

THE BARE BONES OF SOCIAL COMMENTARY IN KATHY REICHS' FICTION

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Abstract

Detective fiction has popularly been considered a light form of literary entertainment. However, many of this genre's practitioners underline the way that their novels engage with contemporary social issues, as a close reading of the texts may reveal. Kathy Reichs' fiction is no exception. In this sense, her Brennan series may be analysed as prompting the reader to set out on a journey of discovery in different ways. This article argues that content and form work hand in hand at the service of Kathy Reichs' social feminist agenda and that just as the many times bare bones found at the crime scene point to both the victim's and criminal's identity, they eventually become suggestive of how our contemporary society works. Blurring the difference between fact and fiction, Kathy Reichs' forensic detective novels expose the bare bones of an array of current societal miseries and appeal to the reader's complicity for the need of social change.

Resumen

Tradicionalmente, la novela policíaca ha sido considerada como una forma literaria de mero entretenimiento e intrascendente. Sin embargo, muchos de los escritores de este género subrayan que sus novelas están comprometidas con las cuestiones sociales contemporáneas, tal y como se desprende de una lectura atenta de sus textos. En este sentido, la novelística de Kathy Reichs no es una excepción y su serie Brennan puede plantearse como una forma de ficción que busca trascender y suscitar en el lector un viaje iniciático. Este artículo sostiene que contenido y forma tienden a equiparar la actividad forense y la agenda feminista de Kathy Reichs, y que, así como en la primera los huesos humanos encontrados en la escena del crimen revelan tanto la identidad de la víctima como la del criminal, la segunda simboliza el funcionamiento de nuestra sociedad contemporánea. Así, atenuada la distancia entre realidad y ficción, las novelas de investigación forense de Kathy Reichs exponen la variedad de miserias de nuestra sociedad actual y apelan a la complicidad del lector para defender la necesidad de cambio social.

Keywords: feminism, forensic science, patriarchy, conservative discourse, narrator, author.

Palabras clave: feminismo, ciencia forense, patriarcado, discurso conservador, narrador, autor.

A recent article in the Spanish newspaper *La Vanguardia* included an interview with Ottar Martin Nordjörd, the author of such crime novels as *Sun Cross* (2008) and *The Eighth Pointed Rose* (2010), who commented on current trends in Scandinavian crime fiction. “Muchos escritores escandinavos usan el crimen como espejo de la sociedad, como un modo de mostrar los problemas que hay en ella” (Moreno 2011:29), he remarked. The same article made an unavoidable reference to Stieg Larsson and his Lisbeth Salander trilogy and underlined that “más allá de la acción y el entretenimiento, su obra encierra una fuerte denuncia social sobre los males que se esconden detrás de la aparentemente idílica y segura sociedad sueca” (Moreno 2011:29).

However, not only do Scandinavian crime novels express social concerns but it is detective fiction as a genre that may seek to engage directly and analytically with contemporary society, as many studies highlight. For instance, R. Gordon Kelly, analysing mystery fiction in contemporary society, observes that “some writers, from Poe to authors currently active, have used mystery fiction as a form to think with as well as a vehicle for social commentary” (1998:138). In general terms, Robin W. Winks states that “there is agreement on the obvious fact that the mystery story has become a prime vehicle for social criticism” (1988:x), or Marieke Krajenbrink and Kate M. Quinn, in a study on identities in contemporary international crime fiction, underline that “the quest to discover the identity of the person responsible for a particular crime has come, in many cases, to serve as a pretext for, or to provide a framework for a wider interrogation of society or of what constitutes criminality” (2009:1).¹

This article will study social commentary in Kathy Reichs’ works and as a conceptual framework, it will take into account feminist detective fiction, that is, “genre fiction [...] consciously encoding an ideology which is in direct opposition to the dominant gender ideology of Western society, patriarchal ideology” (Cranny-

¹ Lee Horsley’s study of twentieth-century crime fiction details the generic characteristics of detective fiction that facilitate its social commentary: “it deals with acts of violence, with devious methods of securing the subordination of others, and with the process of subduing them to your will; its plots turn on the revelation of hidden criminality; its protagonists are marginalized, outsiders forced into awareness of the failing of established power structures; in some of the most popular generic variants, the alienated protagonists are also capable of effective agency, enabling them to act against the corrupt and powerful” (2009:6).

