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Bodies of waste and the breakdown of detective fiction: Representing systemic violence in Roberto Bolaño's *2666*

Ramon Guevara
Independent researcher, Berlin, Germany.
ramon.guevara2000@gmail.com

Abstract: Contemporary systemic crimes challenge classical narrative models of truth and collective memory. "The Part about the Crimes," a section of Roberto Bolaño's *2666*, questions the adequacy of the classical investigative paradigm. Modern culture produces truth through rational processes and epistemic tools often found in detective fiction; contemporary crime, however, exceeds these frameworks, particularly when systemic or global. This article examines the representation of crime in "The Part about the Crimes," which focuses on the femicides of Santa Teresa, a fictional border city modelled on Ciudad Juárez. Drawing on Judith Butler's notion of performativity, the study approaches literary genre as a narrative construct: genre, like gender, creates expectations of intelligibility through the repetition of conventions. Bolaño's text exposes the limits of this performative framework: the investigative paradigm continues to operate, but it no longer generates meaning or accountability. Read through Zygmunt Bauman's concept of 'waste,' the crimes of 2666 reveal that corpses are not clues but opaque signs of structural evil. The article further examines the relationship between the murders and the social and economic landscape of Santa Teresa, particularly its maquiladoras, dumps, and border economy, where human bodies and material waste become closely associated.

Keywords: *crime fiction; systemic violence; Roberto Bolaño,* 2666*;* Zygmunt Bauman; *bodies of waste.*

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Introduction

Roberto Bolaño (1953–2003) did not write traditional detective fiction, but he avidly read crime novels and drew on a South American literary tradition that casts the reader as a detective. For Bolaño, the reader is like a detective, and the text is the body to be investigated. Bolaño's most extensive engagement with detective fiction is *2666*. This posthumous novel comprises five sections, each constituting a novel in its own right, with its own cast of characters and subplots, yet all interconnected: "The Part about the Critics," "The Part about Amalfitano," "The Part about Fate," "The Part about the Crimes," "The Part about Arcimboldi".

This article will focus on "The Part about the Crimes," the core of the novel: in the fictional Mexican city of Santa Teresa, women are disappearing and being violently killed. The novel devotes considerable space to describing the women's bodies found in the city. As readers, we do not know whether the killings are the work of a single perpetrator or of multiple killers, but the instinct of the characters is to find a connecting thread, a pattern, between the violent crimes that seem somehow related. Drawing on different traditions of crime fiction, Bolaño uses narrative tools from literary genres that resort to instrumental reason to uncover the secret of evil.

Previous scholarship has examined the repetitive structure of "The Part about the Crimes," as well as its relation to detective fiction. Bede Scott, for instance, argues that the section's relentless seriality produces a "narrative necrosis" that undermines narrativity and foregrounds the collective and systemic nature of the murders (Scott 307–18). In his essay, he analyses how the narrative voice makes it difficult to distinguish between essential and inessential clues; as the reader struggles to individualize the crimes, the violence appears collective and systemic. It therefore proves productive to analyse the reiteration Scott describes through the lens of performativity, specifically considering Judith Butler (1988)'s notion of gender. In Butler's writings, gender is an identity that arises through the repetition of acts, with no ontological substance behind it. Behind gender's performance, there is no gender. Similarly, Bolaño approaches literary genres as something constructed through repeated narrative acts that ultimately reveal their arbitrariness. By realizing a 'performance' of crime fiction, using and reiterating its tropes until they reveal their lack of ontological substance, Bolaño leads the genre to the failure of its premises. However, the investigative procedure remains relevant even without real meaning. In *2666*, conventions of crime fiction recur even after they can no longer produce explanatory knowledge.

My central argument is that the investigative paradigm still operates in the novel, but generates no meaning because contemporary systemic crimes challenge the very idea of finding a culprit. The investigation the characters carry out, which the reader follows, depicts a systemic form of violence in which the tropes of detective fiction are performed only to fail. The nature of the crimes described in *2666*, the way they affect a specific demographic (women, often workers or sex workers, stripped down of legal protection), reminds of Bauman's concept of "waste". The scholar argues that when designing modern societies, communities tend to draw a line between valuable lives and those deemed "wasted" in the process. Read through Bauman's concept of "waste", the victims of *2666*

reveal how the failure of the investigative paradigm is inseparable from the systemic violence that renders their bodies disposable.

