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Telling Trials: Whodunit and How's It Told? The Belsunce and Patton Cases, Argentina and Australia

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The Belsunce and Patton cases have recently been the subject of considerable talk in the Argentinian and Australian presses respectively.¹ My interest in these crimes, accordingly, lies not so much in their real occurrence as in their constitution as cases through their retellings in the courts and in the press. Explicit and tacit appeals to what I'll loosely call *murder mystery* genres² underpin the relating of the Belsunce and Patton stories in the media. By reading these cases relationally, I shall attempt to signal how a particular genre (or set of genres) does different rhetorical work in different places.

Rhetorically, to talk of putting a genre to work entails postulates of intention and of agency. The temptation here is to attribute a particular intention to a particular genre. In a chess game, for example, to assign someone cognizant of the rules and engaged in a game of chess the intentions of a chess player, is precisely to posit a particular intention (or set of intentions) as a structural feature of a particular genre. However, I wish to suggest: a) that reductively ascribing a fixed purpose, or set of purposes, to a particular genre is only fine for decontextualized gaming examples like that of the chess player mentioned above (the charm of this player and of other ludic figures –language games in general- lies in their circumscribing appeal, their creation of manageable objects of inquiry); b) that the relations between contextualized discursive genres, intention and uptake are more open and less categorical; c) that, for reasons having to do with iteration,³ context and rhetoric, the purposes of a particular discursive genre are not necessarily fixed, and d) that the tellings of the Belsunce and Patton stories might prove instructive in this respect.

The Argentinian *crimen del country*, we recall, concerns the untimely end of María Marta García Belsunce, found lying dead in the bathroom of her home in Carmel Country, Pilar, Argentina, on 27 October, 2002 with five bullets in her head. The Australian inquest, on the other hand, involves the body of Janelle Patton, found dumped and wrapped in black plastic at the more public Cockpit Waterfall Reserve, Norfolk Island, on 31 March of the same year. Her body was extensively injured and bore evidence of a fight. The ends of Belsunce and Patton, as they say, mark the beginning of the stories told around and about them since. But to what socio-discursive ends are these unfortunate deaths put to work? How, in other words, are these cases to be received? And what are the jobs of genre in these interpretive relays, this series of uptakes which moves from a forensic reading of the body, through a judicial filling in of gaps, to media retellings of the tales of the interstices?⁴

Significantly, both cases lack legal closure – to date, no one has been successfully prosecuted for either crime. Indeed, both cases, articulated through more or less spectacular judicial turns and media twists, abound in similarities and differences. What exercises us here, however, are not these counterparts and comparisons per se, but rather what such juxtapositions might say about the rhetorical work of genre.

As in any self respecting *roman-feuilleton*, a case summary could be useful here, provided we remember that, like the devil, the discursive and generic interest is equally in the detail. Some salient features of the cases to date, then, might help to set the scene: 50 year old María Marta García Belsunce and her husband, Carlos Carrascosa, lived close to their relations in the exclusive gated community of Carmel Country, Pilar, Provincia de Buenos Aires. On the rainy afternoon of Sunday 27 October, 2002, María Marta, accompanied by her husband and other family members, watched a soccer match at the house of her brother-in-law, Guillermo Bártoli. She then left Bártoli's place, returning home for her weekly massage. However, her masseuse, Beatriz Michelini, got no answer upon knocking at the door. Michelini returned with the security guard, José Ortiz, where they were met by Carrascosa's shouting through a window that an accident had occurred. The family later collectively agreed that this had been the case. María Marta had apparently slipped in the bathroom, knocking her head on the tap. Her lifeless body was found kneeling by the bath, half submerged in water. Two medical teams arrived, one (that of Dr. Santiago Biasi) summoned by a neighbour. Dr. Juan Ramón Gauvry Gordon later claimed that he had attempted to resuscitate María Marta as, in his opinion, she had suffered a cardiac arrest. Assenting to the family's explanation of the accident, he suggested that the masseuse clean up the bloodied bathroom. During this period, Horacio García Belsunce, journalist and brother of María Marta who was later to recount his version of events to the press, contacted the *Comisario* Casafús to call off any intervention of the police. A patrol did in fact arrive at the gates of the Carmel Country, but failed to visit the house. In the course of cleaning up after the accident, María

Marta's step brother, Johnny Hurtig, chanced upon a small metallic object, which the family determined was a '*pituto*' (connector rod) used in library shelving. They resolved to rid themselves of it; Horacio wrapped it up and flushed it down the toilet. This connector rod, it turned out, was the remains of one of six bullets from a 32 calibre revolver. The other 5 bullets, it was later revealed, were lodged in María Marta's head. The night of María Marta's death, Bártoli took considerable trouble over the funeral arrangements, which included obtaining a death certificate later shown to be fraudulent in several respects. On Monday 28 October hundreds of people processed through the house participating in the wake. The residence was further cleaned of bloodstains in strange places, and María Marta's burial went ahead. Some time later, with something plainly awry, the Public Prosecutor Diego Molina Pico obtained the exhumation and autopsy of the body of María Marta. The results of the autopsy were published more than one month later, on 2 December, when it was revealed that the bathroom accident was in fact a crime. Police and judicial proceedings commenced, and speculation in the media ran wild. The *caso Belsunce* became a media event, positioned by the press, if not by its protagonists, within the murder mystery genre. The legal claims and counterclaims have seen no one to date successfully prosecuted for the crime; María Marta's husband, Carrascosa, was temporarily detained when Molina Pico accused him of homicide, while eight other persons, mainly family members, were accused of *encubrimiento*. It finally fell to Judge Diego Barroetaveña to preside over the case. Completely disregarding directives from the *Cámara de Apelaciones de San Isidro*, he released Carrascosa on bail and, accepting objections raised by the defence, scandalously dismissed the Public Prosecutor, Molina Pico, from the case. The Supreme Court of Buenos Aires, in turn, has ordered an investigation into the propriety of Barroetaveña's handling of the case. At present, the *caso Belsunce* is open and likely to remain unsolved.⁵

Janelle Patton, on the other hand, was a vivacious 29 year old, a "TP" (temporary resident) or "blow-in" working in hospitality on Norfolk Island, the former penal colony settled by descendents of some of the Bounty mutineers. Janelle Patton had by all accounts become rather well known in the insular community, involving herself in projects and having had a couple of relationships with residents. Her parents, Ron and Carol Patton, celebrated their honeymoon on the Island 35 years ago, and had just returned to spend a week with their daughter, who was nearing the end of her stay. Around midday the following day, Easter Sunday, 31 March, 2002, Janelle Patton set out on her regular 50-minute walk towards an ocean lookout above the convict ruins of Kingston. It was a walk from which she never returned. Having been seen stepping out along Rooty Hill Road, Janelle Patton then apparently vanished, her body being found hours later, wrapped in black plastic and dumped at Cockpit Waterfall Reserve. This was the Island's first murder in 153 years. The post-mortem revealed she had resisted, receiving 64 defensive slashes and fractures, including a dislocated ankle, broken ribs, a fractured skull and pelvis and a 15cm-deep stab to the chest. It also established that she had not been sexually assaulted. Between her disappearance and the discovery of the body, a torrential downpour muddled the scene, washing away potential forensic evidence. Police investigations began, but were hindered by logistics, distance and the reticence of some Island residents. Digital traces were found on the sheet of black plastic, provoking an extensive fingerprinting exercise by the Australian Federal Police (AFP). 1,280 Islanders agreed to participate while 352 refused. Although armed with the killer or killers' names (police had an exhaustive list of the 680 tourists and 1778 locals 'on island' at the time of Janelle Patton's death), investigations appeared to get bogged down. Press speculation began with the obligatory evocation of the Island's convict past. "Dem tull" or scuttlebutt, Island rumour and sexual innuendo ran rife for the following two years while no significant investigative breakthroughs occurred. Two years after the murder of Janelle Patton, a coronial inquest, headed by the Australian Capital Territory's Chief Magistrate, Ron Cahill, was launched in an effort to debunk some of the wilder claims and advance the case. Carol and Ron Patton returned to the Island to attend proceedings, checking in at the Castaway Hotel where their daughter had worked. The four day coronial inquest dispelled some rumours and ignited others; Janelle Patton's history was constructed and reconstructed through anecdotal testimonials, including telephone link ups and an extensive reading of her diaries in court. Her forthright nature, her fondness for a drink, her low self-esteem, her temptatious relations with friends and intimates on the Island, her unluckiness in love and trouble ending relationships, were all foregrounded in the hearings. This was further highlighted by the Patton family's impact statement, which, in part, tried to redress the balance in memory of their daughter.⁶ To date, the inquest has failed to result in any charges being laid. While naming 16 persons of interest, Coroner Cahill took pains to specify that persons mentioned were not necessarily thereby suspects. These persons range from 18 to 56 years of age, and include Janelle Patton's own parents, Island men with whom she had had friendships, disagreements and/or intimate relations, Island women, one of whom is dead, in conflictual relations with Janelle Patton, and a couple of persons whom she possibly never met. Some forensic evidence was produced, including the print marks on the sheet of black plastic and a particle of paint, found on the tray of Raymond "Tugger" Yager's ute, which may correspond to flecks found in Janelle Patton's hair. These tenuous indices triggered further (circular) speculation in the coronial inquest, in the broader insular community and among the press.

While some points of convergence between the cases are apparent in these synopses, further structural parallels and thematic threads emerge when reading the stories relationally. Such similarities work on both the plane of judicial inquiries (with their forensic construction and reconstruction of the "hard facts," as the papers say,⁷ of the crimes and apportioning of legal responsibilities) and on that of the general media coverage of the stories first told in court (including the particular recourse by the press to figures and conventions of the murder mystery genre).