Francis 1990:1). In general terms, as feminist detective fiction aims to deconstruct a social order that systematically tends to ratify and perpetuate male dominance over women in both public and private contexts, the female investigative protagonist embodies “a radical female characterization, the competent, caring professional woman, one who breaks the virgin/whore dichotomy of traditional female characterization” (Cranny-Francis 1990:176). Since the mid-nineteenth century and early twentieth century –the first stages of the contemporary feminist movement as well as the first lady detectives–, women authors of the traditionally male-dominated detective fiction have responded to the expanded range of social opportunities for women in society and expressed different feminist viewpoints in more conservative or belligerent terms. In this article, the textual analysis of Kathy Reichs' forensic detective novels will be carried out on the basis that content and form, generic conventions and narrative form, interlock in different ways at the service of a social feminist agenda and the usually fixed triangle of characters – detective, victim and criminal– will constitute the initial pieces of this puzzle.

Firstly, Dr. Temperance Brennan, the series investigative protagonist, embodies the principal reliable spokesperson for the novels' social critique. As she deals with human remains and skeletal trauma in a legal context from the point of view of a forensic anthropologist, she provides identification and specifies manner of death, if possible. Dr. Brennan defines her job in the following quote: “as a forensic anthropologist, it is my job to unearth and study the dead. I identify the burned, the mummified, the decomposed, and the skeletonized who might otherwise go to anonymous graves” (Reichs 2003:3). The scientist's conclusions in the investigation are imbued with the undeniable truth of forensic science, as she gathers and presents scientific evidence. Dr. Brennan employs a systematic empirical method and is guided by a scientific ethical code which involves untainted objectivity and incontrovertible honesty in her search of truth.² In this way, the novels encode an overall conservative discourse intended to prove the possibility as well as the rightness and law and order. As Ellen Burton Harrington points out in her analysis of the use of forensic science in *Sherlock Holmes* and *CSI*, “this process of investigation and exposure generally results in a conservative conclusion that reaffirms the efficacy of the detective procedure and the stability of society” (2007:367).

Besides, Dr. Temperance Brennan's is not the point of view of a beginner in the field but that of an experienced scientist. Apart from her age –in *Death du Jour*, the second book in the series, the reader is told that she is over forty (Reichs

² In this sense, Ellen Burton Harrington characterises investigators as “servants of truth and protectors of society” (2007:372).

2005b:4)–, she is also reported to have excellent credentials, as stated, for instance, by Detective Andrew Ryan, her male partner in many of the novels (Reichs 2007b:237). Consequently, thanks to all the above traits, Dr. Brennan is depicted as an autonomous subject of knowledge and the main character with authority and objectivity within the text. The woman scientist deconstructs the patriarchal ideal of woman, since she embodies the new role of the empowered woman capable of effective agency in society.

Dr. Brennan's job reflects current faith in technology and science, but also shows that she works in favour of social justice, the true driving force behind her behaviour and attitudes: "it is for these victims and the mourners that I tease posthumous tales from bones. The dead will remain dead, whatever my efforts, but there have to be answers and accountability. We cannot live in a world that accepts the destruction of life with no explanations and consequences" (Reichs 2007a:277). Dr. Brennan takes on responsibility and evinces her commitment to humanity because she is moved by the misery and suffering of those dead or alive that she encounters. Being emotionally bound with victims, also shows her feminist engagement, since "fiction that engages the gains of feminism [... stresses] the hero's greater capacity for emotional connectedness" (Forster 2000:217). In Kathy Reichs' novels the forensic scientist is the main active reliable subject in the investigation who is entrusted with scientific as well as moral rightness. Thus, the reader is guided by the scientist's investigation and shares her truth-endowed opinion, setting out on a journey of discovery of the crime and criminal.

