

Summer 2019

# Twenty-First Century Noir: From Stieg Larsson's *Trilogy* to Dolores Redondo's *Trilogy* and Eva García Sáenz de Urturi's *Trilogy*

Salvador Oropesa  
Clemson University, oropesa@clemson.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/languages\\_pubs](https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/languages_pubs)



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Oropesa, Salvador, "Twenty-First Century Noir: From Stieg Larsson's *Trilogy* to Dolores Redondo's *Trilogy* and Eva García Sáenz de Urturi's *Trilogy*" (2019). *Publications*. 97.

[https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/languages\\_pubs/97](https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/languages_pubs/97)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Languages at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in Publications by an authorized administrator of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact [kokeefe@clemson.edu](mailto:kokeefe@clemson.edu).

# Twenty-First Century Noir: From Stieg Larsson's *Trilogy* to Dolores Redondo's *Trilogy* and Eva García Sáenz de Urturi's *Trilogy*

*Salvador Oropesa*

---

## Abstract

Stieg Larsson's *Millenium Trilogy* has influenced twenty-first century Spanish noir, especially Dolores Redondo's *Baztán Trilogy* and Eva García Sáenz de Urturi's *White City Trilogies*. Larsson's novels put misogyny and its violent consequences at the center of noir and provided the development of constitutional rights as the solution to the problem. Following the logic of Western literature, all these texts use myths to make sense of modern problems. Pre-Christian mythology is presented as the root of contemporary evil acts. The novels warn their readers that the return to an ahistorical past and magic brings abomination and inordinate pain. In the Spanish case, policewomen from regional police forces, Ertzaintza in the Basque Country, and Policía Foral in Navarre have the mission to defend their communities from themselves. Problems do not come from the outside but from those who want to stop history and modernity. They also come from patriarchy. In both trilogies, Basque and Celtic myths are displayed to represent everything that is wrong with the self-absorption of closed societies. The answer, according to the Spanish trilogies, is in the preservation of Catholicism as a safe mythical status quo sheltered from deconstruction, and the development of the Spanish Constitution. Police work under the rule of the judicial system protects the citizens of these regions and prevents them from self-destructing their territories. It is our hypothesis that pre-Christian mythology is a metaphor of terrorism, a product of the fear of the Spanish Other. The trilogy format allows the three authors to expand in detail their theories.

**Keywords:** Constitution, Mythology, Procedural, Spain, Trilogy.

---

## 1. Introduction

Stieg Larsson's (1954-2004) *Millenium Trilogy* (2005-2007) brought noir into the twenty-first century. It introduced new topics into the genre such as the Internet and hackers; Asperger syndrome and autism; the fall of communism, the crisis of the welfare state, human rights, the lingering of the fascist past, Eastern Europe, and constitutional law; fetish brands like Apple, Ikea and McDonalds; Spain as a leitmotiv; metanoir; and human trafficking. Larsson's most important contribution to modernizing noir for a new generation was in unifying the novels around core issues of gender and violence: mysogyny, harassment, prostitution, and rape.

Lisbeth Salander, the Swedish protagonist, reacts violently to all instances of sexual abuse against women and children, and these events put in motion the actions of the novels. Lisbeth's zero tolerance policy toward mysogyny makes visible the ways in which human complacency can threaten the most basic of human rights. Ten years after Lisbeth's first appearance, this revolutionary phenomenon now permeates international noir in literature, as well as broader intellectual and cultural debates. This heroic trait provides Lisbeth a mythical dimension as an intermediary between gods and mortals, or in modern terms, between the state and the citizens.

## 2. The Contemporary Hero: Lisbeth Salander

Lisbeth Salander is associated with a series of leitmotifs that give her mythical status, for instance, Thor and Pippi Longstocking. The first is a reference to Norse mythology, and the second uses a well-known character from children's literature in a similar manner to that of Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* when he studied how modern societies recycle old myths and create new ones. In his own words: "myth is a type of speech [conveyed by a discourse] chosen by history" (109–10). Barthes understands that myth offers a naturalness that appeals to an active reader able to historically read the mythification process. This historical reading will make visible the ideology of any cultural practice, like Barthes did when he analyzed wrestling or the newest car model from Citroën.

Henderson explains who Thor is and how he becomes associated with Lisbeth:

Thor, "the god of sky and thunder," represents the "hero" archetype. He is the preserver of law and order, the representative of good against evil, light against darkness, and uses his mighty hammer, Mjölnir, thrown with the devastating power of thunder and lightning, to defend humans against the giants and monsters. He is hugely built, with red beard and eyes and is often depicted as having enormous appetites and not much wit. He is dependable, whereas his father, Odin, is unpredictable. (1054)

Henderson analyzes the attributes Lisbeth shares with Thor: her use of the hammer and taser gun, and also her red hair (1055). Lisbeth's natural hair color is red but she dyes it black. Like Pippi, another redhead, she is strong and unpredictable, and eventually Lisbeth gets the equivalent of Pippi's suitcase full of gold coins in the form of a network of millionaire accounts in fiscal paradises managed from Gibraltar. The association of the outcast Lisbeth Salander to national Swedish icons like Thor and Pippi makes her more acceptable. It balances her tattoos, piercings, punk looks, Amazonian lack of breasts,

penchant for lesbian bondage, and her use of extreme violence in a vigilante fashion. The novels' co-protagonist, Mikael Blomkvist, can be read as a modern Theseus who navigates the meanders of postmodernity not in the name of a progressive ideology, but to ensure that journalism fulfills its mission as a guardian of constitutional rights.