Like the number of genres, the number of parallels between these cases is countless, since comparisons are a question of

framing (or metaleptic degree). We might signal briefly some commonalities in forensic reconstructions of the two crimes: both occurred in 2002 on a Sunday; both involved white female victims meeting particularly violent deaths (as mentioned, María Marta took five bullets in the head while Janelle Patton's post-mortem revealed 64 stab wounds, cuts and shattered bone) and both women had obviously resisted.⁸ In addition, in both cases the locating of the precise scene of the crime has proven problematic.⁹ Similarly, in both cases significant evidence has gone missing, been deleted or erased.¹⁰ Both cases, too, evoke questions of cover-ups, ranging from plain negligence through *trabas judiciales* to *documentos 'truchos'* and restricted and generalized conspiracies.¹¹ Both cases, then, thereby raise the spectre of concerted attempts to pervert the course of justice.¹² Both, too, deal with issues of tenuous evidence,¹³ unsubstantiated rumour and hearsay; both similarly engage ethological issues, questioning the character of the victims¹⁴ and both, likewise, have employed similar procedures on occasion – large scale fingerprinting projects, for instance, were undertaken both at Carmel Country and on Norfolk Island.¹⁵

Not surprisingly, formal similarities in the press reporting of these cases also abound. As mentioned, press interventions are critical in producing the killings as cases, as socio-discursive events. Here, as elsewhere, reporting is always already an instance of interpretive response (uptake). The matrix of material logistics, the enunciatory constraints of the medium,¹⁶ suppression orders and limited access to already limited information¹⁷ along with commercial and other agenda ensure that certain commonplaces recur in the journalistic recounting of the stories played out in court. Some of these rhetorical topoi include: a) setting the scene, where stories deploy suggestively deterministic tropes – the murder of Janelle Patton occurred on a small island with a dark convict past, while María Marta's is a story of privilege, prestigious surnames and exclusivity where all is not quite as it seems¹⁸ – in both cases variations on the “sealed room” are evoked – close-knit, insular communities with their attendant inclusive/exclusive dichotomies;¹⁹ b) the provision of sketchy detail about periferal suspects and protagonists, lurid gossip and rumour-mongering;²⁰ c) an ethopoetic²¹ reading off of protagonists' characters from historical information, testimonials and diaries brought to bear, retrospectively and prospectively, on the (telling of the) case;²² d) the provision of a graphic *dramatis personae*, mapping relations between persons involved;²³ e) the transcription and reporting of declarations, on and off the record, of persons either closely or remotely connected with the cases; f) speculation about the course of events (both the judicial proceedings and the extra-legal reconstruction of the crimes)²⁴ and g) speculation about the motives of both accused parties and judicial advocates (in the María Marta case, questioning as to the implications of judicial determinations and querying of dilatory legal tactics; in that of Janelle Patton, press speculation as to the potential convenience of adding the name of a dead woman to the list of persons of interest).²⁵

Talk of similarities, though, presumes degrees of difference – and differences similarly abound between the María Marta and Janelle Patton cases. Jurisdictional differences, for instance, come to mind – while both crimes occurred in the same year, they took place in different countries, different languages, with different sociocultural determinants, different historical conditions and contextual constraints. The legal proceedings, likewise, are occurring on different continents, in different places in which different judicial protocols, presumptions and instances prevail. In addition, the cases have proceeded differently in their prosecution – the María Marta case reached a trial stage of sorts which, although subsequently aborted, has given rise to extensive legal wrangling, while that of Janelle Patton has been more restricted, currently comprising a murder investigation with an open finding in the concluded coronial inquest.²⁶ (This story could, of course, be altered at any moment, as the inquest works as a pressuring move by federal authorities to elicit ancillary information to prosecute the case.²⁷) There are differences, too, in the initial characterization of events – while the Janelle Patton case announced itself as murder from the start, that of María Marta was first portrayed as a domestic accident.

Both incidents, however, soon established themselves as criminal cases, due in no small part to the recourse by the media to features and protocols of the murder mystery genre.²⁸ And it is this *murder mystery* descriptor applied to these two cases which tells us something if not about what a genre is, then at least about what it isn't, or rather about how a genre matters, the myriad ways in which a genre might work.

A structural approach might define genre as comprising a set of discrete features, formulae and rules and proceed to enumerate these in an exhaustive prescriptive list. This definitional take on genre has as its correlate an ontological concern: are the María Marta and Janelle Patton cases murder mysteries? do they belong 'within' the murder mystery genre? Such a positivist question elicits a positivist response, in which examples from the cases are advanced to fit these criteria. Some criteria of pertinence to determine generic fit might include thematic characteristics, formal features or structural devices and stylistic conventions. Correlates are quickly adduced: thematically, the murder mystery would minimally seem to need: a) an unidentified murderer and a murder victim or murderess (María Marta, Janelle Patton); b) that (mostly) impartial witness, the victim's corpse; c) a violent disruption of order (María Marta and Janelle Patton both met brutal, disturbing deaths); d) a cloistered, hermetic environment (for

María Marta, the Carmel Country; for Janelle Patton, Norfolk Island); e) a tight circle of suspects (María Marta's immediate and extended family, members of the gated community; Janelle Patton's intimate and other relations on the Island); f) multiple potential motives and leads, with obligatory red herrings (in the case of María Marta, topics of talk have included theft, crime of [heterosexual and homosexual] passion, mafia payback or other revenge, drug trafficking, money laundering, dubious financial dealings, police, judicial and political corruption, etc.; in that of Janelle Patton, speculation has centred on a possible crime of passion, an aborted sexual assault, personal vengeance, a random attack, drug dealings, Janelle Patton's being an overly inquisitive outsider, an Islander conspiracy,³⁰ etc.); and g) a demonstrated effort to discover the perpetrator and thereby reestablish order, a quest for resolution invoking topoi of truth and justice³¹ (in the case of María Marta, the aborted charging of Carrascosa with homicide and eight other persons with *encubrimiento*, the judicial peripeteia surrounding the Public Prosecutor Molina Pico and Judge Barroetaveña; in that of Janelle Patton, the police investigation by Detective Sergeant Bob Peters and Ron Cahill's coronial inquest, for example).

Formally, the murder mystery would seem to require such features as a suspenseful serialization (either by chapter division or some other episodic delivery - as with the *roman-feuilleton* format,³² the nature of the police and judicial proceedings and the logistical constraints of press reporting secure the periodicity of the cases of María Marta and Janelle Patton) and the telling of the tale in terms of epistemic figures of concealment and discovery.³³ Stylistically, certain conventions best exemplified would be advanced as constitutive of the genre. Thus, the story of the Janelle Patton case is told as follows: "Detective Sergeant Bob Peters, a Canberra-based Federal Police homicide investigator, will step into a 19th century courtroom and do the equivalent of rolling a hand grenade up a church aisle" (Sutton 30.05.04); "[s]omewhere along the line, there's someone viciously killed a young woman who had every reason to live. You can't just close the door on that [...]" (Latham 30.03.03); "[a] strange tale of sex and suspicion has unfolded as Norfolk Islanders confront the likelihood of a killer in their midst" (Gibbs 05.06.04a); "[f]or more than two years, the name and address of the person who killed Janelle Louise Patton on Norfolk Island has been staring Detective Sergeant Bob Peters in the face. / It is there on his list of the 2771 men, women and children who were 'on island' on March 31 2002, the Easter Sunday Patton was murdered [...]" (Gibbs 05.06.04b). The María Marta case adopts a similar aesthetic: "[el 'pituto'] [f]ue finalmente rescatado del pozo séptico por quien se atrevió a ponerse guantes y revolver excrementos [...]" *[a]lgo huele mal en el country Carmel; en sus distinguidas residencias parece guardarse mucha basura bajo la alfombra...* (El país 14.01.03); "[l]a tarde del domingo 27 de octubre comenzó agobiante, con amenazas de tormenta y bordeando los 25 grados [...]" el lunes 2 de diciembre se realizó la autopsia, [y] los forenses determinaron que la mujer, más que golpearse con un grifo chocó contra cinco balas calibre 32 largo, más una sexta que pasó rozando y que aún no fue hallada, ni siquiera el lugar en que impactó" (Cecchi 12.12.02); "[e]l primero en hablar de la muerte de María Marta fue Horacio García Belsunce, su hermano periodista [...]" Horacio fue muy criticado por la 'ingenuidad' e imprecisiones de sus versiones y por la forma cuasi novelesca con que se expresó: 'Ahora el gordo no tiene quién le caliente los piecitos en la cama', habría dicho ni bien comenzaron a conocerse detalles de esa muerte" (UOLActualidad 01.08.04). The titles of many of these press articles are equally exemplary. (The María Marta case, in particular, engages a series of other narrative devices, of which more shortly.)

Several general objections might be raised to the usefulness of such a structural reading of genre. Its pretension to exhaustivity, its conflation of categories, its reductive isolating of minimal units of analysis and the arbitrariness of its taxonomizing are all problematic points. Moreover, its particular pertinence in relation to the María Marta and Janelle Patton cases is questionable – what does such an approach make of the fact that the María Marta and Janelle Patton killings continue to be described in terms of murder mystery when several key generic criteria are missing from the cases?

