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The Metaphysical Detective Story in Paul Auster's *The New York Trilogy* and Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*

Žánr metafyzického detektivního příběhu v dílech *Newyorská trilogie* Paula Austera a *Dražba série 49* Thomase Pynchona

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I hereby declare that the following BA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned.

Prague 14.1.2010 Marika Buršíková

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Czech Abstract

Cílem této bakalářské práce je analýza žánru metafyzického detektivního příběhu v konfrontaci s klasickým detektivním příběhem. Základní motivy a prvky žánru jsou ilustrovány konkrétními příklady z děl *Newyorská trilogie* Paula Austera a *Dražba série 49* Thomase Pynchona. Obě tato díla užívají konvenčních prvků klasického detektivního příběhu, avšak tyto prvky určitým způsobem modifikují tak, že dochází k narušení navyklého způsobu čtení detektivního příběhu.

Zatímco klasický detektivní příběh klade důraz na racionalitu a nabízí vždy jedno logické vyústění, ke kterému děj směřuje; metafyzický detektivní příběh popírá existenci jediného řešení a logocentrismu jako takového. Nejednoznačnost závěru vrací čtenáře zpátky k dílu samotnému, přičemž klade otázky o roli autora, čtenáře, jazyka a textu samotného. Porovnání klasického detektivního příběhu (žánru zabývajícího se epistemologickými otázkami) a metafyzického detektivního příběhu (směřujícího spíše k otázkám ontologickým) může posloužit i jako ukázka rozdílu mezi modernistickým a postmodernistickým způsobem chápání reality. Ústřední postavy románů Paula Austera a Thomase Pynchona se snaží v řešení 'případu' postupovat jako detektivové z klasických detektivních příběhů. Jejich pátrání však selhává právě z důvodu jejich víry v logocentrismus.

První kapitola této práce je věnovaná klasickému detektivnímu žánru a jeho základním narativním postupům a konvencím. Druhá kapitola uvádí žánr metafyzického detektivního příběhu a jeho vývoj a různé pohledy kritiků na tuto problematiku. Poslední kapitola popisuje základní motivy a postupy typické pro žánr metafyzického detektivního příběhu na příkladech z děl *Newyorská trilogie* a *Dražba série 49.*

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Introduction

This thesis deals with the genre of the metaphysical detective story. To illustrate the main aspects of the genre, I have chosen the novels of Thomas Pynchon (*1937) and Paul Auster (*1947). Both of these authors are often classified as postmodern and their use of the metaphysical detective story genre is one of the reasons for being included in this (wide and problematic) category. Being aware of the fact that the novels which I am going to analyze and compare on the following pages were published twenty years apart from one another (*The Crying of Lot 49* in 1966 and *The New York Trilogy* in 1986), I believe they both provide good examples of the same tendency that is present in postmodern fiction.

I will discuss the reasons why the classical detective story, a genre of popular literature, is often used by postmodern authors and the ways in which the conventions of this genre have been modified by them so that the text ceases to be end-dominated (as is the case of the classical detective story). The metaphysical detective story often does not contain a simple undisputed closure but rather remains open for the reader. Never entirely following the conventional narrative strategies, texts like these play with the readers' expectations in an attempt to raise questions about the role of the author, reader, the act of writing, language, the text itself, etc.

The central aim of this thesis is to provide an analysis of the genre based on examples from the above mentioned novels. Although the authors' biographies may otherwise provide a useful insight into their work, I will not be dealing with them in the present paper. The reason for this procedure is that all the information necessary for the argument can be obtained from the texts alone and their respective criticism, the details from the authors' lives are therefore not essential to the main objective.

The thesis parallels the difference between the classical detective story and the metaphysical detective story with the difference between modernism and postmodernism and

their methods of understanding reality. According to Brian McHale, this difference is characterized by a turn from epistemological issues to the ontological ones. I will provide examples of this tendency in my analysis of the individual novels.

Apart from being both classified as examples of the metaphysical detective genre, these two works have not been considered exceedingly similar in terms of the plot (there is a variety of criticism regarding Auster or Pynchon connected with their use of the detective story genre, but it deals with them individually or in connection with other authors), however, under closer inspection there can be found similarities between their two works. That they have certain things in common can be supported by the fact that many ideas expressed by critics about *The Crying of Lot 49* can as well be applied to *The New York Trilogy* and vice versa.