The forensic investigation that Dr. Brennan carries out draws the reader's attention to dead bodies, which are the suitable excuse to comment on the crime that they expose and the criminal mind behind them. Regarding crimes, the novels voice a social commentary on the irrational abuse of the weak and underprivileged in society, ranging from prostitutes in *Déjà Dead*, the elderly in *Fatal Voyage* to children in *Bones to Ashes* or, simply, "those on the fringe, those no one notices" (Reichs 2007b:343). Similarly, the crimes in the novels encompass a wide variety, including the negative power of religious fervour in *Death du Jour*, outlaw motorcycle gangs and drug trade in *Deadly Décisions*, black trade in exotic animals in *Bare Bones*, illegal dealing with antiquities in *Cross Bones*, black marketeering in organs in *Break No Bones* or children pornography in *Bones to Ashes*. Women victims, whether young or elderly, are mentioned over and over again, which makes Dr. Temperance Brennan recognise a woman victim even before identifying her corpse, as, for example, in *Break No Bones*: "[...] but I already knew. I'd seen too many ravaged wives, coeds, stepdaughters, waitresses, hookers. My gender was the little guy, the one who took the punches" (Reichs 2007b:217); due to her experience

in forensics, Dr. Brennan knows that women are the usual cruelly victimised targets on the basis of patriarchal considerations.³

When the spotlight falls on corpses, the gruesome picture presented in the novels immediately becomes a sorry sight that the reader is forced to see. As an example, the following quote describes the second set of remains found in *Déjà Dead*:

As I disentangled the ends of the plastic, the smell of putrefaction was overwhelming. I unwound the edges and looked inside.

A human face stared out at me. Sealed off from the insects that hasten decomposition, the flesh had not fully rotted. But heat and moisture had altered the features, converting them into a death mask bearing scant resemblance to the person it had been. Two eyes, shriveled and constricted, peered out from under half-closed lids. The nose lay bent to one side, the nostrils compressed and flattened against a sunken cheek. The lips curled back, a grin for eternity with a set of perfect teeth. The flesh was pasty white, a blanched and soggy wrapper molding itself closely to the underlying bone. Framing the whole was a mass of dull red hair, the lusterless corkscrew curls plastered to the head by an ooze of liquefied brain tissue.

Shaken, I closed the bag. (Reichs 2005a:15-16)

The grotesque description highlights that all traces of human identity have been removed from the remains and that they have been treated like rubbish when they were put in a plastic bag. As the victim is later identified as a woman, the dead body unmistakably encodes the terrible reality of male abuse. The reader sees the macabre traces of death through Dr. Temperance Brennan's eyes and cannot, logically, avoid sharing her feelings, her repulsion.

The forensic depiction of a corpse becomes the crude deconstruction of how some individuals behave and evidence establishes that criminal acts, including patriarchally-driven abuses, are irrational and inhuman, since such violence degrades the social community. As Dr. Temperance Brennan explains, "violence wounds the body and it wounds the soul. Of the predator. Of the prey. Of the mourners. Of collective humanity. It diminishes us all" (Reichs 2007b:36). Within the context of detective fiction, as Anne Cranny-Francis underlines, "social disorder is criminalized (as theft, murder, etc.) and the perpetrator of the crime is represented [...] as an incarnation of evil who is outside the realm of the social" (1990:146-47). In order to depict the criminal as evil, the Brennan series sometimes compares the wrong-doer to an animal literally: "[...] in that brief flash I recognized the look of a

³ Sally R. Munt is one of the critics who underlines that "the effects of male crime upon women" (1995:47) is one of the repeated questions in feminist detective fiction.

terrified animal. Nothing more” (Reichs 2005a:132). Other times the novels suggest that physical inhumanness parallels psychological monstrosity and criminals are described as “some sort of mental mutant [...] , psychologically malformed” (*ibid.*:302), as “a moral invalid” (Reichs 2007b:381) or even as “evil fucking perverted bastards” (Reichs 2008a:321). Dr. Temperance Brennan also shares her feelings of repulsion with the reader, as illustrated, for instance, in the next quote about her emotional reactions after she has watched videos of some women’s murders in *206 Bones*, illustrates: “I felt sadness, sure. Repugnance. Anger. Yeah, a boatload of anger” (Reichs 2009:247). These words epitomise the novels’ feminist agenda, upholding that patriarchal crime and its perpetrator are characterised by moral monstrosity and go against human nature due to their irrationality and disruption of social order. The protagonist’s comments leave no doubts about how the conscientious reader must feel: the endorsement of feminist ideals as well as law and order seems to be the only logically unavoidable possibility.