Genre as performativity

To understand how Bolaño engages with detective fiction, it helps to think about literary genre through the lens of what Judith Butler described as performativity. Writing about gender, Butler argued that gender is not an essence but a construct: it exists through continuous conventions, gestures, and repetitions. There is no gender "behind" its performance; performance is all there is: "gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time, an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts" ("Performative acts" 519). Butler provides an analogy for understanding genre as a reiterative structure rather than a fixed essence. I do not mean to suggest that literary genre and gender performativity are equivalent categories. Rather, Butler's account is useful here for a more limited methodological reason: it highlights the constitutive power of repetition. A convention acquires force through its repeated citation and recognition, continually reproduced through textual practice. For *2666*, the relevant point is that repeating generic conventions can simultaneously reproduce and expose the norm they establish. Bolaño's repetition of investigative procedures makes the conventions of detective fiction visible precisely when their expected epistemological effect ceases to occur.

In Bolaño's fiction, literary genre is constituted through repeated acts. A detective novel performs a set of recognisable conventions: a crime, an investigator, a process of rational deduction, and, sometimes crucially, a resolution. Each element creates what we might call an expectation of intelligibility. In its classic formula, the genre promises that violence can be made sense of, inserted into a causal chain, and ultimately rendered meaningful. What Bolaño does in "The Part about the Crimes" is precise: he sustains the performance of detective fiction through this repetition of acts, then reveals the genre's contingency. The conventions are all present: bodies are found, autopsies are performed, detectives investigate, suspects are named, and someone eventually tries to connect the dots. The investigative paradigm continues to operate. But it no longer generates meaning, and it never produces accountability. Detective fiction performs without delivering its promised effect.

When considering Butler's performativity, its relevance lies not only in its reiterative character but also in its capacity to challenge the ontological foundations of identities. Butler argues that no gender lies behind its performance, and we can cautiously transpose this to literary genre: when detective fiction is performed independently of the conditions that once sustained its epistemological function, what remains? Bolaño displaces the literary genre while preserving its recognizable forms; in this way, the narrative framework is no longer grounded in an intrinsic essence. But we must distinguish between the persistence of a convention and the efficacy of its function: detective fiction's narrative framework does not disappear, but it remains even when investigation fails, continuing to organize readers' expectations of intelligibility. These expectations, however, remain unfulfilled. The genre's breakdown consists in the persistence of its formal features,

separated from their epistemological consequences. The investigative form persists, but it can no longer adequately explain systemic violence. The failure of the genre's performative framework is Bolaño's argument, because if the conventions of detective fiction are a way of making violence intelligible, of transforming a body into a clue, a clue into a narrative, a narrative into a truth, then their collapse in *2666* exposes the limits of an entire epistemic model grounded in reason. It shows that such a model exists only as a performative framework.

Several forms of crime fiction shape the structure of *2666*: Todorov's theoretical model of detective fiction, the Latin American political crime fiction exemplified by Walsh's *Operation Massacre* (2013), and Piglia's (1991) notion of "ficción paranoica" (paranoid fiction). If we compare *2666* to Todorov's definition of crime fiction, Bolaño's novel fails the investigative model because the reconstruction of the crime never culminates in a coherent explanation that connects the individual murders into a causal sequence: the accumulation of evidence does not produce the narrative resolution the genre promises. Walsh's crime fiction relies on the idea of violence having political reasons, on responsibility being strictly political; this is not possible in *2666* because, as I will argue in the next sections of the article, in the case of *2666* the origin of the crimes should be found in a structure incapable of being held responsible, in a way that, more than culpability, is linked to the concept of 'implication.'

In Piglia's "paranoid fiction," the failure lies in the impossibility of identifying a hidden design that unifies the apparently disconnected events: the search for a conspiracy becomes an endless process of interpretation, as no hypothesis can account for the systemic and dispersed nature of the violence. What should be noticed here is that the failure of all these narrative frameworks has to do with something they all have in common: all these variations of crime fiction rely on a faith in instrumental reason in order to produce the narrative machinery: In Todorov's account, classical detective fiction is structured around the relation between the story of the crime and the story of the investigation, through which the events of the former are reconstructed and made intelligible to the reader; in Walsh's *Operation Massacre*, the investigative process similarly relies on the rational reconstruction of events through testimony and documentary evidence, mobilising investigative reason to expose the contradictions between the official account and the facts it conceals; when considering Piglia's "paranoid fiction," the perception of a conspiracy leads the detective to an excess of interpretation that looks like a paroxysm of the use of rationality, in order to explain the secret at the core of the novel.

