal experience to address gender performativity and gender as a cultural and mainly communal construction. The transvestites’ bodies, gestures, clothing and discourse both make gender and also exclude them for “the norm”. In this sense, the queer identity implies the perception of being at odds with the “normal” and the legitimate. If *queer* is the umbrella term used as an identity category including people who do not fit the binary (Garcia, 2015), one of the most salient examples in *The cutting room* is Leslie, as well as other transvestite characters at the Chelsea Lounge. The gaze of the other is present as a powerful tool to label Leslie as a “man in a dress” (p. 107). What strikes the most is that it is Rilke himself who tags her that way. Thus, the label exposes the power relations not only between masculinity and femininity but also among the queer population themselves: though *queer* himself, Rilke still performs the “macho” displaying a dominant position over the transvestites since he is enabled to classify them openly.

In sum, embodied in the stylized repetitions of acts that are always under the gaze of the others, genders in *The cutting room* show a tendency to be displayed through a lens of pluralities. Nevertheless, those pluralities work differently depending on the genders under analysis. Female characters embody clear-cut distinctions between those women who have been weakened by the patriarchy and those who have decided to become empowered either by trying to fit the male world or those, usually younger, aspiring to get rid of the snares of the system and to eventually destroy it. Though fairly openly assuming his sexual orientation, the private eye navigates the spaces of plural masculinities, yet he retains for himself the power of heteronormative masculinity while performing both privately and publicly. Finally, transvestites acquired visibility in the novel, and inclusive ways of relating among the different genders represented in the novel are explored. This smartly describes the world of gender relations at the beginning of the 21st century with a clear focus on the performative traits of that experience. Basically, Welsh (2002) appears to claim, we are all in drag.

Genders in a new configuration of hard-boiled fiction

As I have already stated as a response to my first research question, during the latest 20th century and the early 21st century, gender categories have been established to be socially constructed and subject to historical variation. Moreover, since hard-boiled fiction is the crime fiction sub-genre more permeable to social transformations as a consequence of its own responsive nature to society and its aim to address social problems explicitly, it has taken these novel notions and challenged the long-rooted stereotypes attributed to the genre. In this section, I specifically analyzed the potential of hard-boiled fiction to expose the new gender appropriations of the form in the novel under analysis as a response to my second research question: how do the representations of gender in *The cutting room* comply with or disrupt the conventions of hard-boiled fiction?

The female characters in *The cutting room* are a clear sample of how hard-boiled fiction has adapted itself to the social changes in the way of thinking society about gender identity, roles, and sexuality. The elderly Mrs McKindless, who grew during the mid-20th century, represents the gender conceptions of her time: for her, being a woman means caring for family and home. In opposition, the middle-aged businesswoman, Rose, performs “male” roles freely, though the remains of the patriarchal system still jeopardize her chances of being successful. However, it is the young Anne-Marie who clearly displays new gender appropriations of the form in *The cutting Room*. In the past, her attitudes, personality, and physical traits would have configured at once a *femme fatale*, the “dangerous” female character of hard-boiled fiction who was a threat to law and order and to the heroic male character’s morality. However, in *The cutting room*, Anne-Marie is positively depicted as an empowered and independent woman, she sides with male protagonist’s fair social views, and she embodies ultimate justice when she executes the villain. Following Horsley (2005), this ultimately confirms that hard-boiled fiction is finally bringing sexual politics to the fore.

Though not a character in the traditional conception of the term, a murdered young and beautiful woman acts as the starting point unfolding the crime fiction narrative. In this case, the portrait of the girl as a *victim* complies with the traditional traits of the genre, but this time, through the detailed description of the utter vexations on the woman’s body, she aptly comprises a “report”, denouncing broader instances of current patriarchal exploitation such as pornography and prostitution. Similarly, and as also evidenced by Tregnaghi (2014), the representation of people whose gender identities do not fit into a binary male or female framework is also a disruptive adaptation challenging the “maleness” of crime fiction writing. Queerness was usually either excluded from hard-boiled fiction or merely referred to as deviations from the binary norm. Nevertheless, in the novel, transvestites and persons in drag are thoroughly described from the perspective of the protagonist, who shows an overall comprehensive attitude towards their gender identity. Both female victims and queer characters

seem to reclaim at least a presence and a place in the contemporary world as pictured in *The cutting room*.