Dolores Redondo (1969-) and Eva García Sáenz de Urturi (1972-) have obviously read Larsson's novels and assimilated many of the same topics into their work. First and foremost they have followed the trilogy format which allows for a lengthy plot development and the ability to address a variety of topics that affect modern society. Inescapable similarities like the presence of the Internet and hackers, or subtler ones like the use of outlaw motorcycle clubs linked to criminal activities, are not analyzed here. Rather, the challenge here is to explore the ways in which Redondo and Urturi, like Larsson before them, represent a complex, democratic society trying to accommodate disparate forces in conflict: the ghosts of communism and fascism, the devastating effects of patriarchy, the erosion of the welfare state, neoliberalism, fluid sexuality, and traditionalism versus modernity, among other topics. All these factors are developed within the new parameters of the modern book industry and its marketing demands.<sup>1</sup> Each of the three trilogies are gigantic literary enterprises, ranging from 1,800 to 2,500 pages. All receive significant support from the industry, including international book tours that are promoted via the authors' Instagram accounts. Redondo's novels have been translated into thirty-three languages or variants of languages (2016b) as of 2018, and Sáenz de Urturi specifies in her official webpage that she is an expert in book marketing ("Acerca de Mi"). In her Instagram account she announced the future translations of *El silencio de la ciudad blanca* in Bulgaria and Poland. The first two volumes of her *A Saga of the Ancient Family* have already been translated into English: *The Immortal Collection* (2014) and *The Sons of Adam* (2014).

Dolores Redondo's trilogy is formed by *The Invisible Guardian*, *The Legacy of the Bones*, and *Offering to the Storm*. English translations appeared in 2015-2017, and the Spanish originals are from 2012-2014. In the first installment Inspector Amaia Salazar has to find a serial killer who is murdering teenage girls, following elaborate rituals and leaving the bodies in theatrical settings by the Baztán River in the province of Navarra. The first suspect is the *Basajaun*, the mythical lord of the Basque woods. The second volume is *The Legacy of the Bones* and it starts with a suicide and a reference to *Tartalo*, a Basque cyclops. The third book tells of the sudden deaths of infants supposedly murdered by *Inguma*, a devil from Basque mythology that kills babies by inhaling their breath while they are sleeping. Amaia's son, Ibai, 'the river', is his potential victim. The demon that demands the offerings is Aker (Redondo 2014, 94). The common denominator of the three novels is that each one is dominated by a different Basque myth common to the Basque-speaking zones of Northern Spain. Redondo's trilogy takes place in Navarra, mostly in the Baztán valley towns of Elizondo and Pamplona, with visits to the Spanish and French Basque regions.

Eva García Sáenz de Urturi's trilogy is called *De la ciudad blanca*. The white city of the title is Vitoria-Gasteiz, the capital of the Basque country. The first two books of the trilogy are *El silencio de la ciudad blanca* (*The Silence of the White City*, 2016) and *Los ritos*

*del agua* (*Water Rituals*, 2017). At time of writing, the third volume is not yet published. Sáenz's trilogy reproduces Larsson's and Redondo's formula. The protagonist is Inspector Unai López de Ayala—alias Kraken, named for the mythical Scandinavian octopus—and he works for the Ertzainza, the Basque regional police. He is helped by two women, his immediate superior, *subcomisaria* (superintendent) Alba Díaz de Salvatierra, and his intelligent buddy, Inspector Estibaliz Ruiz de Gauna. Together they investigate a number of ritual murders of couples with Vitorian ancestry. The murders happen in different monuments of the city, following a double chronological pattern, based on the age of the victims and the historical antiquity of the buildings. In the second volume the case is about a number of murders linked to Celtic mythology using ritual deaths from the Bronze Age. In Redondo's and Urturi's trilogies the investigators are both sleuths and victims, indicating that they live in closed societies. The novels stress the difficulty outsiders face in integrating into the cities' dynamic of *cuadrillas*—close (and closed) groups of friends that, in extreme cases, are inalterable from childhood to adulthood. The action of Urturi's novels occurs mostly in Vitoria with incursions in Cantabria. The three sets of novels use analepsis to explain the childhood traumas of the characters. These flashbacks explain the moment when the protagonists lost their innocence because of the inordinate violence of adults.