It may seem unbalanced to compare one author's novel with three novels of another one. The three short novels/novellas of which *The New York Trilogy* is comprised had all been published individually during two subsequent years: *The City of Glass* (1985), *Ghosts* (1986) and *The Locked Room* (1986). Although each of them functions individually, the linking of these three novels is a very productive one. The three parts of the trilogy repeat many important themes from different perspectives and grant better understanding of the whole when read together. Moreover, as the narrator of *The Locked Room* explains: "These three stories are finally the same story, but each one represents a different stage in my awareness of what it is about" (294). In my analysis of the genre, I will mainly work with *The City of Glass* with a few digressions to the other two volumes of the trilogy.

The first chapter of the thesis introduces the classical detective genre and its main narrative strategies and conventions. The main source will be Peter Hühn's analysis of the detective story genre. I will explain how popular genres, such as the classical detective story, are constituted through their conventions, which they need to follow precisely in order to

function within the genre. Furthermore, this chapter will deal with the practice of reading and writing classical detective fiction as a means of escape.

The following chapter focuses on the metaphysical detective story. It provides the basic chronology of criticism devoted to this genre, the different labels devised for it and the ways in which the metaphysical detective story was defined in opposition to the classical detective story.

The last chapter is divided into three subchapters which explore the typical themes of metaphysical detective fiction based on examples from *The New York Trilogy* and *The Crying of Lot 49*. There are certain strategies and motives which are used by both Pynchon and Auster. Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney provide a comprehensive list of characteristic themes of the metaphysical detective story genre some of which I am going to refer to individually. Therefore it would be useful to quote these six major points at the beginning of my thesis. They are:

> 1. the defeated sleuth, whether he be an armchair detective or a private eye;
>
> 2. the world, city, or text as labyrinth;
>
> 3. the purloined letter, embedded text, mise en abyme, textual constraint, or text as object;
>
> 4. the ambiguity, ubiquity, eerie meaningfulness, or sheer meaninglessness of clues and evidence;
>
> 5. the missing person, the "man of the crowd," the double, and the lost, stolen, or exchanged identity; and
>
> 6. the absence, falseness, circularity, or self-defeating nature of any kind of closure to the investigation. (8)

To relate this list to the structure of my thesis, the subchapter 'The Classical Detective in the Postmodern World' explores mainly points 1 and 4, 'The City as Text' deals with point 2 and

‘The Mystery Within – the Quest for Identity)’ comprises points 5 and 6 of Merivale and Sweeney’s list.

1. The Classical Detective Story

1.1 Narrative Strategies and Conventions

A genre of popular literature is defined by its conventions. These conventions normally provide for our easy understanding of the text. Certain elements which are common to appear in a detective story (such as the commission of a crime, leaving of traces by the criminal, the suspects, the relevant vs. the misleading clues, etc.) are predictable and guide us in our reading. According to Todorov, the fact that a text conforms to a certain already established genre whose rules it precisely follows is a sign of its lower status in terms of the division between 'high' art and 'popular' art. "Detective fiction has its norms; to 'develop' them is also to disappoint them: to 'improve upon' detective fiction is to write 'literature'" (43). This is an argument which I will illustrate and develop in my thesis. It nicely sums up the difference between the classical detective story and the metaphysical detective story the latter of which distorts or 'develops' the norms of the genre.

It is a theme which Michael Holquist also explores. He sees the main difference between art and kitsch in familiarity. The genres of popular literature are each defined by their own set of conventions which, in order for the text to work, have to be familiar. The function of these conventions is to provide reassurance, in the case of the detective story, this 'reassuring magic' that the readers seek lies in the possibility of attaining order through intellect. This pattern is always repeated and its effect is narcotizing, which, as Holquist argues, in a metaphysical detective story should be avoided (155-6).

It is important to define what is meant when dealing with the classical detective story. It is the 'whodunit', the kind of detective fiction which Todorov takes as his point of departure, a genre which has specific norms to conform to (usually associated with e.g. Conan

Doyle or Agatha Christie). Apart from this type, Todorov identifies another kind of detective fiction which slightly differs. At the end of his essay, he anticipates a different genre of detective fiction which might emerge from the novels that do not fit the traditional classification: "the new genre is not necessarily constituted by the negation of the main feature of the old, but from a different complex of properties, not by necessity logically harmonious with the first form" (52).

What Todorov sees as the possible beginning of a new genre within detective fiction is called 'série noire' or the thriller, also known as 'hardboiled detective fiction' (popularized by Marcel Duhamel, Dashiell Hammett or Raymond Chandler). This can neither be categorized as a classical detective story since it does not follow all its rules, nor can be understood as a metaphysical detective story. It is situated somewhere on the way from one to the other (if we can speak of a 'development' within the genre). For the sake of clarity, I will not be dealing with this type - my main concern will be to contrast the metaphysical detective story with the norms of the classical detective story genre.