In a novel like *2666*, this use of reason can only fail to organize violence. Bolaño is critical of the idea of classification and calculation and ends up showing not only how instrumental reason is inefficient in understanding crime, leading to the breakdown of detective fiction's paradigm, but also how it is entangled with the way modernity organises society in ways that generate what I will define, following Bauman, as "bodies of waste".

When discussing instrumental reason and its inefficiency in achieving a real understanding of crime's complex nature, it helps to consider Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. For them, knowledge cannot be reduced to "classification and calculation"; when knowledge becomes mere repetition, it does not lead to real understanding but instead becomes tautological (20). In *2666*, repetition is achieved

through the reiterative scheme used to describe the women's corpses. "The Part about the Crimes" recounts 110 bodies, which function more as a tautological device than as a means of advancing the plot; each time, a recurrent scheme adds new data: location, identification, cause of death, autopsy. But the reader gains no real knowledge of the causes of the violence. To create real knowledge, data must be conceived as "the surface," meaningful only insofar as it helps explain its "social, historical and human" significance (Adorno and Horkheimer 20), the opposite of what happens in this section of the novel. The problem, therefore, is not that the forensic apparatus produces false knowledge, but that it remains largely confined to the individual case. The limits of forensic description emerge at the level of narrative organization: accumulating individual findings does not yield an account of the relations that connect the murders or explain their recurrence. The problem lies in the implicit assumption that systematically classifying individual cases could produce an understanding of the totality in which violence occurs. The descriptions register the material facts of violence without integrating them into an account of the social and historical relations through which that violence becomes recurrent. The investigative paradigm continues to function at the level of observation and classification, while its capacity to reconstruct the causes of the violence as a whole progressively breaks down.

Forensic language and the limits of instrumental reason

2666 is one of those novels in which the victims, because of their relevance and the space devoted to them, "speak louder than any other narrative voice in the work" (Lloyd 100). If we consider the incipit of "The Part about the Crimes": "The girl's body turned up in a vacant lot in Colonia Las Flores. She was dressed in a white long-sleeved T-shirt and a yellow knee-length skirt, a size too big" (Bolaño 353), we notice that the style is detached: the reader knows nothing about the victim, who is almost dehumanised and referred to only through available attributes, called "the dead", then "the corpse," and finally "the child", in a climax that unfolds as the perspective draws closer to its object of observation. In the following paragraphs, Bolaño's use of forensic, scientific language becomes clear:

> According to the autopsy, Esperanza Gómez Saldaña had been strangled to death. There was bruising on her chin and around her left eye. Severe bruising on her legs and rib cage. She had been vaginally and anally raped, probably more than once, since both orifices exhibited tears and abrasions, from which she had bled profusely. (Bolaño 354)

The wording here signals the scientific approach Bolaño adopts towards violence. This is significant for two reasons: first, because it is repeated in almost all the descriptions of dead bodies in this section of the novel, of which there are dozens, and the dissociative effect of the writing style of this author was also noticed by Susanne Klengel, who adopts the definition of "vertical aesthetics" as an aesthetic tool through which Bolaño can penetrate the darkest sides of evil (138); second, because forensic and scientific language is the language of instrumental reason, the very language that defines the investigative paradigm as a means of navigating and organising violence.

The fact that the victims' bodies are investigated coldly and analytically is therefore an attempt to understand violence through rationality. The obsessive reiteration of details about their corpses, in writing that indulges in detail without turning it into evidence or narrative turning points, marks the futility of the whole process. Rationality here never yields a real deduction, as if it were useless to the ends of this investigation.

Bede Scott argues that *2666* blurs the line between clues that could help the investigation and inessential ones. Because it cannot assign meaning to the crimes described here and to the "signifiers," it is impossible to "'individualize' the crimes" (Scott 310). The idea of individualizing the crimes, making sense of violence, and the very mechanism of the narrative machine are in Scott's essay all entangled, leading the scholar to formulate the idea of *2666* as a novel that, through an overwhelming quantity of corpses and plot lines, leads the text to a state of "necrosis". In Scott's view, repeating narrative nuclei jeopardizes the text's narrativity, pushing it toward necrosis and revealing the arbitrariness of literary genres. When discussing gender, Butler explains that a defining feature of the performative act is its repetitiveness. In this case, Scott can read the repetition of narrative nuclei as a productive feature that creates the performance of literary genre. Even if reading repetition as a "necrotic" quality is a fascinating and quite precise way to explain the misalignment of the text from the narrative patterns, it is exactly through this repetition that the narrative structure is evoked, even if the aim is to unveil its lack of ontological substance and lead to its breakdown.