In the three trilogies the protagonists are women; like Larsson's, Redondo's and Urturi's work also explores gender and violence. Both Spanish trilogies refer to a violent past that is related to the violence of the present. The exhumation of human bones; amputations; child, spousal, and sexual abuse; the mixture of human and animal bones in offerings; filicide; incest; sacrifice altars and caves; layers of civilizations and geological ages; historical cemeteries; clinics for mental patients—all refer to a brutal past that modern gentrification has sanitized. The novels comment on the museumization of the present, where unpolluted historic downtowns with cathedrals serve as backgrounds for modern cafes and ancestral sacred or military sites become exotic venues that cater to rural tourism. As discussed above, although the goal of these novels is entertainment, much like the nineteenth-century realist feuilletons, they represent the anxiety of modernity. In the words of Jo Labanyi: "If we call a novel 'realist' it is not because we believe it narrates events that really happened, but because it constructs an 'imagined community' that corresponds to the illusion of a homogeneous society that is the modern nation" (7).

The *Millennium* trilogy is only partially a police procedural. But in the third volume there is a significant turn of events: suddenly the buzzword is constitution. Early in the novel, in chapter four, the policemen in charge of the case of Lisbeth Salander and her father, Zalachenko, a former Russian spy who became a human trafficker and drug dealer, are discussing the details of the case. One of them, trying to summarize the situation, talks of a "constitutional crisis" (Larsson 2012, 111). Later we learn that the whole team, led by inspector Jan Bublanski, will risk their jobs to defend Lisbeth's constitutional rights. In chapter six the members of the Section, a secret group inside the *Säpo* (the Swedish security service), are arguing what to do with Zalachenko. Evert Gullberg, the retired head of the group, summarizes their situation as follows: "We can agree on what

the consequences would be if Zalachenko talked. The entire legal system would come crashing down on our heads. We would be demolished” (Larsson 2012, 151). I include the Spanish translation: “Podemos estar de acuerdo con las consecuencias en el caso de que Zalachenko se vaya de la lengua. Toda *la maldita Suecia constitucional* caerá sobre nuestras cabezas. Nos aniquilarán” (Larsson 2011b, 167, my emphasis). The Spanish version uses the term “constitucional,” which is key for our reading of the novels. The trilogy ends when Torsten Edklinth, from Säpo’s constitutional protection branch (charged with investigating crimes against constitutional freedoms), works with Bublanski’s team to dismantle the Section and arrest its members. The secret group, a fossil of the Cold War that was created to defend Sweden from communism, continued to exist thanks to an executive branch loophole, and violated all kinds of laws—including the basic constitutional rights of Lisbeth Salander, who was raped by functionaries of the state that should have protected her.

The last part of the novel is a courtroom drama in the Constitutional Court, led by prosecutor Ragnhild Gustavsson of the Attorney General’s office, in which Lisbeth is exonerated of all crimes. The final message of the trilogy is clear: the constitution is the force that holds Swedish society together, and the power of the state is used to guarantee the constitutional freedoms of the Swedish people. The Crown, whose rule is symbolic, functions to remind all authorities and citizens of the constitutional mandate and their rights and responsibilities. Judge Iversen, who frees Lisbeth and reinstates her citizenship, reminds her that her rights are linked to duties:

Fröken Salander, if I rescind your declaration of incompetence, that will mean that you have exactly the same rights as all other citizens. It also means that you have the same obligations. It is therefore your duty to manage your finances, pay taxes, obey the law, and assist the police in investigations of serious crimes. (Larsson 2012, 746-47)

Close to the end of 2,600 pages and after a significant number of cadavers, the constitutional government is the master narrative that saves the day. All forces—private and public, police, Säpo, the magazine *Millenium*, medical doctors and their institutions, Dragan Armansky and Milton Security—are united to help not just Lisbeth Salander, but all democratic institutions under the Swedish Constitution. If in mythology heroes appeared to be intermediaries between humans and gods, here modern constitutional policemen are the intermediaries between citizens and the state, and are charged with safeguarding their rights.

In the Spanish trilogies, Redondo’s Inspector Amaia Salazar belongs to the *Policía Foral de Navarra* (Navarrese regional police) and Urturi’s Inspector Unai López de Ayala is part of the *Ertzaintza* (the Basque police). Both are in charge of defending the constitutional order in Spain. If we review recent history, the main challenge to democracy in these two regions since the advent of democracy in 1977 was the terrorist band ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, meaning Basque home and liberty).<sup>2</sup> There are no serial murderers in Spain like those portrayed in these novels. Therefore, the presence of groups of assassins linked to ancestral cults can be read as a metonymy of the political situation derived from the tension between constitutionalists and separatists. Metonymy is used here in the sense

of a continuum rather than a metaphor for the situation. This continuum is present in how Redondo and Urturi eulogize rural Navarra and Euskadi, fetishizing tradition, prioritizing the peripheral police as a resistance to centralist forces, and presenting their characters as being torn between two incompatible philosophies of life. They feel empathy for rural life, traditions, and the Basque language, as Miguel de Unamuno did in *Paz en la guerra*. But in the end the novels' actions are framed by the realism and homogeneity stressed by Labanyi, of constitutional Spain and its membership in the European Union, which is framed by the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon. As Inspector Amaia says: "We're European citizens" (Redondo 2017b, 225).