Drawing overarching conclusions from the sight of corpses, Dr. Brennan also raises the reader’s awareness about the reasons behind those crimes, the reasons that trigger criminal instinct. In *Devil Bones* Dr. Temperance asserts the following on the basis of her expertise: “Sex. Drugs. Money. Jealousy. Betrayal. Envy. Take your pick. Most murders result from one on the menu” (Reichs 2008b: 284). Thus, as Philip L. Simpson argues in his study on contemporary American serial killer fiction, “serial murder [...] serves as a broad metaphor for a plethora of concerns facing contemporary American society” (2000:ix). In Kathy Reichs’ fiction, the narrative emphasises that there is something wrong in society when abuse is heaped on those unfairly considered inferior, like, for instance, women. The novels’ agenda promotes society’s consciousness against any type of abuse of power by means of appealing to the reader’s sense of justice. In this way, Dr. Temperance Brennan’s journey of discovery of the corpse parallels the discovery of the crime and criminal, which eventually reaches the disclosure and criticism of society’s most appalling miseries.

Faced with a morally unacceptable crime, Kathy Reichs’ novels consequently propose punishment and some order restoration in accordance with the novels’ point of view. As pointed out by R. Gordon Kelly, “generic conventions as well as moral imperatives demand of mystery writers that they do something, at the end, with the accused” (1998:145). Many times the reader sees that the criminal is eventually apprehended and shares Dr. Brennan’s relief and content after doing a good job in the pursuit of justice: “I felt great sadness for these people, so long dead. But I felt comfort in the knowledge that I had helped bring their bodies to this hill. And satisfaction that the killings were at last at an end” (Reichs 2007a:428). In very forceful terms, Dr. Brennan explains the reader the need for any individual’s efforts to fight for justice and make an impact on society:

In my view, death in anonymity is the ultimate insult to human dignity. To spend eternity under a Jane Doe plaque. To disappear nameless into an unmarked grave without those who care about you knowing that you have gone. That offends. While I cannot make the dead live again, I can reunite victims with their names, and give those left behind some measure of closure. In that way, I help the dead speak, to say a final good-bye, and, sometimes, to say what took their lives. (Reichs 2007b:36)

When it becomes clear that the forensic scientist is to be able to turn anonymous corpses into individualised victims, that is, fix identity and restore social order, “the anxieties [in the postmodern world] about personal fragmentation and social instability that come with the ability to change one’s identity at will can be countered with an idealized vision of contemporary forensic science” (Harrington 2007:374). The novels fictionalise both a stable body and identity thanks to technology and in this way, they uphold “a conservative, reassuringly clear understanding of individual identity” (*ibid.*)

Nevertheless, sometimes the criminals are too powerful to be apprehended, like in Guatemala’s massacre in *Grave Secrets*. Other times, although single persons are named as the guilty ones and many times eventually apprehended, complete order restoration seems only a temporary illusion, that is, “the villains may be caught, but the danger remains” (Collins 2002:161). Dr. Temperance Brennan’s daily work with dead bodies makes her reflect on criminality in contemporary society: “I thought about murder. With each passing year the violence seemed to increase in frequency and decrease in rationality. People were shot for handing out pink slips, for taking too long to bag burgers, for driving too slowly or following too close” (Reichs 2009:177). The novels promote common sense and interpersonal fairness but anti-social individual acts result from more general social systemic practices, as detective Andrew Ryan states in a conversation with Dr. Brennan: “There will always be mystic hustlers who will play upon disillusionment, despair, low self-esteem, or fear to promote their own agendas” (Reichs 2005c:436). In this way, the novels conclude but the end opens up discussion on social issues like the abuse of the weak and violence –“a self-perpetuating mania of the power of the aggressive over those less strong” (Reichs 2007b:36)–, issues that are relevant outside the fictional narrative. The novels’ analysis of society’s identity unveils that criminality will never come to closure, which could reflect the pessimistic postmodern belief in the inevitability of never-ending crime and societal ills, and that the fight for a better world should be a constant collective concern.

In form, the novels’ social commentary is also enhanced by the analysis of the relationship between the narrator, the reader and, ultimately, the author. Firstly, the sight of the violent effects of power abuse on dead bodies is forcefully dramatised

by a first-person narrator, that is, Dr. Temperance Brennan. This technique, “a mystery staple since Poe” (Jackson 2002:15), creates the illusion of “a type of confession” (*ibid.*:14) between the series protagonist –Dr. Brennan– and the reader. “Certainly first-person narration affords the reader a seat inside the yellow crime scene tape” (*ibid.*:15), that is, the reader feels as if they were walking around the characters in the fictional story. If Gérard Genette’s classification of the narrative voice is taken into consideration, Temperance Brennan may be argued to be intimately involved in the story that she is telling, as well as with the reader, as an autodiegetic narrator, since she plays the protagonist role of her own story.