Peter Hühn notes how "[i]n spite of writers' preoccupation with surprising variation, the arrangement of narrative elements is fundamentally the same in the majority of classical detective novels" (455) and to support this he mentions the practice of making lists of explicit rules for writing detective stories common in the 1920's and 30's (such as those by S. S. Van Dyne and Ronald Knox). He offers an analysis of the structure of the detective story and its narrative strategies in terms of semiology. Using Saussure's terms he defines detection as simply "selecting and grouping signifiers and assigning various signifieds to them" (455). In the detective story he identifies a double-plot structure comprised of two stories based on the concept of duality of Tzvetan Todorov who divides the detective story into "the story of the crime and the story of the investigation" (44). The investigation is actually the detective's reconstruction of the initial crime story.

According to Hühn's essay, the initial crime is perceived as an uninterpretable sign which resists to be figured out by traditional forces of order in the system (the police) and therefore causes a threat to a normal functioning of the society: "The narrative incapability on the part of society's official agents, their inability to discover and tell the story of the crime, threatens the validity of the established order" (452). The role of the detective who therefore has to be employed is to follow the traces left by the criminal and to correctly interpret them.

One of the conventions of the genre is that it is impossible not to leave any traces at all, even though some may be suppressed. Those that cannot be eliminated (e.g. the body of the victim) need to be manipulated by the criminal somehow to provide a different reading of the story (the murder appears to have been a suicide, an accident) or disable any reading whatsoever. "[T]he criminal *writes* the secret story of his crime into everyday 'reality' in such a form that its text is partly hidden, partly distorted and misleading" (454). The detective acts as the reader of this hidden story and has to find out what the potential clues (traces left by the criminal) signify. From this perspective, the world becomes endowed with a "rich potentiality of unsuspected meanings" (455). The detective's role is to identify which of the facts are relevant. "[B]efore the detective can read the criminal's meaning correctly, he has first to disentangle and eliminate the various secondary meanings and stories" (456).

The detective and the criminal are in their roles paralleled with the reader and author on the higher level. On both levels we encounter strife over the 'possession of meaning'. The author who has written the text is constantly postponing the unveiling of the solution and withholding it from the reader just like the criminal is trying to hide or manipulate the clues that would lead the detective to the discovery (456). The quality of a detective story, as a matter of fact, lies in the author's ability to keep the solution a secret until the end. If the reader is able to discover the solution earlier than the detective, the story is unlikely to be considered a good one. "The … author … makes it a point of honor to prevent the … readers from [solving the case] before he permits them to do so" (459). The purpose of a good

detective story according to G. K. Chesterton is "to enlighten [the reader] in such a manner that each successive portion of the truth comes as a surprise" (*Errors about Detective Stories* 80).

That there is a power relationship between the author and the reader where the author's role is superior, "helps to underline the decisive power of the story and of narration for the organizing concept of reality as implied in this type of detective fiction" (Hühn 460). In other words, the network of clues (including the misleading ones) finally make sense in the end only because they are part of the plan, designed to fall perfectly into place for the sake of the solution, by the author.

This 'asymmetric power relationship' between the author and reader is also a subject of Eliot A. Singer's essay, which analyses the often used analogy between a whodunit and a riddle. In both cases, there is a 'pre-determined solution' of which the writer is the only 'authoritative source'. Although different solutions to the riddle may be thought of, "even if cleverer than that of the poser, [they] are automatically rejected as incorrect" (158). In the whodunit there may appear various misleading clues that seem to guide the reader to alternative solutions which are, however, refuted in the end. Again, the reader who is confronted with these ambiguities has to be satisfied with the final solution: "a satisfactory solution to a mystery must be acceptable as *rationally* superior to those alternatives that the reader has conceived" (158).

Holquist views the role of the traditional detective as "the essential metaphor for order", a pure intellect that operates in the world of chaos and is able to triumph over it. The detective "alone in the world of credulous men, holds to the Scholastic principle of *adequatio rei et intellectus*, the adequation of mind to things, the belief that the mind, given enough time, can understand everything. There are no mysteries, there is only incorrect reasoning" (141).

Moreover, this idea of detection has its counterpart in what the literary critic does. In terms of literary theory, Prasanta Das parallels these notions with the methods of New Criticism where the literary critic has a similar role to that of the detective. He views *The Crying of Lot 49* as a parody of this trend of literary criticism.

> Though *Lot 49* parodies the activities of the traditional literary scholar in Oedipa's search for a reliable text of The Courier's Tragedy, it mostly directs its criticism against the practice and dogmas of the New Criticism. (…) Oedipa's procedures as a detective are akin to those of the New Critics. She subjects clues and texts to intensive scrutiny. (…) Oedipa's assumption, as John Dugdale notes, 'has always been that any concealed meaning she discovers will be unitary and unifying' (147).