In Redondo's and Urturi's novels, the Ertzaintza and the Policía Foral represent a utopian view of modern police forces at the service of citizenry. They are provisioned with the most modern facilities and technology, and always follow the judge's instructions:

Like the police stations in Pamplona and Tudela, the new Policía Foral station in Elizondo was of a modern design, in contrast to the typical architecture of the town and the valley. It was a truly unique building, characterized of its walls of whitish stone and huge, thick plate-glass windows spread over two rectangular stories, the second of which overhung the first, forming a kind of inverted staircase effect and giving it a certain resemblance to an aircraft carrier. (Redondo 2017a, 7)

The Policía Foral and the Ertzaintza, with their brand-new police stations, erase the past: they are distinctive, they break with traditional architecture. *Policía Nacional* (national police) stations and old *cuarteles de la Guardia Civil* (military quarters) are stained by the dictatorial past. The sanitized postmodern structures of democratic police stations tell the story of the constitutional present, or a desired independent future, with designs that did not exist during the dictatorship. By the same token in Spanish noir we have successful attempts to present a modern constitutional *Guardia Civil* (civil guard) in the series of Lorenzo Silva (1966-), and the Policía Nacional in the one written by Domingo Villar (1971-).

### 3. The Need for Myths

Why do we have the need to create myths? Michael Herren in *The Anatomy of Myth* analyzes the epistemological implications of the development of Western myths and their impact on Christian theology. He starts his study with a clear premise, that Greeks (and Romans) left us myths. While other civilizations also made myths, it is the Greek myths that are still dominant in our culture while those of other cultures—Tartessian, Iberian, Celtic, and Phoenicians, just to name those with a presence in the Iberian Peninsula—are practically forgotten unless they were assimilated by the Romans, like nymphs. We use Greek and Roman myths to name the days of the week and months, we study them in high school literature classes, they dominate psychoanalysis and pop psychology, and appear in popular culture from books for teenagers to the cinema. In the Harry Potter series, we find a phoenix, Cerberus, centaurs, and countless other mythical figures. Suzanne Collins, the author of *The Hunger Games*, has repeatedly declared that her main source of inspiration is the story of Theseus and the Minotaur. Katniss, the protagonist, is a modern Diana—bow and arrows included.

Herren states the main difference between Greek myths and those from other cultures is that “they not only gave us their wonderful narratives, but they also provided the elementary tools for interpreting them” (2). This truism is so powerful that 2,500 years later we still use the epistemological tools they passed to us. Greek poets invented myths (Herren, 4), created stories that became histories, and helped people make sense of their world. In this chaos, “Aristotle spoke of a single god who set the cosmos in motion” (Herren, 10), a milestone that brought order to the world of gods and heroes. This idea helped later Christians to naturalize their peculiar form of monotheism and develop a theology that sheltered their beliefs from mythification. (This premise is present in both Spanish trilogies.) The second big step came when Plato created a real imaginary world and gave humans a soul (Herren, 10). Unsurprisingly these Greek myths, heroes, monotheism, a real ideal world, humans with souls, poetry, and tools to interpret the myths shape Spanish neo-noir, procedural, and constitutional novels of the twenty-first century.

In order to analyze myths we need to understand how they work in our culture. Greek history started with the Trojan War and, according to Homer, Zeus determined the victor. As the plot of these stories became more complex, heroes were created to be intermediaries between gods and mortals. These überstories, the first plots of Western culture, are for the most part voyages in which everything is possible (Herren, 15-17). But at some point, these stories were codified as a religion. This development occurred when humans stopped having contact with the gods (Herren, 23). Christianity followed the same pattern, becoming a codified religion a few centuries after the death of Christ. But there is still a difference that affects contemporary literature: Greek and Roman religions were not linked to an ethical code, but rather were more a set of rituals to keep a balance on Earth. The tricky part came when philosophers established that “the gods may have a sphere of operation, but it is within the confines of nature” (Herren, 39) and gods lost their anthropomorphism. In this context Xenophanes “rendered the poets’ gods as fiction (*plasmata*)” (Herren, 50), followed in 5 BCE by Prodicus, who explained that first men turned basic needs into gods (Herren, 80). This combination of Aristotelian and Platonic thought (along with that of their many followers) naturalized in Western culture the idea that there is “more than one layer of meaning” (Herren, 10). This epistemological breakthrough allowed for more than one interpretation of myths, entered Christianity, and survived in modern secular society.

Twenty-first century procedural novels from Spain are secular and clearly immersed in international pop culture. In their condition as postmodern artifacts, the novels use myths to both question and consolidate master narratives. Redondo and Urturi understand Catholicism is an active master narrative in Spain and they treat the topic with care. Particular attitudes and behaviors of individual members of the church are susceptible to criticism, for instance, the ambiguous disapproval (and defense) of Opus Dei in Redondo’s *The Legacy of the Bones* and *Offering to the Storm*. We read in the Spanish trilogies references to churches, processions, festivities, pilgrimages, sanctuaries, and invocations of the Virgin Mary. The contemporary cops, protagonists of these novels, interact with Catholicism

and perfectly understand its nuances, but they are not religious themselves. If they attend a religious service it is because it is the burial of a victim and they are there to observe the attendants as they try to find the murderer. It is just part of their work. Meanwhile, in both Spanish trilogies crimes are associated with evil pagan myths and remnants of pre-Christian beliefs. Redondo and Urturi are conscious of the fact that, following the Western logic learned from Greek and Romans, the rationale used to analyze the anachronism and dangers of ancient myths can also be used to deconstruct Christianity.