One key criterion of a structural take on the genre which is absent from the María Marta and Janelle Patton cases is narrative resolution (suspense, after all, works in a proleptic relation to closure: as mentioned, neither case has been successfully prosecuted in court – neither has staged a climactic drawing room [or other theatrical] scene of revelation. This infinite deferral, thematized in the relating of both cases,³⁴ is predicated on truth talk,³⁵ whose topoi are differently inflected in murder mystery, investigative journalistic and judicial genres). Absent from both cases, too, is the single detective protagonist (rather than figuring the sovereign sleuth, the misogynic analytic white male detective, the private eye, the chief procedural cop, the avenging vigilante or their other, differently fallible and/or intuitive incarnations, these tales disperse the detective's speaking place. In the Janelle Patton case, neither Coroner Ron Cahill nor Detective Sergeant Bob Peters fits the solo detective bill, and the press coverage is attributed to a number of journalists (interestingly, journalist Tim Latham is reportedly working on a book on the case). In the María Marta case, the investigative instances range from judges, magistrates and prosecutors to journalists and persons among the accused.³⁶ The rhetorical occupation of investigative roles by journalists reporting this case will be returned to shortly). Similarly absent here is the single error by the murderer leading to her/his perdition (in the María Marta case in particular, errors appear rather as a generative principle of the tale,³⁷ while in that of Janelle Patton, charges of indecorous behaviour are also bandied about).

A structural approach to genre cannot account for this anomaly – with key criteria missing, how can the María Marta and Janelle Patton cases continue to be described in terms of murder mystery? Talk of prescribed characteristics and criteria fails to account

for uptake and reception in practice. A rhetorical understanding of genre, on the other hand, accepts the María Marta and Janelle Patton cases as murder mysteries from the moment they are taken up, for all intents and purposes, as such.³⁸

If we approach genre not as a set of structural, formal criteria but rather as a readerly intrication [entanglement] of text and context,³⁹ then our attention turns to perlocution,⁴⁰ to issues of uptake and rhetorical effect. Issues of uptake, in turn, invite talk of intention. As mentioned, the temptation here, in terms of classical suasion, might be to attribute to a particular genre a particular intention, or set of intentions. Positing a particular intention as a formal feature of a particular genre, however, amounts to little other than a variation on a structural theme.

Rather than reading a particular purpose as inhering in a particular genre, we might posit genre rhetorically as a function of its uptake, as being appealed to differently in different places and to different ends. How, then, do the María Marta and Janelle Patton cases work to secure their uptake in terms of murder mystery and how are these generic considerations put to work?

The diversity of suasive ends to which a genre might be put is already apparent in literary historical approaches to the murder mystery. Even the common, reductive tale of the genre points to rhetorical cooption in reiteration:⁴¹ briefly, a (problematic) history of the murder mystery, or of authorial intent therein at any rate, might characterize 19th century detective fiction as a largely reactionary investment in a conservative epistemological and social scene, while finding more scope for the expression of progressive sociopolitical concerns in its later American hardboiled articulations.⁴² Similarly, ideologically opposed agenda might equally be associated with the work done by, and with, a genre synchronically – thus coeval exponents of the *roman-feuilleton* are read as engaging the genre from the right and from the left.⁴³ At the same time, this figuring of intent, or an ethopoetic inferring of intention from the text, suggests how a sociological reading is equally unable to address issues of genre, unable adequately to talk to the role of reiteration and uptake in the intrications of text and context: only such a determinist approach could posit the serial murderer, for example, as an exclusive and unproblematic corollary of the hyperindustrialized state.⁴⁴ Similarly, it is genre which helps us recall that the emergence in 19th century England of the institution of the Metropolitan Police, for example, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the advent of the figure of the police detective.

Which is not to say that such considerations and features ought not to be borne in mind; on the contrary, talk of features and characteristics is critical to a rhetorical take on genre, provided this talk be contingent and non-prescriptive. Indeed, it is only through mention of such features that we can attempt to explain how the María Marta and Janelle Patton cases secure their reception as murder mysteries. To address just how these cases work to shore up their uptake, how they come to be read in terms of murder mystery, is also to acknowledge that the perlocutionary force of a genre is contingent and varies contextually.

Rhetorically, a number of devices are commonly deployed to position both the María Marta and Janelle Patton cases as murder mysteries. These include: a) stylistic conventions (as mentioned earlier); b) comparisons with exemplary texts to force generic affiliation (in the María Marta case, Clarín (26.04.04b) notes that

[e]n su acusación, Molina Pico, al describir cómo había sido acondicionado el cadáver de María Marta para el velorio, escribió: "...Es inevitable recordar al mafioso Don Corleone reclamando al funebrero de *El Padrino* el arreglo del cadáver de su hijo ametrallado;

Similarly, *El País* (14.01.03) observes that

[e]l caso que desvela desde hace más de dos meses a la policía argentina aún espera el dictamen de Hércules Poirot / *Algo huele mal en el country Carmel; en sus distinguidas residencias parece guardarse mucha basura bajo la alfombra...*,

while Abbondanza (09.02.03) predicts that

[e]ste caso pasará a la historia argentina como el crimen de la década, por lo menos. Tiene todos los componentes de una apasionante novela policial y también todo lo que debe tener un escándalo mundano...

and Larreta (07.04.04) remarks that

[e]s una novela de Agatha Christie, amena, algo cáustica y un tanto rutinaria, que recuerda otras tuyas más inventivas y sorprendentes. / En el primer capítulo presenta a la protagonista, una mujer de unos cincuenta años, clase alta, talento para los negocios y para las obras benéficas.

In the case of Janelle Patton, Gibbs (05.06.04a) affirms that

[t]he persons of interest in Patton's murder could be cast in a local, darker version of *Twin Peaks*, an *Australian Gothic*. This is not a real-life version of *Sea Change*. It's more like *The Wicker Man*...;

he also reports (01.06.04) that

[Coroner] Mr Cahill said it was not his goal to "rattle the cages" of those named and that it would be a miracle if the inquest ended with anyone being charged. / "This is not like Jessica Fletcher in *Murder She Wrote*," he said. "Angela Lansbury is not going to walk in that door and say, 'He or she or they did it'. Equally, Quincy [a crime-fighting television coroner played by Jack Klugman] is not going to walk in with a forensic solution."

Here, similarity is signalled through highlighting difference.); c) evocations of the genre focusing on particular features or protocols (one variant here appeals to the 'one missing detail' or link, thereby subverting structural assumptions and, through difference, signalling generic similarity.⁴⁵ Again, a formal approach relying on particular criteria for generic classification is unhelpful here, for talk of an essential criterion brings counterexamples to mind – we might thus envisage a murder mystery without a victim [and without sulphuric acid in the mix] in which the story has recourse to delusion or fantasy, a differently metaphorized death or other allegory. The issue here is twofold – 1) formally, determining what qualifies as a 'necessary' criterion's acceptable functional equivalents becomes problematic, and 2) rhetorically, the sole presence or absence of this criterion, or its equivalent, might not categorically determine whether or not a story gets taken up as a murder mystery, as it is not so much that characteristics inhere prescriptively in a genre, but rather that reading, rhetoric and genre are questions of social action⁴⁶ and occur relationally, taking place between texts and contexts, in a mediatory matrix, in the interstices); d) press comparisons relating antecedent cases to those of María Marta and Janelle Patton with allusions to murder mystery,⁴⁷ and e) a *mise en abyme* of the reader by the press, in which the media models appropriate reader uptake – thus, the then Argentine president, Eduardo Duhalde,

calificó de "apasionante" el caso relacionado con el asesinato de María Marta García Belsunce, y confesó sentirse "asombrado e impactado" por las alternativas que rodean la investigación del crimen de la socióloga, ocurrido el 27 de octubre último. / "Cómo no voy a estar en tema. Estoy todo el día, como la mayoría de nosotros (siguiendo la investigación)," reconoció el jefe del Estado.⁴⁸

However, some other rhetorical moves to secure uptake in the *caso Belsunce* find no correlates in the Janelle Patton case. These moves both indicate and contribute to the ways in which different contexts are differently receptive, offering different interpretive constraints and putting a genre to different rhetorical work. The devices deployed in reporting the case of María Marta are many and their imbrication demands we address them synthetically. Some of these rhetorical moves include figuring the investigative journalist as a detective hero⁴⁹ of sorts, reporting the *caso Belsunce* under a range of journalistic rubrics, and deploying the figure of *realidad/ficción*.

The conflation of the investigative journalist and the detective hero, then, is exemplified in the figure of Enrique "El Turco" Sdrecht, whose deductions are foregrounded in the reporting of the María Marta case.⁵⁰ The iconic figure of Sdrecht connotes pure murder mystery, his name having become synonymous with the reporting of Argentinian *casos policiales* over more than 50 years.⁵¹ Among other positions, he was for many years editor in chief of the *sección policiales* of the daily *Clarín*.

(The very existence of *policiales* as a newspaper category is worth recalling here – its presence in the Argentinian press, and the lack of an Australian correlate, both partially determine and reflect how the María Marta and Janelle Patton cases get taken up differently. The classification of the Janelle Patton case has been relatively stable, appearing largely under the *national* news heading. That of María Marta, on the other hand, has been reported under a range of rubrics, from *sociedad* to *política* to *el país* to *información general* to *policiales*. To trace this spillage would be to tell a tale of the repercussions of the case and its rhetorical concern with uptake.)

Sdrecht's interventions form part of a broader discursive trend, a novelizing of the criminal in which investigative journalism turns to writing books through recourse to murder mystery.⁵² In Argentina, then, we needn't rehearse some invidious history of the nation's *literatura negra* (from, for example, Olivera's translations of Poe to Holmberg's tales etc. to the present, including publishing practices enabling the whole thing)⁵³ to relate the María Marta case to murder mystery; the presence of such figures as Vicente Battista, José Pablo Feinmann, Tomás Eloy Martínez, Ricardo Piglia, Enrique Sdrecht, Reynaldo Sietecase, Horacio Verbitsky and Rodolfo Walsh ensures that the comparison imposes itself.