Throughout the literary work, however, and in terms of gender representation, special emphasis is put on Rilke, the accidental private eye in *The cutting room*. The private eye is the leading character in hard-boiled fiction, and in Chandler's (1944) words, he has to fulfill certain traits attributed to his manliness:

Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. (para. 32)

As a matter of fact, Welsh's (2002) modern private eye still embodies the characteristic hero in the hard-boiled tradition. The premise of every hard-boiled "knight" is to undergo different tests to prove his integrity, such as being fearless when facing challenges and avoiding sexual encounters that could ruin his morality. Complying with this "harsh" personality, Rilke faces smugglers, drug dealers, and human traffickers, and he attacks his opponents violently from time to time. The 43-year-old brave man who works in an auction house surely knows how to move around the unscrupulous and illegal Glaswegian context where the story is set.

However, two traits make Rilke an unusual man, and this is not necessarily in the direction set by Chandler (1944). On the one hand, Rilke specifically sides with and even cares for the powerless groups already discussed in previous paragraphs, which makes him more humane and closer to an ordinary 21st-century man. On the other hand, he also makes an open-minded gay character eager to experience his sexuality freely, as attested by his predisposition throughout the novel to have homosexual encounters and for practicing sex in public places. Furthermore, as a result of his public performance, his coworkers, friends and even the police seem to be aware, following Nixon's (1997) views, of his gender identity and of the dynamic

uses he gives to the male body. Thus, not only society but also the genre itself appear to be gradually accepting the queer gestures of its members and even of its private eyes.

A review of the development of the genre exposes how it has adopted new gender appropriations concurrently with social changes. Even though “Chandler’s judgments were more clearly gendered than those of many other hard-boiled writers” (Horsley, 2005, p. 81), subsequent hard-boiled writers during the late 20th century, influenced by feminist criticism, included female private eyes, transgressor and victim protagonists challenging those patriarchal conceptions. Similarly, *The cutting room* reflects current relations of power, not only between men and women, but also including a third gender group representing queer people, as is the case of its private eye himself. Consequently, *The cutting room* can be read as a deconstruction of what would generally be seen as conventional hard-boiled assumptions about masculine assurance and control, and it positively “demonstrates how Chandler’s hard-boiled original can avoid ossification” (Wanner, 2015, p. 40). All it had to do was move with the times.

Conclusion

With the publication of *The cutting room* in 2002, hard-boiled fiction certainly moved forwards. In terms of the representation of genders, the novel definitely goes beyond the *masculine/feminine* gender division and their ossified and clear-cut congruence with qualities usually thought of as fixed such as *good/strong* and *evil/weak*, respectively. *The cutting room* not only deconstructs gender but also offers a wide panorama of the pluralities available at the beginning of the 21st century. The world depicted in the novel is not one inhabited just by either warrior knights or *femme fatales* since there is room in it for plural femininities, plural masculinities, and even for the queer experience, all of which positively destabilize the heterosexual normative framework of both hard-boiled fiction and the patriarchal system as a whole.

However, as I have somehow noticed halfway through my research, in *The cutting room*, the conventional representation of genders in hard-boiled fiction is disrupted only up to a certain extent. First, that is highly noticeable in the case of women, who seem to have only two options in the world configured by the novel: they are either weakened by the patriarchy or empowered against it. Similarly, in terms of the genre under consideration, they function either as victims to condemn the social structures in general, or they become the explicit transgressors of the binary norm. As regards the last option, it has to be acknowledged, though, that Anne-Marie positively embodies an independent woman, freed from any type of male authority and in charge of executing the already-dead patriarch. This symbolizes the final downfall of a system that actually precludes the freedom of women and exalts the power of men, a wish that many readers of the novel should share.

Second, and in relationship to men, it should be acknowledged that Rilke embodies a plural masculinity navigating between the warrior knight and the poof. However, as a man, he is the only character who has the chance of experiencing the pluralities of his gender without

running the risks that women and transvestites usually run when they dare live defying binary norms. Moreover, the accidental private eye in the novel also retains for himself the power to side with the groups he considers powerless, such as the women represented by Anne-Marie or the girls at the Chelsea Lounge, and the power to observe and label the queer experience, whose scene is introduced to readers solely through his eyes.

Third, despite their being exclusively labeled by the male protagonist and set in the particular and still restrictive scene of a transgender nightclub, the queer experience is given both a voice and a body in the novel. Far away from the disgust that drag produced in traditional hard-boiled private eyes, the character embodied by Leslie openly plays a political role, challenging the readers to deconstruct and re-evaluate what is being a man, what is being a woman, and the various conceptions of gender at play at the beginning of the 21st century. It is in that challenge to our already fossilized notions of gender where the power of *The cutting room* actually lies.

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