This is not to say that these novels intend to challenge Christianity itself. The dichotomy of paganism/Catholicism is displayed as an unequal binary, where Catholicism is the norm of the dominant culture and paganism is not. Catholicism is part of the landscape and the stage where the characters interact, but paganism refers to evil and the presence in our world of ancient devils. These contemporary Spanish procedural novels follow the Christian axiom that “pagans had myths, but Christians had truths” (Herren, 162).

In the Redondo trilogy’s first novel, Sub-inspector Jonan Etxaide explains to his boss, Inspector Amaia Salazar, about the mythical *Basajaun*, which he suspects is involved in the serial murders they are investigating, citing his double perspective as a scientist and cop in the process:

Just because the *basajaun* was there doesn’t mean he killed the girls. It’s more likely the opposite: as the protector of the forest, it’s logical that he would feel responsible, insulted, and provoked by the presence of this predator ... you know better than anybody that it’s not crap, chief, and I speak with authority, since I’m an archeologist and anthropologist as well as a police officer. (Redondo 2017a, 83)

Yet Sub-inspector Etxaide is wrong. He cannot imply that we should acritically accept ancestral myths because we have been taught how to deconstruct them. This is part of the western epistemological DNA. Nonetheless, the antagonists follow Sub-inspector Etxaide’s logic. They believe in the cult of Aker and sacrifice the lives of others to benefit from his favor. Inspector Ayala is unconvinced by Etxaide because she does not focus on the explanation but rather on the evil deeds of the practitioners that put her and her family in danger. The devil, the leader of the pagan cult, is a character who will go on to murder Etxaide. He anthropomorphizes himself in the figure of Judge Markina. This devil does the vilest of all deeds in a modern democracy: he disguises himself as the ultimate defender of the constitution and the constitutional rights of Spanish citizens. Redondo’s novels literally demonize those judges who became celebrities, subverting from the realm of popular culture the democratic balance of powers.

Already in the first century CE Plutarch sanitized the story of Theseus and the Minotaur and divided the world into those who believed in mythical monsters and the rationalist philosophers who did not: “what is impossible today was always impossible” was at the core of Plutarch’s literature (Herren 85-6). His dictum still impacts how novelists write contemporary procedural novels. Present-day fictional murderers kill to offer sacrifices to ancient gods and myths, as long as these gods do not do anything (Herren, 88). It may seem that their cult is effective, bringing youth, health, wealth, and sexual power. But we never see these gods or devils performing miracles. In the Baztán trilogy we see the power

of the devil or the people possessed by the devil, but we never see the devil himself performing supernatural acts. Markina kills Etxaide with a stolen gun, but he does not use any supernatural prowess.

We have already established that myths can be analyzed and explained from different perspectives. Philological and etymological explanations are common (Herren, 106), but they evolve over time and reappear in the Spanish trilogies through links to anthropology. In Redondo's saga, Basque anthropologist José Miguel de Barandiarán (1889-1991) is an unchallenged authority, and is quoted almost verbatim. Redondo does not hide that he is the main source used to elaborate the myths in the novels. As mentioned above, the character Etxaide is also an anthropologist. In Urturi's trilogy one of the antagonists is the (fictional) anthropologist Saúl Tovar of the Universidad de Cantabria, who is always referring to Celtic myths and pre-Christian theonyms. In both trilogies pagan rituals are either mythical or Christianized in the sense that it is the Christian devil in disguise doing what he does best: that is, deceiving (former) Christians. These two sets of Spanish procedural novels demand a Christian (or a Kantian) reading, "granting the possibility of a simultaneous literal and allegorical interpretation" (Herren, 168-69). It is notable that in both sets of novels, the anthropologist characters die. A possible explanation is that they are punished because they believed in pagan myths that should have remained in oblivion.

#### 4. The Need for the Devil

The question is how the ideology of the second decade of the twenty-first century in Spain, a capitalist nation-state enmeshed in world markets, rewrites the image of the devil, disguised as a resurrected pagan god. If in Brian Stoker's *Dracula*, the monster is defeated by the Holy Host, in contemporary Spain the devil is defeated by the constitution and its constitutional angels, in the form of cops from regional administrations who are always supervised by judicial power. They only act when authorized by the judge and they request warrants when they need to interfere with the freedoms of citizens. Moreover, such requests are denied on a regular basis.