A further indication of the resonances of the María Marta case articulated as murder mystery is the range of metacommentaries that its coverage has occasioned in the press. A number of articles appeared allegorizing and analyzing aspects of proceedings, working redundantly to ensure that the María Marta case be read as murder mystery.⁵⁴ Of particular note here is the intervention of Vicente Battista, who published a series of pieces collectively entitled “*La mira del cazador*” in the *sociedad* rubric of *Clarín*. The coverage of the Janelle Patton case, although also in terms of murder mystery, has given rise to nothing remotely similar. “*La mira del cazador*” presents a series of speculative dialogues in which the interlocutors Patricia and Rodolfo conjecture openly or in thinly veiled terms about the *caso del country*, pinning their hypotheses on references to a variety of classic literary and cinematic murder mystery texts.⁵⁵ Through citation, allegory and analogy such work contributes to securing a reading, to overdetermining the uptake of the María Marta case in terms of murder mystery.

In its efforts to secure uptake, Battista’s intervention plays dialogically on the old reality/fiction binary.⁵⁶ While figuring less insistently in the Janelle Patton case,⁵⁷ this topos occurs repeatedly in that of María Marta.⁵⁸ Briefly, these questions of verisimilitude, of ontology, are subsumed by issues of rhetoric and of genre, to the point where the reality/fiction dichotomy figures as a key topos in reading murder mysteries. A rhetorical approach to genre, a concern for perlocution, sees the question of verisimilitude both performed and problematized by the genre of the murder mystery.

How is it, then, that two intriguing cases, both appealing to the murder mystery, elicit such different uptakes in the press? What might this say about the rhetorical ends of genre? As mentioned, both cases have been the subject of considerable talk. However, the comparatively massive coverage the *caso Belsunce* has received points to the diverse socio-discursive ends to which a genre such as the murder mystery can be put.

On the whole, coverage of the Janelle Patton case has focused on Norfolk Island’s alterity, talking up the negative aspects of the community’s insularity, its culture of silence and fraternal loyalty. Furthering this dynamic of inclusion/exclusion, the mainstream mainland press reports touch on jurisdictional tensions between the Island and Canberra and its problematic relation with the AFP. Tim Latham’s intervention (30.03.03), however, is striking in its exceptionality: he effectively marshalls elements of the case to point to systemic conflicts of interest, lacks of checks and balances and issues of impunity in Island governance. He deploys the Janelle Patton case epideictically, using the occasion to signal issues of domestic violence, health care, tax, immigration and other concerns about the Island’s polity. For the most part, however, the Janelle Patton case is framed as a murder mystery with a view to telling a tale of more or less morbid curiosity: thus the murder mystery works to recount a strange tale of suspicion and sexuality (Gibbs 05.06.04a) - “a tragic story that unfolds like a classic murder mystery worthy of Agatha Christie” (Bowden 27.05.04) perhaps, but one whose ripples and ramifications largely stop short of the mainland’s shore.

The María Marta case, on the other hand, while also framed as a murder mystery, elicits a series of responses which are nothing short of extraordinary. Different interpretive constraints, different sociocultural and historical determinants, a climate of instability, a generalized Argentinian *desconfianza discursiva* (Hortiguera 07.03) and an idiosyncratic history of reader responsivity,⁵⁹ make these stories differently readable and signal the ways in which genre works as an “intrication of text and context” (Freadman *op. cit.*). The judicial turns and media twists of the María Marta case articulate and activate a series of sociocultural pressure points – wealth/poverty, inclusion/exclusion, political and judicial corruption, conflation of cops and robbers, drug trafficking, money laundering, disappeared persons and criminal impunity,⁶⁰ for example. The securing of the uptake of the *caso Belsunce* as murder mystery indicates how the rhetorical locus of genre is not the text, how genre works relationally and how to talk of genre is to engage a range of (contextualized and contextualizing) postulates of intent.

Like genres themselves, the María Marta and Janelle Patton cases show how the rhetorical ends to which a genre can be put are countless, and how a particular purpose, or set of purposes, ought not to be taken as inhering in a particular genre. Multiple contextual mediations and differing interpretive constraints mean that a particular genre need not entail a particularly fixed uptake.

A rhetorical approach to genre concerns itself with suasion, with perlocution, with attempts to determine a particular uptake. Reception, however, is a shaky and contingent thing, and just how, and for how long, the María Marta and Janelle Patton cases will continue to be framed as murder mysteries remains, as they say, *une affaire à suivre*...⁶¹

Notes

- 1 For operative reasons, press is largely restricted here to some mainstream newspapers available both as hard copy and online. [Return to reading.](#)
- 2 For our purposes, *murder mystery* is to be taken as a loose generic set, a genus whose species include, for example, the classic English murder mystery and North American hardboiled detective novels, etc. [Return to reading.](#)
- 3 On iteration or iterability, see Derrida (1988). [Return to reading.](#)
- 4 Hence, for example, the multiple deaths of María Marta - “María Marta García Belsunce fue asesinada dos veces. Primero, por

la mano criminal que la golpeó y descerrajó seis balazos, y la segunda muerte ha sido cometida por su familia que encubre el crimen por razones dolosas o culposas, o por torpeza de la mentalidad de la pequeña burguesía arribista.." (Corbière 06.01.03). Similarly, "[...] el oscuro homicidio de María García Belsunce, fallecida el 27 de octubre pasado de muerte accidental –según la primera versión familiar–, de muerte natural –según el acta de defunción– y de cinco balazos en la cabeza –según la autopsia realizada 45 días más tarde [...]" (Cecchi & Kollmann 13.12.02). [Return to reading.](#)

5 Recent developments, including the *desprocesamiento* of Carrascosa, further reinforce this popular hypothesis. *Clarín* (30.07.04) noted recently that "[l]a causa García Belsunce sigue atravesada en una maraña judicial y camina sobre el filo de la impunidad". [Return to reading.](#)

6 Here we witness the violence of a non-coincidence of genres, contested jurisdictions in which the Pattons bring a register of personal grief to a judicial discursive framework. Carol Patton is quoted in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (*SMH* 03.06.04a) as stating that "[t]he past three days have been very difficult for our family and we appreciate the opportunity to place on record our feelings at this time. We have endured a public dissection of the negative aspects of our daughter's life with little reference to her positive attributes of which there were many. We have heard nothing of her warm and loving nature, her sense of fun and humour, her genuine concern for others and the ability to overcome many difficulties she encountered in her life". [Return to reading.](#)

7 "[...] Quintal turned up to the inquest every day, unlike most Islanders, who seemed to prefer "dem tull" or rumour, to the hard facts of the inquest" (Milligan 05.06.04). [Return to reading.](#)

8 Regarding María Marta, "los investigadores [...] están convencidos de que ofreció resistencia: "Tenía golpes en el rostro y moretones en los brazos, todos demasiado notorios como para pasar desapercibidos y como para suponer que se trató de un accidente", continuó el experto; [...] [experto:] Hay evidencias concretas de que la mujer ofreció resistencia [...] Había sangre en el baño, pero también había manchas en la puerta del dormitorio y en la escalera que lleva a la planta baja" (Cecchi & Kollmann 13.12.02).

Regarding Janelle Patton, Carol Patton affirmed in the family's impact statement that they were "proud of the way she fought" (Gibbs 03.06.04a); Sutton (30.05.04) captions a photo of Janelle Patton as "MIGHTY STRUGGLE". [Return to reading.](#)

9 Regarding María Marta, "[l]a mujer no murió en el baño y alguien borró rastros [...] Hay evidencias concretas de que la mujer ofreció resistencia, de que no fue asesinada en el baño y de que el escenario fue preparado... [experto:] Había sangre en el baño, pero también había manchas en la puerta del dormitorio y en la escalera que lleva a la planta baja" (Cecchi & Kollman 13.12.02).

Regarding Janelle Patton, "[t]he problem for police is they still don't know where Janelle was murdered..." (Latham 30.03.03); "There is no factual or forensic evidence against anyone that could convince the Coroner, Ron Cahill, to find on Thursday other than that Patton was murdered somewhere on Norfolk Island by a person or persons unknown" (Gibbs 05.06.04a); "Patton was last seen walking on Rooty Hill Road by Jodie Williams, who drove past her at about 11:40am. Patton had probably been snatched in a vehicle, and slain at some still unknown site" (Gibbs 05.06.04b); "The reserve was not the murder scene which, like the killer and the murder weapon, has yet to be identified" (*SMH* 03.06.04c). [Return to reading.](#)

10 Here, the case of María Marta presumes deliberate intent, while that of Janelle Patton largely concerns natural elements. Regarding María Marta, "María Marta García Belsunce murió en octubre, en un elegante country de Pilar, supuestamente por un accidente en la bañera. La vieron tres médicos y fue enterrada en la Recoleta. Ahora el fiscal ordenó exhumar el cadáver, que tenía cinco balazos en la cabeza... / LA MATARON A BALAZOS, PERO SU CERTIFICADO DECIA QUE FUE UN PARO.." (Cecchi 12.12.02); "No tiene nada que ver un golpe con un grifo que cinco disparos en la cabeza, masa encefálica desparramada y alrededor de medio litro de sangre que perdió la víctima', confió el experto" (Cecchi & Kollmann 13.12.02); "El 19 de diciembre, el sexto proyectil (había sido tirado al inodoro por sus familiares) apareció en el pozo ciego de la casa" (*Clarín* 24.04.04a); "Del lado de la familia de María Marta hubo, como mínimo, negligencia. Fue su hermano Horacio el que le pidió: 'Sacame la Policía de encima' a un alto jefe de la Bonaerense; fue su cuñado Guillermo Bártoli el que consiguió un certificado de defunción falso; fueron varios familiares los que decidieron que una bala era un "pituto" a tirar por el inodoro. ...El círculo íntimo de María Marta tuvo mucho que ver con que en esos días no se hiciera nada" (Prieto 24.04.04); "El episodio [del pituto tirado] plantea interrogantes. Si los familiares pensaron que el pequeño objeto era un accesorio de biblioteca, no tenía sentido deshacerse de él, sino dejarlo en cualquier estante. Aun con la voluntad de desecharlo, parece insensato tirarlo por el inodoro. El tacho de basura habría alcanzado. A la inversa, si pensaron que el objeto era una bala perdida, resultaba incorrecto y hasta delictivo tirarlo a la basura o al inodoro. Junto a otros elementos, el ejemplo del pituto fue visto por varios observadores como un síntoma de 'ocultamiento' o 'encubrimiento' del crimen por parte de algunos familiares" (*El país* 14.01.03).