The movement of New Criticism was connected with the notion of 'close reading' where the text was analyzed regardless of any outside sources. The critics were paying attention to particular aspects of the text (such as metaphors, the meter, the repetition of similar sounds, etc.) and abstracting meanings from these individual elements. In the limited world of the particular literary work, they played the role of the classical detective.

1.2 Classical Detective Stories as a Means of Escape

Reading or writing detective stories has often been compared to a means of escape – escape from a world of chaos into a neat world of perfect logic. Michael Holquist discusses this as a trend among some intellectuals and he offers many examples of writers or scholars (such as J. I. M. Stuart or C. Day Lewis) who, apart from their 'serious' work, turn to writing classical mysteries usually under pseudonyms. Daniel Quinn, the central character of *The City of Glass*, had in his early life published several 'high literature' works under his real name (poetry, plays, critical essays). After losing his wife and son, he feels he can no longer continue going in this direction. However, writing still remains the only thing he thinks he can do. As a result, he starts writing detective novels, no longer under his real name, but under the pen name of William Wilson. This alone signifies a certain detachment from what he writes. For Quinn, this kind of writing is effortless as well as comforting since he no longer feels responsibility for the result. There is comfort for him not only in writing them but also in reading mystery novels.

As Holquist notes, "Detective stories had always been recognized as escape literature. But escape from what? Among other things, escape from *literature itself*" (148). The literary quality of the novels that Quinn reads is not of any importance to him. "Whereas his taste in other books was rigorous, demanding to the point of narrow-mindedness, with these works he showed almost no discrimination whatsoever" (8). Literary quality is not a factor here; what Quinn needs is to identify with the detective hero and to feel satisfaction from each perfectly solved case. In this way, the books he reads are compared to a kind of junk food which he craves for, however always ends up wanting more. Reading detective stories is likened to consumerism, at least in the case of mysteries where re-reading of the same story would be utterly pointless since it would no longer create the same kind of pleasure of suspense followed by a catharsis.

As Hühn puts it, the text "consumes itself" – when the story is closed, the meaning of all signs is stabilized, the signifiers correctly matched with their respective signifieds. "Because the mystery was initially defined as the meaning of the text, no relevance remains when the meaning becomes extractable and the mystery is removed (the book than leaves nothing to be desired)" (458-9).

Even Edgar Allan Poe, who is generally noted as the inventor of the classical detective story genre, was said to have "invented the detective story that he might not go mad" (J.W.Krutch, quoted in Haycraft 9). This is an over-simplification, nevertheless it has some merit. Confronted with the chaotic world full of absurdities and experiences of dread that we encounter in most of Poe's fiction it is only natural that there would be a need for some escape, even if it is only into another kind of fictitious world: "it is in the very depths to which he experienced, and was able to capture in words, the chaos of the world, that we must search for the key to the ordered, ultra-rational world of the detective story" (Holquist 141).

2. The Metaphysical Detective Story

2.1 Defining the Genre

It was Howard Haycraft who in 1941 first introduced the term "metaphysical detective story" (76) in his book on the history of detective fiction *Murder for Pleasure*. He used this term in relation to Chesterton's Father Brown tales. Haycraft stresses Chesterton's philosophical approach and his concern with "the moral and religious aspects of crime."(76) He views Chesterton's work as a major contribution to the genre although his tales often do not fulfill all the requirements of "good detection" (76-7). The fact that they do not follow all the conventions is one of the reasons why his work "gave [the genre] a needed and distinctly more 'literary' turn that was to have far-reaching effect" (77). This is not far from the truth, since Chesterton was among the first of many authors who started pushing the borders of classical detective fiction into the realm of "that problematical thing called Art" (76). The term 'metaphysical detective story', used only once by Haycraft for this particular author, has been adopted and its meaning developed by critics and used until now for a much wider spectrum of narratives.

Merivale and Sweeney, the editors of a collection of essays entitled *Detecting Texts: The Metaphysical Detective Story from Poe to Postmodernism*, decided to use Haycraft's term despite later attempts at alternative coinages. In the introductory essay, they provide a basic chronology of criticism dealing with this genre and the various other names devised for it, one of the more widely used terms being the 'anti-detective' story or novel (Spanos, Tani). According to Merivale and Sweeney this term might be confusing since the stories are "not necessarily as, in Tani's words, 'a deliberate negation' of the entire detective genre (24).

Rather, these stories apply the detective process to that genre's own assumptions about detection" (3).