In her seminal study on Satan in literature, Eva Marta Baillie explains the mythical dimension of this character: "Satan is a mythical figure: Almost all characterizations of him do not come from biblical sources, but from ancient, pre-medieval, and medieval mythology" (14). The devil is an epistemological blank that helps humans give the appearance of an explanation to aberrant acts. In the words of Baillie:

While the concept of evil does not necessarily help us to understand human behavior, myth and narrative can nevertheless help to develop an understanding of what we experience as evil. It is different from understanding evil's nature; evil refers to an abstract concept and bridges an explanatory gap in human behavior. In its expression through narrative we might be able to approach evil on a non-ontological or non-empirical level. (52)

The three trilogies resort to explaining evil in a tautological way or personifying it in the human appearance of the devil. It may be more helpful to analyze the behaviors to get better answers. For instance, where do these devils act? In these novels, they are often

found in places frequented by tourists. We already referred to the museumization of historical centers and pre-Christian landmarks. Until recently cathedrals, churches, palaces, and *alcázares* (a half-fortress, half-royal palace construction) had houses or structures attached to them; in fact the old cathedral of Vitoria still does. When cars invaded these spaces in the 1960s and 1970s, whole wings could be ruined. But since the arrival of democracy in 1977 many of these spaces have endured the process of museumization. The string of Romanesque churches in the *casco antiguo* (old quarter) of Zamora has been thoroughly cleaned and restored to look new. As of February 2018 a visit to Park Güell in Barcelona is EUR 7.50, La Sagrada Familia EUR 15, Casa Milà EUR 16.50, and Casa Batlló EUR 23.50 (guided tours cost extra); taken together, they cost as much as a visit to Disney Paris (EUR 65).

It is not by chance that novels in which elaborated crimes happen in these monuments are multiplying: other examples include *El asesino de La Pedrera* (2012) by Aro Sáinz de la Maza (1959-) and *Origin* (2017) by Dan Brown (1964-). Symbolically, crimes occur in these spaces because of the anxiety we feel in them; they have been denaturalized, in the sense that they have been removed from their original context. They stand on their own, restored, as if time had not passed, detached from their peers; all distractions have been removed. It is in this gap where novelists can insert their fiction; these decontextualized buildings develop a phantasmagorical presence that makes them ideal scenarios for fantastic and ritual crimes. There may also be pragmatic reasons. Writers are aware of the visual possibilities these settings will provide if their works are made into feature films or television series. This has certainly come to pass: *The Invisible Guardian* became a movie in 2017, directed by Fernando González Molina, and three of Dan Brown's novels became movies directed by Ron Howard, starring Tom Hanks.

Dehistoricization is not a new development. Basque nationalism had already dehistoricized the Basque landscape, creating a mythical Basque countryside unsullied by industrialization or the nation-state of Spain. Like Stoker found Dracula in a medieval Transylvania (Rodríguez, 96), Redondo and Urturi found the devil in the mountains between Navarre and the Basque Country, or the mountains between the Basque Country and Cantabria, respectively. In a similar fashion, the Basque writer Jon Juaristi has performed his own rational deconstruction of Basque myths. He explains how during the Francisco Franco dictatorship (1939-1975) Basque nationalists first tried to differentiate their Catholicism from that of the dictatorship. Once they realized this was not possible, and after Vatican II, Basque nationalism entered a neo-pagan phase—at times it was just pure atheism (Juaristi 1999, 48). There is a chapter in Juaristi's *El bucle melancólico*, titled “La guerrilla imaginaria” (269-344), in which he explains in detail the relationship between neo-paganism and Basque nationalism. Because the Catholic differentiation did not work, after 1952 (Juaristi 1997, 303) Basque nationalism following the pattern of European nationalist movements promoted pre-Christian religions, especially neo-Celtic cults. Many of these small groups were strongly associated to neo-Nazism and antisemitism. In Basque culture this hodgepodge put together Pío Baroja's novel *La leyenda de Jaun de Alzate*, parapsychology, and abertzale feminism, adapted from the stories of witches rescued by the anthropologists Julio Caro Baroja and José Miguel de Barandiarán.

This kind of neo-paganism is visible in Redondo's trilogy. Amaia, with the help of Father Sarasola, a PhD in psychiatry, member of Opus Dei, and high officer in the Vatican for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, says:

I sought Father Sarasola's help. To my surprise, he arranged for me to interview the protected witness who denounced the sacrifice in Lesaka ... this was a spiritual sect with satanic overtones, but instead of worshipping the devil, they were encouraged to return to the supernatural traditions of Baztán. Or in the words of the witness: to the old spiritual traditions, which allowed man to commune with the powerful, mysterious, magical earthly forces around which the region's inhabitants based the religion they practiced for thousands of years. They also drew on the ancient practices of witchcraft, with its potions, spells, herbalism and shamanism, learning to explore the limits of man's power. (Redondo 2017b, 395-96)

The novel repeats this quotation twice, almost verbatim, in a period of thirty pages. The authority figures from the Catholic church and the constitutional police unmask an anthropomorphized demon disguised as a constitutional judge; there was a demon after all.

Parra Membrives has a reflection on rural Scandinavian noir that applies to the Spanish trilogies:

The withdrawal from big cities fulfills a double purpose: To make clear that evil does not come from the corruption inherent to the residents of the big city but that human beings are naturally evil. The second reason is to present modern society human afflictions with some representative examples in a reduced setting. This way it is easy for the reader to understand them. (my translation, 551)

The action of the Spanish trilogies happens in the Northern part of the country and the Atlantic climate is given a protagonic role. In the words of Parra Membrives that we adapt to the Spanish procedural: "This is linked to an adverse climatology that leads to depression and hopelessness that never resolves the problem, not even after the reestablishment of the apparent status quo at the end of the novel" (my translation, 551-52).