Regarding Janelle Patton, "[forensic evidence] is limited, due to a rainstorm that hit the Island around 3pm on the Sunday. In a 20-minute period, it bucketed down, drenching the Island with half an inch of rain. There were no fingerprints or foreign DNA found on Janelle's body. Detective Sergeant Bob Peters says he'll never know what forensic clues were washed away" (Latham 30.03.03); "[w]ith the torrential downpour] tyre marks, DNA, footprints or other evidence was washed away" (Milligan 05.06.04). [Return to reading.](#)

11 Regarding María Marta, see Prieto (24.04.04) endnote x; "La irrupción de los rostros desagradables de la realidad en la vida cotidiana del country tiene un efecto demoledor, si bien raramente lo extraordinario sale a luz. Boca cerrada y discreción rodearon la extraña e inoportuna muerte de Cristina Onassis en Tortugas [...]" (Viau 27.01.03). We recall, too, that in the case Belsunce, María Marta's husband, Carrascosa, was accused by the Public Prosecutor Molina Pico of homicide, while eight other family members and intimates were accused of encubrimiento (*Clarín* 24.04.04b): María Marta's neighbour, Sergio Binello; her brother-in-law, Guillermo Bártoli; her friend, Nora Burgués de Taylor; her brother, Horacio García Belsunce; her step-brother,

Juan Carlos Hurtig; her step-father, Constantino Hurtig; the doctor, Ramón Gauvry Gordon and her masseuse, Beatriz Michelini. Regarding Janelle Patton, “Baker ‘Foxy’McCoy [...] finds it ‘very weird’ [the murder] happened in broad daylight and is sure there is a ‘big cover-up’” (Milligan 05.06.04). [Return to reading.](#)

12 Regarding María Marta, “[s]e busca en una huella digital estampada en un manchón de sangre, cuando en el velatorio hubo cerca de doscientas personas que deambularon por la casa donde ocurrió el crimen, destruyendo cualquier pista [...] El acta de defunción fue falsa, impuesta por la familia que fabuló sobre el pretendido ‘accidente’. El cuñado de la occisa, Guillermo Bártoli, adquirió un féretro de bajo costo lo que hace presumir que algunos intentaron cremar los restos de María Marta. Eso hubiera estado cercano al crimen perfecto [...] Juan Ramón Gaudry Gordon, el primer médico que vio a García Belsunce, declaró que la familia le dijo que había sido un accidente doméstico fatal y que él mandó a limpiar la sangre del baño, donde apareció el cadáver de María Marta” (Corbière 06.01.03).

Regarding Janelle Patton, see Milligan (05.06.04), endnote xi. [Return to reading.](#)

13 Regarding María Marta, “[d]e la inspección policial surgió el hallazgo de dos cabellos y de un ‘vello púbico’ que habrían estado en un sillón. La utilidad de esos elementos era muy dudosa, primero porque mucha gente pasó por allí y después porque un incómodo contacto sexual en un sillón no encajaba con los tiempos del crimen” (*El país* 14.01.03).

Regarding Janelle Patton, “[a]ll investigating officers had were the paint flakes on Janelle’s body, finger and palm prints on the black plastic, and some hairs that DNA technology has been unable to analyse. The telephone exchange prevented intercepts and the gossip mill meant police could not break into houses to install listening devices [...] Forensic scientists found a microscopic flake of green paint embedded in the tray of Yager’s ute which was [...] almost identical to the paint flakes found in Janelle’s hair. [...] Yager spent hours water blasting and steam cleaning his car that day. He says he did it every Sunday to minimise salt damage, but other locals never saw it looking so clean” (Milligan 05.06.04). [Return to reading.](#)

14 Regarding María Marta, Battista’s column (02.02.03) has its protagonist Patricia remark that “[l]a vieja costumbre de satanizar a la víctima: en algo andaría, por algo será. En lugar de investigar al asesino, investigamos al asesinado”; similarly, “Lo cierto es que María Marta fue asesinada, y sufre ahora el escarnio porque muchos intentan investigar a la víctima en vez de dirigir la mirada hacia los posibles asesinos y encubridores” (Corbière 06.01.03); “La falta de apremios económicos y la ausencia de hijos propios no hicieron de María Marta García Belsunce una mujer desinteresada de su entorno. Afincada en un exclusivo country de Pilar, decidió ocuparse de los niños ajenos, aquellos que por diversas razones habían sido perdidos por sus familias. Se abocó también a los apremios económicos y sociales de los demás” (*Página/12* 12.12.02).

Regarding Janelle Patton, “[s]he was a bit wild. But was that enough to drive her killer to commit brutal murder? [...] The revelations of Janelle Patton’s diary have been instrumental in this respect. [...] [Patton] ‘crashed’ at [Yager’s] house once, but wrote ‘no sex’ in her diary” (Milligan 05.06.04). Lines are quickly blurred in the press coverage of the case, conflating evidentiary documents tendered to the courts, testimonials and hearsay: “[Laurence ‘Bucket’ Quintal and Janelle Patton] had sex and Janelle described it as ‘not rape, but not something I wanted.’ / A note to him was found in her handwriting saying: ‘Look Bucket, I’m sore. I’m bruised big time. I’m devastated by everything you said and did to me last night’” (Milligan *ibid.*). But a diary read retrospectively in court can have unpredictable effects; its reception is fraught, its rhetorical workings are various and cut many ways: “She also had now widely documented disagreements with Jap Menghetti, harrassing him after their relationship ended. In her diary, she said he described her as ‘enemy number one on Norfolk’” (Milligan *ibid.*). [Return to reading.](#)

15 Regarding María Marta, “[...] nuestro fiscal ha decidido tomarles las impresiones digitales a todos los habitantes del Carmel” (Battista 16.02.03).

Regarding Janelle Patton, “1,280 Islanders stepped forward to offer their hands [for the AFP fingerprinting exercise] for justice; 352 refused” (Latham 30.03.03). While the actual number of persons “on island” varies between accounts, the principle of exhaustivity is constant. [Return to reading.](#)

16 We recall, however, that devices such as hotlinks, graphics resources and archived back editions ensure that online editions of newspapers are able to forge diegetic relations in ways not as readily available to hardcopy press. [Return to reading.](#)

17 Regarding Janelle Patton, “[p]erson of interest Raymond ‘Tugger’ Yager, who is now working in Cambodia, gagged anyone who knew him from speaking. Other Islanders have had visitors warning them not to talk [...] Janelle’s friend Shanya Young said Janelle was avoiding Joep before her death, but did not say why” (Milligan 05.06.04).

Regarding María Marta, “[e]n ese sentido, el borrado de las huellas queda sumergido en un mar de dudas: aún no está determinado si fueron limpiadas ingenuamente y con posterioridad, si se realizó para borrar pruebas o uno o varios miembros del entorno familiar decidieron eludir el escándalo” (Cecchi & Kollmann 13.12.02). [Return to reading.](#)

18 With the María Marta case, the critique of ‘high’ society is articulated through recourse to the ‘low’ popular genre of the murder mystery. “La falta de apremios económicos y la ausencia de hijos propios no hicieron de María Marta García Belsunce una mujer desinteresada de su entorno. Afincada en un exclusivo country de Pilar, decidió ocuparse de los niños ajenos” (*Página/12* 12.12.02); “*Algo huele mal en el country Carmel; en sus distinguidas residencias parece guardarse mucha basura bajo la alfombra*” (*El país* 14.01.03). Even the weather was a little on the portentous side: “[l]a tarde del domingo 27 de octubre comenzó agobiante, con amenazas de tormenta y bordeando los 25 grados” (Cecchi 12.12.02).

Equally, in the Norfolk Island case, history appears to conspire against Janelle Patton: “Home to 1800 people, many descendants of the Bounty mutineers who settled on the former penal colony after sailing from Pitcairn Island, the breathtakingly beautiful Island has a creepiness that could stem from the suffering during the convict years or the sense that you are always being watched” (Milligan 05.06.04); “[...] the Sydney woman’s death delivered the tourist haven a nasty reminder of its dark convict past... / Among [the persons of interest] are members of some of the Island’s famous families, descendants of the HMS Bounty

crew led by Fletcher Christian into the most famous naval mutiny in modern history [...] One local mused about whether Ms Patton's killer would ever be found. / 'She ventured into the deep waters of Norfolk and perhaps she didn't know what lines she was crossing over,' he said. 'We're talking about more than 200 years of history here'"(Sutton 30.05.04); "The Bounty descendents arrived at Norfolk's abandoned penal settlement in 1856 [...] In the past year there's been two suspicious fires on the Island. Indeed arson is a great Norfolk tradition and dates back to the day the mutineers burnt the Bounty" (Latham 30.03.03). Similarly, "[...] historical undercurrents are little understood by foreigners, including 'TPs' as Ms Patton, a temporary resident, was./ Intense interest is focused on the hearing, to be conducted in an 1832 sandstone military barrack hung with portraits of Island monarchs King George VI, Queen Victoria and Queen Mary. It dates from the Island's second convict settlement, when, said Governor Ralph Darling, it was 'a place of extremist punishment, short of death'" (Sutton 30.05.04).