Besides, the functions that Temperance Brennan fulfills as a narrator highlight the intimacy that she develops with the reader, too. Sometimes, the narrator carries out a testimonial function, whereby she confirms the truth of the story and expresses her own feelings about it. Firstly, when convenient halfway through the development of the plot, Temperance Brennan shares her internal monologues with the reader, expounding on the unfairness in which some underprivileged people in society live. For example, in *Déjà Dead* Dr. Brennan describes the terrible situation of prostitutes in the most marginal neighbourhoods in Montreal, but the picture could apply to most cities in the world:

The saddest were the women at the borders of this flesh trade life, those just crossing the start and finish lines. There were the painfully young, some still flying the colors of puberty. Some were out for fun and a quick buck, others were escaping some private hell at home. Their stories had a central theme. Hustle long enough to make a stake, then on to a respectable life. Adventurers and runaways, they’d arrive by bus [...]. They came with gleaming hair and flesh faces, confident of their immortality, certain of their ability to control the future. The pot and the coke were just a lark. They never recognized them as the first rungs on a ladder of desperation until they were too high up to get off except by falling.

Then there were those who’d managed to grow old. Only the truly canny and exceptionally strong had prospered and gotten out. The ill and weak were dead. The strong-bodied but weak-willed endured. They saw the future, and accepted it. They would die in the streets because they knew nothing else. Or because they loved or feared some man enough to peddle ass to buy his dope. Or because they needed food to eat and a place to sleep. (Reichs 2005a:235)

Temperance Brennan confides to the reader how powerless she feels in the face of the terrible reality that she sees around her. In this case, like other times in the series, the narrator’s realistic and committed testimony of the cruel misery in which prostitutes live –they are considered only flesh, bodies, objects– unveils the novels’ social anti-patriarchal agenda in a straightforward way.

Other times in the series, the narrator’s testimonial function works hand in hand with the time of the narration. The narrator normally explains the reader what

happened in the past using the past tense –what Gérard Genette calls ‘subsequent narration’–, but occasionally throughout the narrative, Temperance Brennan comes out of the fictional world to talk directly with the reader in different ways. On the one hand, she anticipates that something terrible is about to happen, like in the following quote: “It was to be one of the worst days of my life” (Reichs 2003:47). On the other, sometimes she decides to begin her narration in the present in order to prepare the reader regarding future events in the novel; this is the device used in *Break No Bones* and *Flash and Bones*. As a significant contribution to the obliteration of fiction and non-fiction, Temperance Brennan seems to exist in two parallel worlds, one in which she interacts with the other characters in the narrative, and the other which she shares with the reader and where she express her opinions and feelings about what is going to happen in the fictional world.

Regarding the end of the novels, the narrator’s testimonial function and involvement in the story is also further highlighted. In this sense, the Brennan series may be considered to finish making use of the literary form of parable so as to clarify the fictional constructed discourse even further. For example, at the end of *Cross Bones*, which deals with religious fanaticism, Temperance Brennan makes the following statement in a conversation with Detective Andrew Ryan:

The Torah, the Bible, the Koran. Each offers a recipe for spiritual contentment, for hop, for love, and for controlling basic human passions, and each claims to have gotten the recipe straight from God, but via a different messenger. They’re all just trying to provide a formula for orderly spiritual living, but somehow the message gets twisted, like cells in a body turning cancerous. Self-appointed spokesmen declare the boundaries of correct belief, outsiders are labeled heretics, and the faithful are called upon to attack them. I don’t think it was meant to be that way. (Reichs 2006:476)

The novel finishes with a last remark by Temperance Brennan, as if made to the reader: “Adieu, Israel. I wish you peace” (Reichs 2006:476).⁴ The above quote, only a representative example of similar ends in Kathy Reichs’ series, suggests that the fictionalisation of Brennan’s forensic detective stories is embedded with a final message. In the series, the denouement is an induction that necessarily follows from the specific cases and it illustrates an ethical lesson as a universal truth, that is, what should be normative attitudes and behaviours for proper action so that contemporary society undergoes effective change.