The essays of Michael Holquist and William V. Spanos were published in two consequent years (1971 and 1972). Independently of each other, they express similar ideas based on the comparison of the classical detective story and the metaphysical detective story. While Holquist uses the contrast between the two to show what constitutes kitsch and how art differs from it (155), Spanos views it as an analogy of the difference between Western (positivistic) mode of thinking and the postmodern mode of thinking. Spanos considers the metaphysical detective story (or anti-detective story as he calls it) to be "the paradigmatic archetype of the postmodern literary imagination" (154).

The main aspect that distinguishes metaphysical detective fiction is, according to Holquist, that it is "not concerned to have a neat ending in which all the questions are answered, and which can therefore be forgotten" (153). It takes the classical detective story as its point of departure but fulfills none of the expectations connected with such a narrative: "it's telos is the lack of telos, it's plot consists in the calculated absence of plot. It is not a story – it is a process; the reader (…) must do what detectives do (…). But all [the] clues end – when put together – in zero, or a circle, the line which has no end" (153). What is a better way of showing the limitedness of a certain genre than taking the very genre's conventions and subverting them in order to create a completely different effect? The reader's mind is accommodated to certain patterns which provide satisfaction but leave it passive. Holquist likens the reading of a metaphysical detective story to a kind of exercise, a "calisthenics of perception" (153-4) for a mind that has been numbed by traditional detective plots.

Spanos argues that tendency to provide closures is not only a feature of classical detective fiction but also a general trend in the thinking of our (the Western) society. "It is discoverable everywhere in the language and the shape of action of men from all social levels of the Western City" (163). By pointing for instance to newspaper articles he shows the need

for a perfectly structured reality where all action leads to some comforting conclusion. Confronted with a lack of closure, the facts are often manipulated to suit and satisfy this demand. As an example of this common strategy he evokes an event from the Vietnam War: in December 1970, a month-long training was conducted and a scheme plotted and rehearsed by the Americans for a rescue operation at a prisoner-of-war camp in Vietnam. On the day of the action there was however no longer anybody to rescue, leaving the actors of the operation with a feeling of helplessness. Nevertheless, it was eventually declared by the Secretary of Defense that the "affair was a successfully completed operation" (165). The absurdity of the situation which was lacking an appropriate closure finally had to be transformed into an accomplishment by the authorities. This is an illustration of how "Western structure of consciousness is bent, however inadvertently, on unleashing chaos in the name of the order of a well-made world" (167).

Holquist and Spanos end their essays on a very similar note. They are both aware of the need for disturbing the readers out of their comfortable world of "well-made fiction' where rational solutions are always provided to suit our needs at the expense of manipulating our reality to fit these artificial structures. They both call for fiction which "instead of familiarity, gives strangeness (…) [i]nstead of reassuring, (…) disturbs" (Holquist 155).
As Spanos puts it "only in the precincts of our last evasions where 'dread strikes us dumb', only in this silent realm of dreadful uncertainty, are we likely to discover the ontological aesthetic possibilities of generosity" (167-8).

To explain this more, Spanos takes the concept of dread as opposed to fear from Heidegger (who derived these categories from Kierkegaard). What distinguishes dread from fear is that fear has an object. When we are afraid, we are afraid *of* something. Whatever the object is, it includes the potential of dealing with it: "fear has no ontological status because, having an object that can, as it were, be taken hold of, one is certain that it can be dealt with: eliminated or neutralized or even used" (149). Contrariwise, dread has no object. The fact that

there is no object is what makes it so terrifying since there is no way of eliminating it. The way of the Western thinking (rational and positivistic) is to create an object of dread although it is not there and in this way to "justify the absurdity of human existence" - to make the reality straightforward, linear. "It is based, rather on a monolithic certainty that immediate psychic or historical experience is part of a comforting, even exciting and suspenseful well-made cosmic drama or novel – more particularly, a detective story" (150).

The central characters of *The New York Trilogy* and *The Crying of Lot 49* all start with this preconception about the world. They start their quest with the expectation that with good detective abilities they will be able to arrive at a solution. Once it occurs to them that the problems they encounter might *not* have a single solution, that reality might not be structured in this simple, straightforward way; what they experience is dread. The world around them is no longer perceived as secure, "dread generates a withdrawal of the world as web of definite or defined objects" (Spanos 149).

Furthermore, the uncertainty on the outside (the inability to solve the case) causes an uncertainty within. In the course of events, they start questioning even the things they have never thought of questioning before, their own identity. This is one of the key characteristics of what Stefano Tani calls the "deconstructive anti-detective novel" (76).