These deterministic figures, however, can be coopted. Hence Ron Patton appealed to history to exhort persons with knowledge of his daughter's death to come forward and talk: "It's like John Adams on Pitcairn Island who brought peace to Pitcairn Island [...]" (Latham 30.03.03). [Return to reading.](#)

19 For interesting expositions of this inner/outer dynamic in relation to the María Marta case, see Feinmann (25.01.03), Russo (26.01.03) and Viau (27.01.03). In respect of the Janelle Patton case, Latham (30.03.03) and Milligan (05.06.04) similarly explore this binary while Gibbs (05.06.04a) exploits it in a more sensationalist vein. [Return to reading.](#)

20 Regarding Janelle Patton, "[y]ou can't sneeze in Norfolk Island without someone knowing it,' a hospitality worker says [...] 'Much of what was said in the inquest was already rumoured on the Island [...]' Ruth McCoy says. [...] Quintal turned up to the inquest every day, unlike most Islanders, who seemed to prefer 'dem tull' or rumour, to the hard facts of the inquest" (Milligan 05.06.04); "A strange tale of sex and suspicion has unfolded as Norfolk Islanders confront the likelihood of a killer in their midst [...] Islanders can see without being seen..." (Gibbs 05.06.04a); "As Islander Steven Robertson said: 'Australia has AFL, we have gossip [...]' One theory has Islanders carrying out a group slaying of Ms Patton" (Sutton 30.05.04); "It's a place bursting with gossip, half-truths and a dark, unspoken secret: Just who murdered Janelle Patton [...]" (Latham 30.03.03); "Norfolk Island's 'dem tull' – Island gossip - was just as active last year [...] While Norfolk Island residents are keen for the murder to be solved, the Island was also abuzz yesterday with gossip about the sex lives of certain people named during the inquest" (Sutton 06.06.04). Regarding María Marta, "[el agente de bienes raíces:] En [los countries], en cambio, después de algo así no se puede seguir viviendo. Los ojos de los otros, siempre encima de uno, se convierten en un infierno, y el estallido del drama siempre tiene una magnitud inconmensurable" (Viau 27.01.03); "*Algo huele mal en el country Carmel; en sus distinguidas residencias parece guardarse mucha basura bajo la alfombra*" (El país 14.01.03). [Return to reading.](#)

21 On the ethopoetic impulse, see Miller (2001). [Return to reading.](#)

22 Regarding María Marta, "[l]a falta de apremios económicos y la ausencia de hijos propios no hicieron de María Marta García Belsunce una mujer desinteresada de su entorno. Afincada en un exclusivo country de Pilar, decidió ocuparse de los niños ajenos, aquellos que por diversas razones habían sido perdidos por sus familias. Se abocó también a los apremios económicos y sociales de los demás: desde 1996, con la asociación Damas del Pilar –una entidad integrada por señoras de aristocráticos apellidos– desarrolló acciones para recaudar fondos destinados a la comunidad de ese partido bonaerense. Desde hace dos años integraba también el reducido grupo de activistas de Missing Children, la organización que en ese lapso ayudó a ubicar a más de setecientos chicos extraviados" (Página/12 12.12.02); "Otra [motivación posible] era el crimen pasional. Parecía improbable, porque se trataba de un matrimonio al que no se le conocían desvíos y amantes. Pero esa línea de suposiciones avanzó, sin mayor respaldo, hasta afirmar la idea de una relación lesbiana de María Marta con una vecina" (El país 14.01.03). Regarding Janelle Patton, "Janelle Patton's private life on Norfolk Island - her lovers, fights and fears - was opened like a stolen diary yesterday. [Her diaries were in fact scrutinized during the inquest.] / The gathered Islanders and others in the Georgian courthouse heard of a 29-year-old fleeing Sydney, physically and emotionally scarred by men, a woman who had plans for a fresh start on Norfolk, but kept battling low self-esteem with anti-depressants and alcohol [...] To reach the evening of March 30, 2002, when Ms Patton's body was found wrapped in black plastic at Cockpit Waterfall Reserve, Sergeant Peters began with events that led her to Norfolk and shaped her relationships with men. / An unremarkable relationship in her late teens had led into a disastrous one with an RAN sailor who once broke her jaw. / Ms Patton was so scarred that when she then attracted a man she really liked, her response was, 'He's such a nice guy, why does he want anything to do with me?' This partner had suggested that she go away for a while and sort out her emotions. (After she was killed, he blamed himself.)" (Gibbs 01.06.04).

As mentioned, in her impact statement, Carol Patton tried to redress the character balance in favour of the memory of her daughter: "'We have heard nothing of her warm and loving nature' . . . Janelle Patton's mother, Carol, and father, Ron, speak to the media at the Norfolk Island courthouse yesterday. The loving child and courageous woman who fought to the end for her life had been lost in the search for what motivated someone to kill Janelle Patton, her mother said yesterday [...] 'We have endured a public dissection of the negative aspects of our daughter's life with little reference to her positive attributes, of which there were many,' the 57-year-old maths teacher said. [...] 'Along with the sadness and the grief, though, comes a sense of pride. We're proud of the way she fought.'" (Gibbs 03.06.04b). [Return to reading.](#)

23 Regarding Janelle Patton, see Milligan (05-06.06.04). Regarding María Marta, see the *infografías* provided periodically in *Clarín*, for example. [Return to reading.](#)

24 Regarding María Marta, "parece probable que la investigación del asesinato de María Marta García Belsunce se encamine a un final sin condenados por su muerte. A este empantanamiento de la causa no se llegó por casualidad: el fiscal, el juez y la familia tienen buena parte de la responsabilidad..." (Prieto 24.04.04); "[y] [Molina Pico] señaló que la única finalidad de la defensa de los sospechosos es 'continuar generando obstáculos' para evitar que la causa avance" (Clarín 26.04.04a).

Regarding Janelle Patton, “[Coroner Ron Cahill:] ‘It’s closed, but it’s still open’ (Gibbs 04.06.04); “‘There’s no doubt the investigation and the search for truth will continue until someone is brought to justice,’ [Cahill] told the inquest” (SMH 03.06.04b).

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25 Regarding María Marta, “[p]ara quienes están del lado del fiscal Molina Pico, la resolución de ayer de la Corte puede ser leída de la siguiente manera: ‘Si le delegaron el tema a la Secretaría de Control Judicial, significa que alguna irregularidad hay. Si no, directamente hubieran archivado las cosas’. Para los que están del lado de Barroetaveña, la lectura sería la contraria: ‘Si hubieran encontrado elementos para sancionar al juez, lo hubieran hecho ayer, tal como lo anticipaban muchos y lo esperaba el fiscal Molina Pico’” (R.K. 29.04.04); “Especialistas consultados por *Clarín* explicaron que las nulidades normalmente se piden por cuestiones ‘más formales que de fondo’. [...] En muchos casos, los pedidos de nulidades suelen formar parte de estrategias defensoras para dilatar los casos y ganar tiempo’, señalaron” (Clarín 12.02.03)

Regarding Janelle Patton, “As some Islanders reeled last week at the reading of their names in court, it might seem convenient to name a new person of interest who can never face trial” (Sutton 06.06.04). [Return to reading.](#)

26 Although the inquest has concluded, Coroner Cahill’s open finding enables the potential continuation of the case. “‘Because the inquest is closed at this stage doesn’t mean the investigation is,” [Detective Sergeant Bob Peters] told reporters” (SMH, 03.06.04c). Coroner Cahill himself interestingly conflates the inquest and the police investigation, affirming: “[i]t’s closed, but it’s still open” (Gibbs 04.06.04). [Return to reading.](#)

27 Which isn’t to say that this tactic will necessarily succeed, given the constitutive insecurity of uptake: “Ruth McCoy, a direct descendent of Bounty mutineer Fletcher Christian who housed Janelle on her property for a year before her death, tells the *Inquirer* that Islanders with information may be even more frightened to come forward because they now know the full details of the murder” (Milligan 05.06.04). [Return to reading.](#)

28 To reiterate, *murder mystery* is to be taken here as a loose generic set, a genus whose species include, for example, the classic English murder mystery and North American hardboiled detective novels. [Return to reading.](#)

29 While the Janelle Patton case occurred on an island, the María Marta story with its gated community equally deploys insular analogies: “‘Los diez indiecitos’ sucede en una isla tan vedada a desconocidos como el country Carmel. En ‘Los diez indiecitos’ el asesino necesariamente tiene que ser uno de los escasos habitantes de esa isla. Todo indicaría que el asesino de María Marta García Belsunce también debería hallarse entre los moradores del country” (Battista 16.01.03); “Eso es ‘Asesinato a distancia’, dice Rodolfo. Efectivamente, confirma Patricia, la novela de tu tocayo Rodolfo Walsh. Villa Regina, recordará, se parecía mucho a un country. Así la describía Walsh: ‘Como en una isla se extendían los terrenos de Villa Regina [...]’” (Battista 09.02.03).

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30 “Did [Janelle Patton’s] anti-drug stance have to extend to ripping up marijuana plants? Did she really have to bang on Paul ‘Jap’ Menghetti’s windows when he started seeing another woman? Why did she reprimand Susan Fieldes and Charles ‘Spindles’ Menghetti for allegedly having an affair?” (Milligan 05-06.06.04). [Return to reading.](#)

31 Like *impunidad*, the particular resonances of the *verdad y justicia* topoi in Latin America will be remembered here. [Return to reading.](#)

32 Obviously, the 19th century *roman-feuilleton* was not the exclusive province of the murder mystery; other ‘popular’ genres such as moralizing, adventure and sentimental novels, for example, also find their precursors in this journalistic form. [Return to reading.](#)

33 Figures of revelation and permutations of the alethic pervade this talk. Regarding María Marta, “[Susan Murray, presidenta Missing Children, amiga de María Marta] [a]gregó que, de todas maneras, ‘tenemos la esperanza de que alguien superior al juez reaccione y acelere la investigación del caso para que se llegue a la verdad de una vez por todas’” (Clarín 25.04.04); “¿y se podrá llegar a la verdad con esa investigación?, pregunta Patricia sin disimular su escepticismo. Sí, dice Rodolfo, bastaría con imitar los gestos de algún detective célebre [...]” (Battista 26.02.03).