My argument focuses not on the novel's capacity to sustain conventional plot forms, but on how repetition preserves the expectation of investigation, thereby making visible the discrepancy between generic recognition and epistemological efficacy. The performance of detective fiction conventions in *2666* exposes the historical contingency of the model of intelligibility they sustain. Literary genres often reflect principles, epistemological and ideological frameworks, that rarely separate from the material context in which they first emerged. For example, Golban argues that the post-Enlightenment faith in modernity and progress makes the Bildungsroman possible ("An attempt" 130). In the case of crime fiction, once it has been displaced from its original spatial and temporal landscape and brought to Latin American contemporary crime scenes, its original bond with the Enlightenment ideal of the evidentiary trial (Bloch 33-4), in which guilt must be established through competent evidence and not extorted through confession, is severed. By repeating the crime fiction genre and pushing it to its breaking point, Bolaño shows how contemporary crime challenges literature's traditional representations and suggests the need for new ways to portray violence.

The traditional representation of crime in detective fiction relied on causality and individual responsibility as principles that sustained it, but Bolaño makes visible the gap between documenting and classifying individual crimes and understanding the condition that generated these crimes; the explanatory frameworks traditionally associated with the genre are exceeded in a way that raises a broader question: how can literature represent violence when identifying the perpetrators and reconstructing crimes is insufficient to explain the deep causes of a social and political structure that not only produces violence but might also be considered complicit in it?

The novel's goal is therefore to explore the features of violence in the late capitalist world, focusing on the conditions of violence along the borders, with the investigation of the crimes as secondary. From this exploration, it becomes clear that instrumental reason cannot explain evil. "The Part about the Crimes" shows how all attempts to turn a body into a clue, evidence for deduction, consistently fail. Each description follows the same structure, though not always in the same order: time of discovery, location, identification, autopsy, (occupation), and lastly, death. Considering the descriptions of some of the women found in Santa Teresa, it becomes clear that the modality tends to repeat itself. The women described in this section might differ in age, profession, social condition, and place of discovery; in a conventional detective novel, such differences would become narratively significant, generating hypotheses, revealing patterns, or narrowing the field of suspects. In *2666*, however, they do not. The narrative voice records each death as a bureaucratic procedure. Difference is registered, but it does not become meaning: each new body introduces new information but not new understanding. The descriptions are additive rather than cumulative: they increase the quantity of violence represented without advancing the investigation. As E. De Rosso argues, Bolaño builds a story where "the secret is movable" ("A Reading with a Mobile Secret" 78); the reader comes to doubt not only whether reality can be revealed, but whether reason can understand any reality at all. Instrumental reason, the defining tool of detective fiction, operates here in a void of meaning. It is performed as a trope of crime fiction, yet ultimately fails to explain violence.

Bodies of waste and systemic violence

If we consider the victims, we observe that they are typically women, often workers or sex workers, economically and socially marginalised. When violence is perpetrated against marginalised groups, institutions may fail to respond adequately, and the victims appear to inhabit a space outside society itself, beyond the reach of legal protection. These women are vulnerable, stripped of political, legal, and social protections.

What proves productive here is Bauman's concept of "wasted lives": the author explains how *waste* is a crucial concept in contemporary societies, and how designing modernity meant that some lives got wasted in the process: "When it comes to designing the forms of human togetherness, the waste is human beings. Some human beings who do not fit into the designed form nor can be fitted into it" (Bauman 30).

Drawing on Bauman, I argue that Bolaño depicts a landscape of "bodies of waste". Bauman's formulation describes the social production of human beings who are rendered disposable by modern systems of organisation. Bolaño radicalises this condition at the level of corporeal representation: the women of Santa Teresa become materially visible only after they have been discarded, their corpses becoming the physical traces of a social order that had rendered their lives marginal or disposable. The expression "bodies of waste" shifts the analytical emphasis: it highlights the materiality of the process, which remains central to Bolaño's representation of systemic violence. The focus on bodies stresses the material form in which this disposability manifests: their presence makes the consequences of this process visible, while resisting complete assimilation into the investigative and interpretive frameworks through which the novel attempts to make sense of them.