Tani in *The Doomed Detective*, the first book entirely devoted to metaphysical detective fiction, categorizes the anti-detective novel in three groups. In the order in which they more and more abandon the conventions of detective fiction they are: the innovative, deconstructive and meta-fictional anti-detective novels. In the innovative anti-detective fiction there is a solution which is conceivable but it is arrived at "without justice and by social criticism" (76). In the deconstructive anti-detective novel, the solution appears to be inconceivable: "The detective is unable to impose a meaning, an interpretation of the outside occurrences he is asked, as a sleuth, to solve and interpret. Reality is so tentacular and full of clues that the detective risks his sanity as he tries to find a solution" (76). As the detective

feels the ambiguity of the case, he starts to experience a similar uncertainty about his own identity: "To accept the mystery 'outside' somehow releases the mystery inside the detective" (77). Tani argues that unlike the 'outside mystery', the mystery of identity can be solved.

As one of the representatives of the deconstructive category he chooses *The Crying of Lot 49*. *The New York Trilogy* could be included in this group as well, moreover, it partially falls within the third category that Tani describes – the meta-fictional anti-detective novel. This last group is characterized by an intensified encounter between the reader and writer: "In meta-fictional anti-detective fiction the writer is no longer an 'absent' third-person narrator but part of his text (…). He keeps reminding us that what we are reading is only fiction and that he is the conjuror in this magic game, which has ho reality but its own" (114). In *The City of Glass*, Paul Auster disturbs the reader's expectations by exactly this strategy - including himself, or rather a character of his name in the novel. Also, these novels often lack any actual crime (which is the case of *The City of Glass* again), the only 'criminal' being the author himself, who "'kills' (distorts and cuts) the text and thus compels the reader to become a 'detective'" (113). The role of the reader and author and the various relationships between the two is explored in the plots of *The New York Trilogy* as well as on the meta-fictional level.

Although Brian McHale does not directly deal with the metaphysical detective story as such in his book *Postmodernist Fiction*, his notion of the shift of dominant between modernist and postmodernist fiction has been applied when dealing with this subject (e.g. Ewert 180). The notion of dominant is a Russian formalist concept, McHale takes it from Jakobson in whose view the dominant is defined as "the focusing component of a work of art [which] rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components [and] guarantees the integrity of the structure" (6). McHale argues that the dominant of modernist and postmodernist fiction shifts from the "problems of *knowing* to problems of *modes of being*" (10). The dominant of modernist fiction is epistemological; the dominant of postmodernist fiction is ontological. The same contrast can be seen between the classical detective story, which McHale calls "the

epistemological genre *par excellence*" (9), and the metaphysical detective story. The difference lies in the questions which are asked in these narratives:

> [M]odernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions such as those mentioned by Dick Higgins (…): "How can I interpret the world of which I am a part? And what am I in it?" Other typical modernist questions might be added: What is there to be known?; Who knows it?; How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty? (9)
>
> [P]ostmodernist fiction deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions like the ones Dick Higgins calls "post-cognitive": "What world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?" (10)

McHale is aware of the fact that epistemological questions cannot be asked without raising ontological questions as well, and the other way round. In fact, there is a certain "dynamics of change by which one system emerges form and supplants the other. (…) Intractable epistemological uncertainty becomes at a certain point ontological plurality or instability" (11). Nevertheless, it depends on the work we read, which set of questions is asked first; postmodernist writing puts the ontological problems in the foreground as more urgent than the epistemological ones (11).

2.2 Being Thrown Back into the Text

For a reader who would try to read the novels of Auster and Pynchon as instances of classical detective fiction, they would make a very unsatisfactory, even frustrating reading. The metaphysical detective story never offers the reader any satisfaction resulting from a perfectly solved case. This means the point of reading such a text has to be located somewhere else. David Seed points out the fact that in *The Crying of Lot 49* "the novel's title [which appears as the last words of the novel] throws the reader back into the text" (quoted in Loyd 148). This is an immense deviation from the classical detective story where the end of the text is where all is answered and there is therefore no need of ever going back to it. Here, as we are confronted with a distortion of the classical detective narrative structure, we may become aware of how the conventions of this genre are employed to simplify reality, which otherwise lacks the possibility of being easily solved like a puzzle.