Regarding Janelle Patton, “[t]here’s no doubt the investigation and the search for truth will continue until someone is brought to justice,’ [Coroner Ron Cahill] told the inquest” (SMH, 03.06.04b). [Return to reading.](#)

34 Regarding Janelle Patton, “[a]n arrest of the killer, a trial and a conviction, and the Islanders could move on from Norfolk’s first murder in 153 years” (Sutton 30.05.04); “[t]here’s no doubt the investigation and the search for truth will continue until someone is brought to justice,’ [Coroner Ron Cahill] told the inquest” (SMH, 03.06.04b).

Regarding María Marta, “parece probable que la investigación del asesinato de María Marta García Belsunce se encamine a un final sin condenados por su muerte. A este empantanamiento de la causa no se llegó por casualidad [...]” (Prieto 24.04.04).

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35 See (Clarín 25.04.04) and (Battista 26.02.03) in endnote xxxii. [Return to reading.](#)

36 “Falta el investigador deductivo, pero tampoco está el intuitivo, reconoce Patricia” (Battista 09.02.03). [Return to reading.](#)

37 As Battista (16.01.03) observes, “En la mayoría de los casos el asesino comete un error, ese error será su perdición. En el crimen de María Marta García Belsunce los errores se repiten sin descanso, pero en lugar de alumbrar al culpable cada día lo oscurecen más”. [Return to reading.](#)

38 On Todorov’s (1973) terms, for example, it is an *historical*, rather than a *theoretical*, construal of genre which is of interest here, because a tracing of uptake is empirical and grounded retrospectively – positing historical genres as a sub-group of complex theoretical genres (Todorov, 1973: 21), then, is of limited use rhetorically. [Return to reading.](#)

39 See Freadman (forthcoming): “Genre, if it is anything, is the intrication of text and context [...]”. [Return to reading.](#)

40 In speech act theory, perlocution is that which Austin (1962: 101) problematically associates with “saying something [that] will

often, or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons: and it may be done with the design, intention, or purpose of producing them [...]" [Return to reading.](#)

41 On cooption, see, for example, Butler (1997). [Return to reading.](#)

42 Ideologically leftist allegory is certainly the avowed intention of, for example, some contemporary Chilean authors of murder mystery fiction. Thus Franken (19.04.02) notes that "Díaz Eterovic, desde una posición política comprometida con la izquierda, quiere entregar en sus novelas negras 'una radiografía de nuestra sociedad actual' y 'reflexionar acerca de la marginalidad de una ciudad como Santiago [...]' acerca de los espacios de soledad que hay en una ciudad como Santiago, sobre la justicia en Chile, el poder aplicado en la política y el caso de los detenidos desaparecidos." Similar tales could be mapped, *mutatis mutandis*, onto Argentina with Ricardo Piglia, for example, onto Spain with Manuel Vázquez Montalbán, onto Italy with Leonardo Sciascia, onto Australia with Paul McLaren, etc. [Return to reading.](#)

43 For example, Ponson du Terrail and Eugène Sue, respectively. [Return to reading.](#)

44 Thus Marta Ferro, for example, affirms that "[l]os yanquis tienen asesinos seriales porque son casos que se dan en sociedades superindustrializadas [...]" (Boido 03.00). The common belief that "far more crimes [classified as serial murders] occur in the United States than elsewhere" (Hacking 1999: 54), points equally to such crimes' occurring in other places and invites problematization in terms of classificatory criteria used to determine beliefs and their extensivity, etc. [Return to reading.](#)

45 Regarding the María Marta case, Battista (26.02.03) writes that "Rodolfo reprime la sonrisa y dice que [el asesino mediático] era el detalle que faltaba en este show"; *El País* (14.01.03) notes that "Oscar Sierco, ejecutivo de la Casa Sierra [...] dijo que Bártoli, pudiendo elegir entre varios modelos de ataúd, eligió uno más barato. De allí deducía que la familia pensaba efectuar la cremación del cadáver, para lo cual un ataúd costoso habría sido un derroche. La deducción llevaba a Sdrech un paso más allá. Si la familia pensaba efectuar la cremación del cadáver, allí culminaría el Crimen Perfecto, con la desaparición de las pistas."; Corbière (06.01.03) likewise inquires whether "¿[s]e está esperando un chivo expiatorio a quien atribuirle el crimen?", noting that "[y]a aparecieron el 'vecino' raro, la empleada doméstica vestida de rosa, que estuvo en el velatorio pero nadie sabe quien era, el jardinero, un presunto 'marginal' que habita otro country, falta el 'mayordomo' de las novelas policiales de ficción. / El acta de defunción fue falsa, impuesta por la familia que fabuló sobre el pretendido 'accidente'. El cuñado de la occisa, Guillermo Bártoli, adquirió un féretro de bajo costo lo que hace presumir que algunos intentaron cremar los restos de María Marta. Eso hubiera estado cercano al crimen perfecto".

Regarding the Janelle Patton case, see, for example, Gibbs' article (05.06.04b) entitled "*Missing Links*". [Return to reading.](#)

46 On genre as social action, see Miller (1994). [Return to reading.](#)

47 Regarding the María Marta case, Cecchi & Kollmann (13.12.02) observe that "[l]a línea que sostiene el crimen pasional sigue siendo la más fuerte para investigar el caso [...] Vaciar el cargador sobre la víctima es un patrón conocido entre los peritos como saña pasional, como ocurrió en el caso de Adriana Facello de Portas, a quien un hombre, supuestamente su amante, le vació el cargador de 9 balas en el Lawn Tennis Club, 24 días antes de la muerte de García Belsunce"; similarly, Viau (27.01.03) writes that "[b]oca cerrada y discreción rodearon la extraña e inoportuna muerte de Cristina Onassis en Tortugas, donde su amiga, Marina Dodero, alquilaba una casa. En aquella oportunidad, la supermillonaria también fue hallada en la bañera y su tránsito al otro mundo diagnosticado como fruto de un edema pulmonar [...] / otra historia de violencia ensangrentó los countries: el médico de 62 años Armando Pochat apareció acuchillado con un tramontina en su casa del San Diego. Al tiempo que trascendía esa muerte, se informaba que Horacio Conzi, un 'Rambo' criollo propietario del restaurante Dallas de San Isidro y acusado de matar a tiros a un joven de poco más de veinte años, era buscado en la casa que un oficial de la Marina tiene en Las Glorietas"; likewise, Pikielny (28.03.04) notes that "la larga lista de casos sin resolución que tuvieron lugar sólo en estos últimos años de democracia restaurada: los atentados contra la Embajada de Israel y la AMIA, la muerte de Alfredo Yabrán, la muerte de Carlos Menem (h), las mafias de la Triple Frontera, las muertes vinculadas al caso Armas, la explosión de Río Tercero y los sobornos en el Senado son sólo algunos tramos de esta novela inconclusa con final abierto".

Regarding the Janelle Patton case, Sutton (30.05.04) reports that "[o]ne local mused about whether Ms Patton's killer would ever be found. / 'She ventured into the deep waters of Norfolk and perhaps she didn't know what lines she was crossing over,' he said. 'We're talking about more than 200 years of history here.'"; similarly, Latham (30.03.03) writes that "[i]n the past year there's been two suspicious fires on the Island. Indeed arson is a great Norfolk tradition and dates back to the day the mutineers burnt the Bounty". [Return to reading.](#)

48 *El País* (08.01.03). The very modelling of uptake, however, implies that reception is a processual and sometimes shaky thing. Thus Janelle Patton's parents coopt the topoi of media focus on Norfolk's history and insularity, proposing alternate readings – Carol Patton declared (*SMH* 03.06.04a) that "[w]e believe that Janelle was the embodiment of Norfolk Island. Throughout its history, Norfolk Island has had to be strong to survive. It has had to be resilient. It has had to be honest with itself in facing hardships. It has had to work openly, honestly and extremely hard to survive and grow. The history of Norfolk Island as it grew from a penal settlement to the island it is today represents the best and very strongest of human characteristics. Janelle had those very same characteristics and spirit. And someone murdered her," while her husband, Ron Patton, deployed the following analogy in exhorting people to come forward with information about the crime (Latham 30.03.03): "[i]t's like John Adams on Pitcairn Island who brought peace to Pitcairn Island". [Return to reading.](#)

49 In the María Marta killing, the journalist's deductive musings are central to the reporting of the case – *El País* (14.01.03): "[e]l episodio [del pituto] plantea interrogantes. Si los familiares pensaron que el pequeño objeto era un accesorio de biblioteca, no tenía sentido deshacerse de él, sino dejarlo en cualquier estante. Aun con la voluntad de desecharlo, parece insensato tirarlo por el inodoro. El tacho de basura habría alcanzado. A la inversa, si pensaron que le objeto era una bala perdida, resultaba

incorrecto y hasta delictivo tirarlo a la basura o al inodoro". [Return to reading.](#)

50 *El País* (14.01.03): "[e]n una de sus intervenciones [Sdrech] presentó en cámara a Oscar Sierco, ejecutivo de la Casa Sierra y éste dijo que Bártoli, pudiendo elegir entre varios modelos de ataúd, eligió uno más barato. De allí deducía que la familia pensaba efectuar la cremación del cadáver, para lo cual un ataúd costoso habría sido un derroche. La deducción llevaba a Sdrech un paso más allá. Si la familia pensaba efectuar la cremación del cadáver, allí culminaría el Crimen Perfecto, con la desaparición de las pistas". [Return to reading.](#)

51 A necrological note deserves mention here - *Clarín* (24.08.03): "Enrique Sdrech, el Turco Sdrech, era uno de aquellos periodistas cuyas figuras orillaban la ficción. Un tipo empeñado en descubrir la verdad de las cosas, fascinado por los procedimientos racionales para desentrañar los hechos aberrantes que naturalmente se intenta sustraer a la mirada de la sociedad. Lleno de tanta pasión por su trabajo y fe en su rol, que resultaba por eso fascinante. Nunca lo pretendió —y seguramente nunca lo supo— pero fue un personaje digno de Hammet o Chandler, un investigador lleno de ternura inserto en la negritud de una sociedad violenta y expulsiva".