⁴ In “From the Forensic Files of Dr. Kathy Reichs” in the novel *Flash and Bones* Kathy Reichs explains her own views on this issue in a straightforward way: “Extremist ideas do not offend me. In my view, people are free to believe what they will. Extremism that hurts others offends me greatly. In *Cross Bones* I wrote of religious extremism–belief systems that refuse to accept the legitimacy of differing worldviews” (Reichs 2001:275).

All the above-explained narrative devices used in the Brennan series are argued to strengthen the reader's identification with the narrator, and thus, to boost the possibility of raising the reader's social awareness and eventual acceptance of the novels' social commentary. What is more, the novels discursive paradigm also relies on the close connection between Temperance Brennan, the narrator and woman hero of the series, and Kathy Reichs, the author. Although a simple identification Temperance Brennan/Kathy Reichs is out of question, many similarities may be drawn and the publishers' marketing strategies for the series as well as the author herself play on these (in)direct links.

First of all, the two of them share a few common biographical details. Temperance Brennan, a little younger than Kathy Reichs, was also born in Chicago, has Irish ascendancy and a Roman Catholic education. In terms of family, both Kathy Reichs and Temperance Brennan have married –though Temperance Brennan has separated from the beginning of the series– and have children. Other members of Kathy Reichs' family appear in her novels, too; Kathy Reichs admits in the interview included at the end of *Devil Bones* that Temperance Brennan's sister Harry is, in fact, her own younger sister Deborah (Reichs 2008b:384). The author admits, too, that her Latvian in-laws appear in *206 Bones* as Temperance Brennan's own former in-laws, and especially in connection with the recurring summer holiday at one Carolina beach that is depicted in many of the novels.

Concerning personality, Temperance Brennan's character resembles Kathy Reichs' in some ways. Talking about *Déjà Dead*, Kathy Reichs concedes that they are alike: “[...] some of Tempe's personality traits are also mine. Friends who have read the book tell me that her dialogue sounds like me” (Mudge 1997: par. 6). This seems particularly true with reference to Kathy Reichs and Temperance Brennan's sense of humour. In this sense, Kathy Reichs explains that “one characteristic Tempe gets from me is her sense of humor [...]. I think Tempe's sense of humor reflects my own. Friends tell me that when they read the dialogue they can hear my voice quipping the wisecracks” (Reichs 2008b:378).

Professionally, the links between Kathy Reichs and Temperance Brennan are extremely intimate. The parallels are obvious, for example, when thinking that they are both professors of anthropology, they work in Montreal and do forensic work in North Carolina and Canada. In general, Kathy Reichs confirms Temperance Brennan's links with her own work: “Through my fictional character, Temperance Brennan, I offer readers a peak into my own cases and experiences” (Reichs 2007b:467). As Kathy Reichs acknowledges in Paul Ruditis' book *Bones: The Official Companion*, “since authors write about what they know my novels began with a job. My job. I am a forensic anthropologist. Thus, Temperance Brennan's occupation was a given from the start. So were my plot lines. I draw story ideas

from what I do" (2007:6). Referring to her first novel *Déjà Dead*, for instance, in an interview with Alden Mudge, she says that "everything I describe in the book, I actually did" (1997: par. 11). This is one of the features that Kathy Reichs believes attracts her readers: "What makes *Déjà Dead* unique is that I write about the things I actually do. Being in the autopsy room, autopsy procedure, skeletal analysis. I don't need to research that. I live it. That's what I do every single day" (Mudge 1997: par. 12).

Being forensic anthropologists has made Kathy Reichs and Temperance Brennan voice similar feelings when coming face to face with death. When talking about her novel *Grave Secrets* in an interview with Ann Bruns, Kathy Reichs highlights the fact that she is portraying her own lived experiences in Guatemala: "Tempe is describing the things I saw, heard, smelled, and experienced in Guatemala. She is sharing the emotions I felt" (2002: par. 13). Similarly, in the section "From the Forensic Files of Dr. Kathy Reichs" in *Spider Bones* Kathy Reichs makes a similar comment: "Through Tempe, I've tried to convey the feelings I experienced while examining the files of men and women killed long ago and far from home while serving their country" (Reichs 2010:304).