We may see an illustration of how the reader is 'thrown back into the text' in the second volume of *The New York Trilogy*. In Auster's *Ghosts*, a detective named Blue is hired to watch a person named Black. It is a very strange task since there is almost nothing to watch, the person spends most of his time reading and writing. Being confronted with such an unusual situation, Blue tries to make sense of it. He imagines several conventional cases, which would provide an explanation (such as that Black is perhaps planning to commit some crime and waiting for the right moment). Nevertheless, he is never able to come to any conclusion for sure unless it would be possible to enter Black's mind. For him "Black is no more than a kind of blankness, a hole in the texture of things, and one story can fill this hole as well as any other" (147). He starts thinking not about the case but of his role in the whole process:

> For the first time in his life, he finds that he has been thrown back on himself (…). He has moved rapidly along the surface of things for as long

> as he can remember, fixing his attention on these surfaces only in order to perceive them (…) asking no more of things than that they be there. And until now they have always been, (…) distinctly telling him what they are, so perfectly themselves and nothing else that he has never had to pause before them or look twice. (146)

In a similar fashion, the reader of a classical detective story is never confronted with any substantial obstructions in the reading process. He may try to predict the solution of the case, while perceiving the investigation from the detective's point of view and, in the end, he may have guessed correctly or incorrectly. Nevertheless, the solution is always there at the end. There is a certainty of some sort of an outcome to which everything leads. Similarly to Blue, the reader smoothly moves along the surface of things, guided by the detective who gradually solves all the enigmas thanks to his extraordinary powers of reasoning. "That this should be so follows from the premise that there is one and only one true meaning" (Hühn 456). From being 'thrown back' on ourselves arises the awareness of the conventions that manipulate the reality to suit our psychological needs. This awareness is what Holquist and Spanos call for in their essays.

3. The Themes of the Metaphysical Detective Story

3.1 The Classical Detective in the Postmodern World

The characters of *The New York Trilogy* and *The Crying of Lot 49* are not detectives by profession (with the exception of Blue in *Ghosts*). They are drawn to the case by a coincidence and then unable to leave it because of their natural obsession with a closure. Their relation to the case is usually built upon their knowledge of the fictional world of the classical detective stories rather than real life experience. Daniel Quinn in *The City of Glass* is a writer. The only knowledge of the profession of the detective he has is through fiction.

> Like most people, Quinn knew almost nothing about crime. He had never murdered anyone, had never stolen anything, and he did not know anyone who had. He had never been inside a police station, had never met a private detective, had never spoken to a criminal. Whatever he knew about these things, he had learned from books, films, and newspapers. He did not, however consider this to be a handicap. What interested him about the stories he wrote was not their relation to the world but their relation to other stories. (7)

In a way, Quinn evokes characters like Don Quijote or Madame Bovary whose idea of life is constructed by entirely fictional worlds from the books they have read. The novel itself hints on the fact that Daniel Quinn whose initials are D.Q. can be read as a donquijotic character who is in a way delusional because 'bewitched by books'. The tragic nature of donquijotic characters is caused by the discrepancy between the world of fiction which they desire and the actual world that they inhabit. In Quinn's case, it is the belief that there exists a

solution to which all the clues lead to. How does Quinn imagine the detective story should look like?

> In the good mystery there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word that is not significant. And even if it is not significant it has the potential to be so – which amounts to the same thing. (…) Since everything seen or said, even the slightest, most trivial thing may bear a connection to the outcome of the story, nothing must be overlooked. (8)

This is also the reason why Quinn becomes so immersed in Stillman's theories. They also provide a simple explanation which unites all the meanings into a single one. It is the belief that everything in the world has once been named by a single author, God (more specifically, it was Adam entitled by God to name things), and therefore everything has a purpose. Stillman argues that once this was true - "a thing and its name were interchangeable" (43), however, with the fall of men, God's language has also fallen, so that the words no longer represent the essence of things. This is why Stillman tries to reconstruct the prelapsarian state of language by means of his experiments.

Stillman's theory evokes Ferdinand De Saussure's notion of the signifier and signified being united into a single whole. However, not even this (already surpassed) concept works here. Stillman is wrong in thinking that the names should represent the essence of things, since the relationship between the signifier and signified is only conventional, arbitrary. De Saussure would never approve of Stillman's experiments; he even refuted the possibility of such a project's success: "whoever creates a language controls it only as long as it is not in circulation; from the moment when it fulfills its mission and becomes the property of everyone, control is lost" (De Saussure 44). As Stillman describes his method to Quinn, we can see that it is the method very similar to that of the detective:

> '[F]or the time being I'm merely collecting data, gathering evidence so to speak. Then I will have to coordinate my findings. It's highly demanding

> work. (…) I have to be outside in all kinds of weather, constantly on the move, forever on my feet, going from one place to the next. It wears me out, you can be sure of that.'
>
> 'But it's worth it.'
>
> 'Anything for the truth. No sacrifice is too great.' (75)

In the end, Stillman commits suicide the reason of which is unknown to Quinn or the reader. It can be assumed that he kills himself because he realizes that he had failed and there is no shared "truth", that his theory was wrong and his life-long experiments (one of which caused him to be imprisoned for the abuse of his son) have been devoted to an illusion, a projection of a world ruled by logos.