These bodies no longer function as evidence in the manner of classic crime fiction; the corpses found in *2666* are not clues; they exist only as symptoms of a political and social condition. In Bolaño's view, these corpses are precisely the outcome of the social project itself: a symptom of what a given design expels. Bolaño traces the origins of this condition to the history of progress itself, and in a key passage of *2666*, a character reflects on how violence has been historically made visible or invisible through language: "In the nineteenth century, toward the middle or the end of the nineteenth century, society tended to filter death through the fabric of words" (266). From the author's perspective, through language (and, by extension, the narrative models that rely on it), human beings have always sought to draw boundaries between deaths deemed worthy of recognition and those destined for oblivion. One of the novel's central concerns is its open critique of this historical legacy, which the bourgeois tradition has translated into forms of thought and representation now inadequate to confront the contemporary world. The rationality embodied by the narrative modes the novel deconstructs is called into question not only because it is obsolete and unable to address contemporary problems, but also because the author recognizes its violent, concealing underside. The author carries out this concealment through the weapons of reason, repeatedly deployed in Santa Teresa, where, however, the density of elements that escape such interpretive grids ultimately causes the collapse of the bourgeois novel and its instrumental logic.

In this sense, Santa Teresa semantically draws together a series of issues related to the section of Bauman discussed above. It is often described as an "industrious" city, which ultimately means that it is a site of labour exploitation, and it lies on the border with the United States. In essence, Bolaño himself figures Santa Teresa as a dividing line between the Global North and the Global South:

> For a while, as he swept, the priest talked and talked: about the city, about the trickle of Central American immigrants, about the hundreds of Mexicans who arrived each day in search of work at the *maquiladoras* or hoping to cross the border, about the human trafficking by *polleros* and *coyotes*, about the starvation wages paid at the factories, about how those wages were still coveted by the desperate who arrived from Querétaro or Zacatecas or Oaxaca, desperate Christians, said the priest. (Bolaño 379)

Bauman writes that "all boundaries beget ambivalence," and that "the frontier separating the 'useful' product from 'waste' is a grey zone: a kingdom of undefinition, uncertainty, and danger" (*Wasted Lives* 28). Santa Teresa is indeed a city fraught with tensions and dangers, just as it is materially filled with waste: throughout the novel, descriptions of the dumps are repeatedly invoked, where the bodies of the victims are often found, with particular attention devoted to a dump known as El Chile. Describing it, the author writes that "the population was stable: never fewer than three, never more than twenty," reducing people to metrics (Bolaño 372-3). Where the bodies of women were analysed through forensic language, here bureaucratic language performs the same dehumanising function. If modern societies find ways to classify and organise themselves by dividing what is useful from waste, language plays a central role in the process. When the life and the death of some people are managed through bureaucratic language, the

bodies of the victims become open to classification and cataloguing. Modernity not only produces waste but also creates the structures, including language, through which it is managed, administering waste and reinforcing the borders between what is useful and what is not.

It is hardly surprising, then, that the novel repeatedly refers to places where bodies are abandoned, places that create an intimate resonance between cycles of production, the construction of a social order, and the violence through which certain bodies are discarded from this idea of progress. The victims are found in the dumps, in the *maquiladoras*, along the abandoned streets. If "[s]eparation and destruction of waste was to be the trade secret of modern creation" (Bauman 26), these bodies of waste reclaim their central position in the construction of the contemporary world. It is in this sense that the following sentence should be understood: "No one pays attention to these killings, but the secret of the world is hidden in them" (Bolaño 348). The investigation undertaken by the detectives, the readers, and the narrator is not an investigation into the perpetrator of the murders, but rather a full-fledged inquiry into systemic violence as the price to be paid for the world as it exists today.