This truism deconstructs the core of xenophobic nationalism that the enemy is the other and that corruption comes from the outside. This is why there is a tradition of placing evil in rural Basque and Navarrese landscapes (Elorza, np). To balance evil, Redondo's novels mention the *besajaun* and the goddess Mari: the first as protector of the ecological balance in nature, and the second as protector of maternity. In both series, the female protagonists are pregnant and their children are in danger. Juaristi (following the Greek logic) deconstructed this Basque mythology, discussing a "Basque yeti, the *basojaun* or lord of the mountain, adaptation of the wild man common to Southern Europe" (my translation 1999, 38). Barandiarán uses the term "baxajaun" (420), and his whole encyclopedia entry ends up forming part of *Guardián*, including the detail that the sheep move their heads in unison when the *basajaun* crosses in front of them, making their bells toll at the same time. Juaristi's deconstruction of Mari is merciless:

The myth of Mari, the Dame of Amboto, supposedly the survival of a pre-Christian matriarchal religion, has roots that do not go beyond the 14<sup>th</sup> century and is a local [Basque] variation of Doña María de Padilla; the children of Seville used to see her "in a horse carriage burning in flames of fire." (my translation 1999, 49)

María de Padilla was a noblewoman, mistress of King Peter of Castile, who had her union with the king recognized posthumously by the Pope. She was resurrected as a romantic heroine in European literature. What Juaristi does is denying Mari's ancestral origin, which is as old as the first men who inhabited what is today the Basque region. Barandiarán counts thirty different representations of Mari plus an "etcétera" (420-21); he also adds attributes so it multiplies the possible combinations ("Mari"). Juaristi reads her as an empty myth because myths are always synecdoches of something, a needed explanation to societal questions and Mari cannot provide these answers. The Spanish trilogies, like the Swedish one, start with misogyny defined not just as hatred of women but the persistence of *machismo*, especially in its extreme manifestations like murder, rape, and women trafficking. Larsson explains misogyny in constitutional terms because democracy matters, and at its core is the treatment of women as citizens. The same phenomenon happens with the Spanish trilogies; misogyny can be and should be represented for the same reasons as in Larsson's trilogy but it has a newer added component, the dangers of zealotry because the enemy is inside.

### 5. Conclusion

Larsson loosely uses myths to reinvent a literary genre in which the hard-boiled detective, or the efficient, cynical, and semi-corrupt cop of twentieth-century noir, are replaced in favor of postmodern, twenty-first century heroes who can navigate late-stage capitalism. These new heroes are cool, and in the Spanish case, chase old pre-modern myths—metonymies of taboo problems like terrorism. The difference is that the Spanish trilogies are so ingrained in Western culture that they cannot escape the Greek, Roman, and Christian tradition of writing myths.

The lesson of these trilogies is that evil, mythical or real, can be defeated by the constitutional forces of the state under direct supervision from the judicial system. The rule of law is cathartic, although in postmodernity the new equilibrium is perpetually deferred. Sampaio says that "as in Greek tragedy, family affairs are interwoven with State affairs" (76). The three protagonists are phoenixes: Lisbeth is reborn from her tomb and from a shot in the head (Sampaio, 77); Amaia survives her affair with a demon and kills him with a Glock; and Unai/Kraken also returns from the dead after being shot in the head. "Lisbeth defies the Laws of the State" like Antigone (Sampaio, 78), while Amaia and Unai are the state: the armed angels of the constitution.

*Clemson University*  
oropesa@clemson.edu

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Most critics despise the influence of the international publishing industry in present-day literature. My opinion is that writers in every era have had to adapt to the marketplace as it existed in their lifetime. The current publishing model resembles the nineteenth-century serialized publication of novels in newspapers, which were later printed in book format. The present model rewards lengthy, entertaining, well-structured novels that deal with contemporary issues, like those of Benito Pérez Galdós or Miguel de Unamuno's *Paz en la guerra*, making these works available to mass audiences at fairly low prices.

<sup>2</sup> Of all the literary representations of ETA, the separatist terrorist group active between 1959 and 2018, the most popular and successful is the novel *Patria* (2016) by Fernando Aramburu. The action happens in a fictional town that resembles Hernani (Guipúzcoa); Elizondo and Vitoria are less than 100 km away. ETA murdered forty people in the *Comunidad Foral* and twenty *etarras* from Navarra died manipulating bombs or killed when confronted by the police (EFE Pamplona). According to the comprehensive list published by Wikipedia of victims of ETA forty-five people were murdered in the province of Álava. See [https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anexo:Asesinatos\\_cometidos\\_por\\_ETA\\_hasta\\_la\\_muerte\\_de\\_Francisco\\_Franco](https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anexo:Asesinatos_cometidos_por_ETA_hasta_la_muerte_de_Francisco_Franco) and [https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anexo:Asesinatos\\_cometidos\\_por\\_ETA\\_desde\\_la\\_muerte\\_de\\_Francisco\\_Franco](https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anexo:Asesinatos_cometidos_por_ETA_desde_la_muerte_de_Francisco_Franco).