For the cases that Dr. Brennan investigates, Kathy Reichs does draw heavily from her own first-hand experiences over the autopsy table. She takes an idea from a case or cases on which she has worked, and then she changes all the details, as she has explained in interviews or even in the section in some of her novels called "From the Forensic Files of Dr. Kathy Reichs."⁵ Nevertheless, the novels also play on how much fact and/or fiction the books include. For instance, in *Death du Jour*

⁵ The novels published until November 2011 which include this forensic section are *Bare Bones* (418-20), *Monday Mourning* (427-30), *Cross Bones* (477-81), *Break No Bones* (464-68), *Spider Bones* (303-06) and *Flash and Bones* (273-78). In this section there is information on the real cases that some (or all) Kathy Reichs' novels are built on. Thus, *Déjà Dead* is based on her first serial-murder investigation; *Death du Jour* derives from work that she undertook for the Catholic Church and from the mass murder-suicides that took place within the solar Temple cult; *Deadly Décisions* stems from a case connected with Quebec Hell's Angels. *Fatal Voyage* is based on her disaster recovery work; *Grave Secrets* was inspired by her participation in the exhumation of a Guatemalan mass grave. *Bare Bones* sprang from moose remains that she examined for wildlife agents. *Monday Mourning* grew from three skeletons discovered in a pizza shop basement; *Cross Bones* draws on her visit to Israel, incorporating strangely-unreported Masada bones, a burial box supposedly that of Jesus' brother, James, and a recently looted first-century tomb; *Break No Bones* goes back to her archaeological roots and examines the physical evidence of organ theft; *Bones to Ashes* originated with the discovery of a child's skeleton in the Acadian heartland of Maritime Canada; *Devil Bones* is not based on a single incident, but rather a mélange of cases that she has worked on and that have to do with skulls used as ritual objects; or *Spider Bones* gives a general idea about some of the operations at the "the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command, JPAC, [...] [where Dr. Kathy Reichs has worked as an external consultant] to locate Americans held as prisoners of war and recover those who have died in past conflicts" (Reichs 2010:303).

and *Deadly Décisions* the reader finds a note before the acknowledgements section which underlines that the characters and events are fictional; and *Fatal Voyage* contains the section “Afterword”, where Kathy Reichs explains that at the time of writing the novel, she could not have imagined the terrorist attacks on September 11th, though she makes a reference to her work in disaster response teams, just like in the novel.

Regarding the locations where the novels take place, there is a close relationship between Dr. Brennan and Kathy Reichs, too. They both live in Charlotte, North Carolina, and when Dr. Brennan investigates cases in other cities or countries, the destination is a real place that Kathy Reichs knows well, as she remarks in *Flash and Bones*’ “From the Forensic Files of Dr. Kathy Reichs” (Reichs 2011:274). They are such places as Israel (Reichs 2006), Chicago (Reichs 2009) or Hawaii (Reichs 2010). *Grave Secrets* takes place in Guatemala and reflects Kathy Reichs’ work on the exhumation of a mass grave, so a real massacre is the backdrop of the action in the narrative and may be studied as a tangible expression of both the protagonist and the author’s social commitment.⁶

Grave Secrets condemns “one of the bloodiest conflicts in Latin American history” (Reichs 2003:4) for the indiscriminate slaughter of civilians during the Guatemalan civil war which took place from 1962 to 1996. In her article “Guatemala as a National Crime Scene: Femicide and Impunity in Contemporary U.S. Detective Novels,” Susana S. Martínez indicates that the novel “reflects the findings of the 1999 CEH Report that provides evidence of massacres in 626 villages and raises the number of documented dead or disappeared to more than 200,000” (2008:4).⁷ Kathy Reichs’ *Grave Secrets* actually provides the reader with the essential facts of this crime against humanity: “The bulk of the slaughter was

⁶ With reference to Dr. Kathy Reichs’ commitment to social justice throughout her career, her website highlights that she has served as a forensic expert in several world-known massacre cases. She has travelled to Rwanda to testify at the United Nations Tribunal on Genocide, has assisted the Foundation for Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology in an exhumation in the area of Lake Atitlan in southwest Guatemala, has identified war dead from World War II, and was a member of the Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Team which has worked at the World Trade Centre disaster. Kathy Reichs’ involvement also means that she endorses several organisations on a regular basis. According to the information on her website, she supports various charities and non-profit organisations. She supports the Know My Bones Campaign; she is a spokesperson for the National Osteoporosis Foundation; she works for Helping a Hero, a campaign devoted to supporting severely injured veterans in the United States armed forces; she works with the Caribbean Primate Research Center, which studies non-human primates; and she is a member of Hmong Students in Laos, an organisation which offers scholarships and logistical support to Laotian students pursuing careers in education.