We are talking here about bodies of waste instead of wasted lives since the only way these victims are able to reclaim a space in the late capitalist landscape is through the materiality of their bodies. In this section of the novel, they are a dissonant element: descriptions of the corpses, incapable of assuming rational meaning, refuse the narrative form as if it were a strange object; narrativizing this violence is essentially impossible, especially within the conventions of a literary genre. Rather than being situated within a sequence of events expressing a certain causality, the narrative can only proceed chronologically: the body of the present victim is replaced by that of the next, and then by the one after that, in an apparently inexhaustible sequence that is nevertheless almost entirely devoid of causal connection: "The case remained open and was soon forgotten. Five days later, while the investigation was still unconcluded, the janitor at Morelos Preparatory School found the body of another dead woman" (Bolaño 373).

These descriptions never enter the plot, and this is the most interesting feature of Bolaño's crime fiction. Instead of clues in traditional crime stories, the corpses form an opaque chain of signs that never unveil the mystery, but only make its existence visible. The opacity of these bodies is directly linked to their meaning in the economy of their representation, since their appearance, while exposing the recurrence of violence and the unequal distribution of vulnerability, does not account for the causes or relations responsible for that recurrence. Once these bodies become an opaque chain of signs, they expose the limits of representing systemic violence through a narrative model based on individual causation, particularly in the context of the globalized border economy represented in Santa Teresa. The body, then, as the minimal unit of representation, projects the narrative dimension beyond the page, into a realm where the meshes of narrative rationality fail to hold. The body becomes what literary convention cannot contain; it claims belonging to the world rather than to the narrative model.

The femicides of Santa Teresa closely recall those that took place in Ciudad Juárez, where hundreds of women were killed in what became a recognised crisis from the 1990s onwards. In writing about these crimes, Rita Laura Segato addresses the question of

meaning in contemporary Latin American violence: for someone outside Ciudad Juárez, these crimes pose an "intelligibility" problem ("The Writing on the Bodies" 13). What contradicts the genre formula is that, in both Ciudad Juárez and the fictional Santa Teresa, the violence's apparent meaninglessness shifts the question from who committed the crimes to why.

The failure to identify a culprit and establish a motive stems from the fact that the violence depicted in *2666* is not instrumental. Segato argues that these crimes have an "expressive quality" that makes a violation resemble an enunciation ("The Writing on the Bodies" 20–2): crimes perpetrated on the body can be read as a message that communicates a power relation. It should be noted, however, that the expressive dimension of violence does not make its causes intelligible, because in the case of Bolaño's representation of femicides, the bodies make a violent order visible, without enabling the reader to reconstruct a coherent causal sequence, resulting in a failure of interpretation.

But if crime is a discursive act, Bolaño aims to show the failure of the hermeneutic process: once the victims' bodies are reduced to the materiality of waste, they become unreadable within the framework of detective fiction. They communicate only their vulnerable position within a structure, but nothing about how they ended up occupying that position. Where crime fiction, in Todorov's definition, reconstructs the crime, the description of the violated bodies fails to illuminate the factual truth behind it.

Around halfway through "The Part about the Crimes", the reader gets a specific reference to the seriality of the killings, which leads the policemen to think there might be a single culprit: "the serial killer has a signature" (Bolaño 470). At this point, readers, who become the real detectives in Bolaño's fiction, reach the first real turning point. The characters involved in the investigation project their contrived solution onto the existence of a serial killer. And a serial killer is someone who perpetrates violence with a modus operandi, a red thread; a serial killer can become a scapegoat capable of making violence fit into a coherent behavioural scheme. But this novel is built upon the failure of logic. The detectives attempt to solve the crimes by attributing them to Klaus Haas, a German man peripherally connected to some events in the investigation, but one who clearly cannot be held responsible for the entire phenomenon, because once he is incarcerated, killings go on. Even if Haas were guilty of some wrongdoing, his imprisonment would do nothing to remedy the systemic problems of the contemporary capitalist system. This failure to identify a single culprit is not incidental: Bolaño is describing a systemic form of violence that can never be attributed to a single individual.

Reflecting on the systemic crises produced by capitalism, Mark Fisher points to the environmental crisis as a case where responsibility is displaced onto individuals, while the actual cause, he argues, lies in "an impersonal structure that, despite being capable of producing effects of every kind, is not a subject capable of exercising responsibility" (*Capitalist Realism* 66). The same logic applies to Santa Teresa: the improvised detectives fail not because they are incompetent, but because what they are trying to investigate is a structure. When Amalfitano says certain characters are "all mixed up in" the killings (Bolaño 343), the phrase does not point to single culprits, nor does it absolve a group by hiding behind the vagueness of an evil shared by an anonymous multitude. It can be read alongside what Rothberg calls "implication": a relation to violence that does not necessarily

depend on individual agency but is shaped by structural conditions that produce crimes and injustices through privilege and inequality. The idea that violence is reproduced through an impersonal structure does not mean we cannot identify or hold individual perpetrators accountable; rather, implication directs attention to relations of participation rather than direct perpetration. Rothberg's theoretical framework clarifies what the investigative paradigm cannot fully capture: the inadequacy of treating individual culprits as an exhaustive explanation of violence.