Sdrech also presented television programs including *Identikit*, *Prontuario*, *La cámara del crimen* and *Investigación Sdrech*. He published a range of books on *casos policiales* and, at the time of his death on 23 August 2003, was about to see the launching of another of his texts: *Crimen en el Country. Seis tiros para María Marta* (Editorial La Grulla). See, for example, http://www.lacapital.com.ar/2003/10/19/Seniales/noticia_45813.shtml, <http://www.webpilar.com/nwp/notas/200307/03belsunce.htm> or <http://www.launion.com.ar/001sudestada/int022.htm>. [Return to reading.](#)

52 Which is to say neither that such a move is unprecedented (Poe and Capote are exemplary in this respect) nor that it is not occurring, or could not occur, elsewhere – such considerations simply go beyond my present brief. [Return to reading.](#)

53 Nor, presumably, is a reductive history of Australian crime fiction (from, for instance, Louis Becke and Ernest Fevenc, through Paul McGuire to Paul McLaren, Peter Corris, Marele Day, etc.) required to talk of the Janelle Patton case generically, as such histories tend not to address contingent deployments of genres in terms of their rhetorical effects. [Return to reading.](#)

54 See, for example, Battista (16.01.03) "María Marta: el relato del crimen"; Abdala (26.01.03) "Crimen ¿y castigo?"; Pikielny (28.03.04) "Los diarios y la realidad: la novela argentina"; Tirri (01.02.03) "El crimen como ceremonia hogareña"; Feinmann (26.01.03) "Poisonville". [Return to reading.](#)

55 Battista (26.01.03): "[Rodolfo y Patricia] comparten el mismo entusiasmo por las historias de crimen y misterio. Rodolfo prefiere la violencia del policial negro. Dashiell Hammett es su autor de cabecera. A Patricia le interesan los acertijos que ofrece el policial clásico, es una devota lectora de Agatha Christie. [...] Patricia convocará a sus héroes favoritos, desde el caballero Auguste Dupin hasta el inefable Sherlock Holmes, sin olvidar ni a Hercule Poirot ni a Miss Marple. Rodolfo, por su parte, invitará a Sam Spade y a Philip Marlowe, incluso habrá el comisario Maigret [...]"; Battista (09.02.03): "Eso es 'Asesinato a distancia', dice Rodolfo. Efectivamente, confirma Patricia, la novela de tu tocayo Rodolfo Walsh. Villa Regina, recordarás, se parecía mucho a un country. Así la describía Walsh: 'Como en una isla se extendían los terrenos de Villa Regina,...' / En el caso country, se lamenta Rodolfo, está faltando Daniel Hernández. Falta el investigador deductivo, pero tampoco está el intuitivo, reconoce Patricia. Hay que lamentar dos ausencias: la de Daniel Hernández, el detective de Walsh, y la de Nick Charles, el detective de Hammett [...]"; Battista (26.02.03) "Sin embargo, advierte Patricia, no hay que desechar ninguna pista. En 'El hombre que nunca estuvo', de los hermanos Coen, Ed Crane, el protagonista, en mitad de la película confiesa que él es el asesino, pero nadie le cree. Recién en los minutos finales sabremos que no había mentido. // ¿Y se podrá llegar a la verdad con esa investigación?, pregunta Patricia sin disimular su escepticismo. Sí, dice Rodolfo, bastaría con imitar los gestos de algún detective célebre. Nero Wolfe, por ejemplo, le habría ordenado a Archie Goodwin, su ayudante, que averigüe cuál es el grado de amistad que hay entre los familiares de la víctima y el abogado penalista"; etc. [Return to reading.](#)

56 As do any number of other journalistic interventions in the María Marta case. On the longstanding investment of Argentinian literature in the reality/fiction dichotomy more generally, see Hortiguera (15.12.03). Any number of other genres, of course, have equally invested in this rhetorical binary: 18th century novel prefaces, historical novels, *romans à clef*, etc. The recent Latin American *telenovelas de ruptura* (allegorical soaps from Venezuela [*Por estas calles* (1992)], Brazil [*O Salvador da patria* (1989)] and Argentina [*Ricos y famosos* (1997)]), for example) are similarly traversed by this reality/fiction binary. [Return to reading.](#)

57 See, for example, Gibbs (05.06.04a): "[t]he persons of interest in Patton's murder could be cast in a local, darker version of *Twin Peaks*, an *Australian Gothic*. This is not a real-life version of *Sea Change*. It's more like *The Wicker Man*. In that 1973 film Edward Woodward played a mainland police sergeant and 40-year-old virgin lured to a tiny Scottish isle in search of a missing girl, with Christopher Lee as the patriarch of a pagan society that engages in ritual sex. 'Your lordship seems strangely ... unconcerned,' the sergeant tells Lord Summerisle as it becomes clear the missing girl was sacrificed to the gods. 'I am confident your suspicions are wrong,' the Christopher Lee character replies. 'We do not commit murder here'". Gibbs (01.06.04) likewise reported Coroner Cahill's affirming that "it was not his goal to 'rattle the cages' of those named and that it would be a miracle if the inquest ended with anyone being charged. / 'This is not like Jessica Fletcher in *Murder She Wrote*,' he said. 'Angela Lansbury is not going to walk in that door and say, 'He or she or they did it'. Equally, Quincy [a crime-fighting television coroner played by Jack Klugman] is not going to walk in with a forensic solution". In her family's impact statement, Carol Patton similarly noted (SMH 03.06.04a) that "from the moment when we were notified of her death, we were catapulted from our comfortable everyday lives into an unknown world which to us only belonged in the movies and books". [Return to reading.](#)

58 Cecchi (12.12.02), for instance, notes that "[q]uizás, en la literatura abunde como elemento narrativo, pero en la realidad sufrir la muerte en dos formas diferentes es por definición imposible. Los dos oscuros finales de María Marta García Belsunce parecen desmentir tal certeza"; *El País* (02.01.04) affirms that "[l]os aficionados a la novela policial (la clásica, la honorable) ya no

encuentran en libros o en cine su material. [...] Pero los aficionados pueden consolarse ahora con la realidad argentina, que les da dos casos ejemplares. / Uno es el crimen de María Marta García Belsunce". Likewise, the introduction to Battista's "El crimen de country: La Mira del cazador" series remarks (Battista 26.01.03) that "[a]quí, la lupa está puesta sobre un asesinato en el que la realidad y la ficción se confunden"; in a separate article (16.01.03), Battista had insisted that "la realidad supera a la ficción".

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59 On the work of *spondere* and the responsibility of responsiveness, see Chambers (1998). [Return to reading.](#)

60 Thus Corbière (06.01.03): "[l]a decadencia de las instituciones argentinas, en particular la del Poder Judicial, puede medirse en el caso del asesinato de María Marta García Belsunce. Es bochornosa la actividad de la policía, del fiscal y del juez. Está claro que existe una vara distinta para medir los actos delictivos. Una, para perseguir a los ladrones de gallinas, a un presunto subversivo o los delitos cometidos por las clases pobres. En cambio, si el hecho criminal se produce en el seno de una familia de pretendido abolengo, como los García Belsunce, y en un country -esas ciudadelas exclusivas rodeadas de guardianes y alambrados-, no existe investigación seria y todo parece esfumarse en el aire. [...] Crimen de clase, Justicia de clase. De los ricos y de los escaladores sociales. Vinculados con dictaduras militares, como el padre de los García Belsunce, colaborador del gobierno del general Juan Carlos Onganía; o relacionados, como el caso de Carrascosa, con los vaciadores de bancos, los hermanos José y Carlos Rohm [...]. [Return to reading.](#)

61 In the Janelle Patton case, the recent murder of the territory's Deputy Chief Minister and Minister for Land and the Environment, Ivens "Toon" Buffett, adds another element to the mix. Norfolk Islanders are understandably keen to separate the slayings – Tom Lloyd, editor of the local paper, is thus quoted as affirming that Buffett "wasn't connected one way or the other to Janelle's murder" (*The Age* 20.07.04). However, connections will impose themselves as part of human interest and the rhetorical work of genre. Thus Gibbs (Gibbs 20.07.04), while affirming that the killing of Buffett was "unrelated to the death of Ms Patton," nevertheless describes the victim as "[a] Norfolk Island politician instrumental in the hunt for Sydneysider Janelle Patton's killer" who "helped to push through legislation that was required to investigate the Janelle Patton case, whose murder was the first on Norfolk Island since Pitcairn Islanders, including Mr Buffett's ancestors, resettled it in 1856." Along with Tom Lloyd, police at the time of writing have posited no link between the Buffett and Janelle Patton murders. However, neither the police, nor the media, nor the victims' intimates have had the last word here. Prior to Leith Buffett's being charged with his father's murder, Ron Patton, father of Janelle, extended his sympathies to Buffett's family from mainland Australia: "We regard him as one of the true leaders of Norfolk Island and it's a very sad loss for the community there," Mr Patton said. "He was very helpful with the police in getting through the legislation to enable the fingerprinting and so on. Our condolences go out to the family because we understand what they would be going through. It's made me feel for them and I think it's brought back memories of Janelle" (Gibbs 20.07.04).

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