⁷ The quote refers to the report written by the Guatemalan Commission for Historical Clarification.

carried out by the Guatemalan army and by paramilitary organisations affiliated with the army. Most of those killed were rural peasants. Many were women and children. Typically, victims were shot or slashed with machetes” (Reichs 2003:4). In this way, the novel leaves no doubt as to the nature of the crime –an indiscriminating state-sponsored massacre. But Kathy Reichs, by means of Dr. Temperance Brennan, includes more precise details:

Here in Chupan Ya, soldiers and civil patrollers had entered on an August morning in 1982. Fearing they'd be accused of collaborating with the local guerrilla movement and punished, the men fled. The women were told to gather with their children at designated farms. Trusting, or perhaps fearing, the military, they obeyed. When the soldiers located the women where they'd been sent, they raped them for hours, then killed them along with their kids. Every house in the valley was burned to the ground.

Survivors spoke of five mass graves. (Reichs 2003:4-5)

As both history and the novel underline, many of the victims were women and children, all those who are unable to stand up against abuse and violence. In pursuance of the objectives of the series' agenda, the narrator obviously urges the reader to consider the critical need for social change through the simple irrefutable presentation of facts in this as well as the other novels of the Brennan series. Additionally, as the crimes in the Brennan series take place in different parts of the world, they mirror the problems in our contemporary globalised world above national differences, which provides Kathy Reichs' social commentary with a far-reaching scope and makes a decisive contribution to the series' realism by making a reference to our globalised world.⁸

All in all, it may certainly be concluded that the dissection of the Brennan novels shows how content and form are used as valuable tools at the service of the series' social feminist agenda by means of Dr. Temperance Brennan and an effective blurring of the lines between fiction and non-fiction. While Kathy Reichs skillfully safeguards her personal worldviews from unscreened exposure by means of the skillful use of an autodiegetic narrator who explains the reader a fictionalised version of reality, Temperance Brennan is undoubtedly indebted to her creator. Temperance Brennan cannot be simply identified with Kathy Reichs, but there exist

⁸ Quoting from Eva Erdmann's analysis of detective fiction, “in literature, the spread of crime has taken on topographic proportions that reflect the globalization processes of the late twentieth century. In crime novels at the beginning of the twenty-first century, investigations take place all over the world and anyone who went to the trouble of totting up the sum of fictional scenes of the crime would be undertaking a project of international cartography. On the map of the world there are hardly any areas uncharted by crime fiction, hardly any places that have not yet become the setting for a detective novel” (2009:13).

coincidences between the series' narrator and its creator, as she details fictional criminal acts based on the author's actual experiences and feelings in favour of human rights. As a result, Temperance Brennan constitutes a personalised (in)direct instrument of her creator's humanist agenda and provides the medium by which the novels' discourse is raised to a more general level of discursive significance. Thus, the relationship between the protagonist, writer and reader is undoubtedly strengthened and a close link based on commitment is definitely built.

In conclusion, upholding humanitarian involvement as a life principle, Kathy Reichs' series renders a personalised contribution to the understanding of detective fiction as social commitment. Her novels' protagonist, Dr. Temperance Brennan, masters the analysis of bones, the physical support of a human body, and her conclusions are endowed with unquestionable truth and moral rightness thanks to forensic science. Those bare bones, devoid of life and personal significance, point to a crime and criminal but may also be considered to be suggestive of our society's identity. Fact informs and lends reality to fiction and the journey through the criminal trail leads the reader to witness the victim, criminal and society's bare bones. Content and form interplay to help the narrator confront the reflective reader with the series' final purpose, that is, expose patriarchy to prevent victims from dying in vain and help them contribute to shaping both our individual and collective historical memory. The fictional crime crosses the frontier of fiction so as to become a real eye-opener in favour of social feminist justice. Fiction intrudes our real world, as the narrator's voice, fictionally personified by Temperance Brennan, penetrates the reader's mind. Although the public may look for entertainment in detective fiction, the analysis of Kathy Reichs' detective novels supports, among other possibilities, their understanding as social feminist novels. The Brennan series eventually upholds a conservative discourse based on justice, law and order which captivates the reader's sympathy so that they desire the exploration and advent of a brave new world.

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