Where crime fiction assigns roles such as culprit, victim, and witness, *2666* focuses on a structure that cannot isolate those who should be held responsible, yet makes visible that crime often originates in regimes of domination, even when the people implicated "do not originate or control such regimes" (Rothberg 1). *2666* does not try to establish whether the violence is caused specifically by patriarchy, economic inequality, geographical conditions, or race. Instead, it shows a structure in which these factors intertwine, presenting the mechanism of contemporary crime beyond a simple causal connection. A single answer that explains the violence would be simplistic, which is why the characters' attempts to solve the mystery are always frustrated.

Bolaño thus captures a structure that, as Fisher puts it, cannot exercise responsibility, yet implicates, in Rothberg's sense, those who stand in relation to the crimes it produces. The corpses of Santa Teresa are not traces of a culprit but the point where a responsibility without a subject becomes visible. This is why the detective story, built to locate a guilty party, cannot contain them.

Conclusion

The failure of detective fiction in *2666* is realised in an original way: Bolaño preserves its investigative paradigm while stripping it of its capacity to produce resolution. The machinery of the crime novel is therefore performed, removed from its original context, and transplanted into a new setting that contradicts and jeopardises its premises.

Read through Butler, the repetition of autopsies and identifications exposes the performative quality of literary genre once its epistemological premises have ceased to hold. Bolaño's representation of crime uses forensic language to register each body with great precision, yet, like the instrumental reason Adorno and Horkheimer describe, it never goes beyond classification; it never reaches the social and historical relations that make the violence recurrent. The corpses in Santa Teresa, the "bodies of waste," are the material residue of a social order that discards the lives it cannot fit into its design. This is why detective fiction, built to locate a guilty party, can only measure its limits against this kind of violence.

Bolaño turns the narrative problem (the impossibility of solving a whodunit) into a political statement about the price of the functioning contemporary world. What kind of system produces a situation in which the category of "murderer" is insufficient to explain the murders? The production of waste, exploitation, and structural inequality caused by the very idea of progress are all features that need to be considered when analysing contemporary crime and its representation in the arts. Today's violence challenges the logical, rational frameworks of detective fiction, a genre that aims to explain it, and

ultimately breaks them down. Where detective fiction presupposes the idea of someone behind the crime who is responsible for it, *2666* stretches this idea, leading us to realise that even when individuals can be held responsible for their wrongdoings, individual guilt is not enough to explain a form of violence that the system itself has produced.

In *2666*, the procedures of crime fiction keep operating: it is crucial to notice the proliferation of narrative material that deals with the tradition of crime fiction, the way the novel spreads clues, hypotheses, suspects, yet none of this produces knowledge or resolution. The conventions of the genre recur even after they have stopped explaining anything, and this is precisely what a performative reading brings to light: a form sustained by repetition alone with no substance behind it. The violence of Santa Teresa is systemic, no culprit can stand in for it, and the investigation can only keep circling a crime that exceeds the category of guilt it was built to assign.

In this landscape, Bolaño plays with the detective genre's logical pillars. What if the same rationality that seeks to explain violence is structurally related to the mechanisms that make certain forms of violence possible and certain victims illegible? His critique targets not detective fiction, but the epistemological framework that made it possible.

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ORCID

Ramon Guevara *https://orcid.org/0009-0003-6419-4190*

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Notes on Contributor(s)

Ramon Guevara holds a Master's degree in literary studies from the Scuola Galileiana di Studi Superiori (University of Padova, Italy). His research interests include contemporary Latin American literature, queer theory, and critical approaches to power, marginality, and subjectivity. His work examines the intersections of narrative disruption, literary genres as performative forms, and the politics of knowledge production, with particular attention to Roberto Bolaño and postcolonial contexts. He is currently based in Berlin and is not affiliated with any university.

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