## References

- Baillie, Eva Marta (1989). *Facing the Fiend: Satan as a Literary Character*. Eugene: Cascade.
- Barandiarán, José María de (1972). "Baxajaun." *Diccionario ilustrado de mitología vasca y algunas de sus fuentes*, Vol. I. Bilbao: Biblioteca de La Gran Enciclopedia Vasca: 420–21.
- (1972) "Mari." *Diccionario ilustrado de mitología vasca y algunas de sus fuentes*, Vol. I. Bilbao: Biblioteca de La Gran Enciclopedia Vasca: 424-25.
- Barthes, Roland (1987). *Mythologies*. Trans. Annette Lavers. New York: Hill and Wang.
- EFE Pamplona (2011). "Los cuarenta asesinados que ETA ha dejado en Navarra." *Diario de Navarra* [Pamplona], 21 October, 2011. [www.diariodenavarra.es/noticias/navarra/mas\\_navarra/los\\_cuarenta\\_asesinados\\_que\\_eta\\_dejado\\_navarra\\_46414\\_2061.html](http://www.diariodenavarra.es/noticias/navarra/mas_navarra/los_cuarenta_asesinados_que_eta_dejado_navarra_46414_2061.html). [Last accessed 12 December 2017]
- Elorza, Antonio (1974). "El tema rural en los orígenes literarios del nacionalismo vasco." *Biblioteca virtual Miguel de Cervantes*. [www.cervantesvirtual.com/nd/ark:/59851/bmcv71g6](http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/nd/ark:/59851/bmcv71g6). [Last accessed 13 January 2017]
- García Sáenz de Urturi, Eva (2014a). *The Immortal Collection*. Trans. Lilit Zekulin. Thwaites, Seattle: AmazonCrossing.
- . *Instagram*, [www.instagram.com/evagarciasaenz/?hl=es](http://www.instagram.com/evagarciasaenz/?hl=es). [Last accessed 18 February 2018]
- . "Acerca de Mí," [www.evagarciasaenz.com/autora](http://www.evagarciasaenz.com/autora). [Last accessed 15 January 2018]
- (2017). *Los ritos del agua*. Barcelona: Planeta.
- (2016). *El silencio de la ciudad blanca*. Barcelona: Planeta.
- (2014). *The Sons of Adam*. North Charleston: CreateSpace.

Henderson, Deborah (2014). "Thor's Mighty Hammer: Christianity, Justice and Norse Mythology in Stieg Larsson's *Millennium*." *The Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 47, No. 5, 2014: 1047-61.

Herren, Michael (2017). *The Anatomy of Myth: The Art of Interpretation from the Presocratics to the Church Fathers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Juaristi, Jon (1997). *El bucle melancólico: Historias de nacionalistas vascos*. Madrid: Espasa Calpe.

——— (1999). *El chimbo expiatorio (la invención de la tradición bilbaína, 1876-1939)*. Madrid: Espasa Calpe.

Labanyi, Jo (2000). *Gender and Modernization in the Spanish Realist Novel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lagercrantz, David (2015). *Lo que no te mata te hace más fuerte*. Trans. Martin Lexell and Juan José Ortega. Barcelona: Destino.

Larsson, Stieg (2010). *La chica que soñaba con un cerillo y un galón de gasolina*. Trans. Martin Lexell and Juan José Ortega. Barcelona: Destino.

——— (2012). *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets's Nest*. Trans. Reg Keeland. New York: Vintage.

——— (2011a). *The Girl who Played with Fire*. Trans. Reg Keeland. New York: Vintage.

——— (2008). *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. Trans. Reg Keeland. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

——— (2009). *Los hombres que no amaban a las mujeres*. Trans. Martin Lexell and Juan José Ortega. Barcelona: Destino.

——— (2011b). *La reina en el palacio de las corrientes de aire*. Trans. Martin Lexell and Juan José Ortega. México, DF: Planeta Mexicana.

Parra Membrives, Eva (2013). "Crímenes con denominación de origen. Glocalización en la novela policiaca nórdica femenina." *Revista Signa*, vol. 22: 549-67.

Redondo, Dolores (2012). *El guardián invisible*. Buenos Aires: Destino.

——— (2017a). *The Invisible Guardian*. Trans. Isabelle Kaufeler. New York: Atria.

——— (2016a). *The Legacy of the Bones*. Trans. Nick Caistor and Lorenza García. London: HarperCollins.

——— (2013). *Legado en los huesos*. Ciudad de México: Destino.

——— (2017b). *Offering to the Storm*. Trans. Nick Caistor and Lorenza García. London: HarperCollins.

——— (2014). *Ofrenda a la tormenta*. Ciudad de México: Destino.

——— (2016b). "Biography." 2016, [www.doloresredondo.com/en/biography](http://www.doloresredondo.com/en/biography). [Last accessed 17 Dec. 2017]

Rodríguez, Juan Carlos (2011). *Tras la muerte del aura (en contra y a favor de la ilustración)*. Granada: Universidad de Granada.

Sampaio, Maria de Lurdes (2011). "Millenium Trilogy: Eye for Eye and the Utopia of Order in Modern Waste Lands." *Cross-Cultural Communication*, vol. 7, No. 2: 73-81.