Postmodernism was characterized by Lyotard as an "incredulity toward meta-narratives" (xxiv). This incredulity is one of the main aspects of the metaphysical detective story. However, it is not impersonated by the protagonist of the novel - the figure of the detective. The detective usually represents the classical tendency, the detective's interpretations of the world contrast with the actual world that surrounds them. It is the reader who, once he ceases to believe in the effectiveness of the detective's actions, becomes incredulous. It is the role of the reader to find out the actual crime that is investigated here. Alison Russell believes it to be logocentrism:

> Logocentrism (…) is the "crime" that Auster investigates in *The New York Trilogy*. In each volume, the detective searches for "presence": an ultimate referent of foundation outside the play of language itself. The quest for correspondence between signifier and signified is inextricably related to each protagonist's quest for origin and identity, for the self only exists insofar as language grants existence to it. (72)

Similarly, in *The Crying of Lot 49*: "Oedipa's attitudes are too much like those of the fictional sleuth of the classical formula. She has the same faith that Holmes and his kind have

in rationalism and nineteenth-century scientific determinism and predictability" (Das 144). However, the kind of world that is portrayed in *The Crying of Lot 49* (and *The New York Trilogy* as well) is of a completely different nature "characterized by relativity, indeterminacy, and statistical probability, in place of Newtonian cause and effect" (Das 145). However, she does express doubts. As she is confronted with still more and more clues which are strangely interconnected, she starts developing theories of how her situation could be explained. In her doubts, the distrust in the search for a 'meta-narrative' or as she puts it 'the central truth' is expressed:

> Oedipa wondered, whether, at the end of this (if it were supposed to end), she too might not be left with only compiled memories of clues, announcements, intimations, but never the central truth itself, which must somehow each time be too bright for a memory to hold; which must always blaze out, destroying its own message irreversibly, leaving an overexposed blank when the ordinary world came back. (66)

But why is Oedipa so obsessed with discovering what lies behind the labyrinth of signs that she assumes are all connected with Trystero? She needs to be certain of the possibility of restoring order in the world. In Couturier's words, she "professes that once the Trystero has been unmasked and destroyed the world will recover its order and unity and she will have regained her sanity" (26). This is very much the same attitude as that of Stillman in *The City of Glass* who believes that once he discovers the key to the prelapsarian language, the world will be lucid again and restored from the fall.

As she "keeps unearthing more and more texts which duplicate reality and make the 'real' more elusive" (Couturier 5), Oedipa, sifting through the endless accumulation of clues, gradually realizes that she was naïve to assume the role of the classical detective and think that reality would construct itself around her as a well-made detective novel:

> Where was the Oedipa who'd driven so bravely up here from San Narciso? That optimistic baby had come on so like the private eye in any long-ago private drama, believing all you needed was grit, resourcefulness, exemption from hidebound cop's rules, to solve any great mystery.
>
> But the private eye sooner or later has to get beat up on. This night's profusion of post horns, this malignant, deliberate replication, was their way of beating up. (85)

In the end, Oedipa comes up with not one but four possible explanations. The "symmetrical four": either the Trystero is real "or [she is] hallucinating it. Or a plot has been mounted against [her] (…). Or [she is] fantasying some such plot" (117-8). There are many references to narcissism throughout the novel, the very name of Inverarity's city San Narciso for instance or the 'Echo Courts' with a statue which portrays Oedipa as a voluptuous nymph. Oedipa herself can be narcissistic as she comes up with the notion that everything has been planned for her, which means that Pierce Inverarity would have to hire all the people that Oedipa meets only to play this monstrous joke on her.

One of the explanations is also that Oedipa is paranoid to which the novel also points to (e.g. a band called The Paranoids following Oedipa and Metzger around). The paranoiac sees the world in which everything is interconnected, the meanings united in a single one (this is also represented in *The City of Glass* by Stillman's constant connecting of meanings of words on the grounds that they rhyme or sound similar). This is logocentrism taken to the extreme. Oedipa suddenly sees everything as pointing to Trystero: "With coincidences blossoming these days wherever she looked, she had nothing but a sound, word, Trystero, to hold them together" (75).

Oedipa can also be "projecting a world", all of it being just a result of her imagination. Although she refuses to do experiments with LSD which her psychoanalytic suggests her, she is nevertheless many times under the influence of alcohol – from the very start when she

receives the letter about the execution, drunk from a fondue with "perhaps too much kirsch" in it (5). It can never be sure whether she really sees the symbols everywhere or she is just hallucinating them.

Oedipa writes the crucial question "Shall I project a world?" in her memo book, influenced to do so by Randolph Driblette, the director of a performance of The Courier's Tragedy – a play in which Oedipa notices a reference to Trystero. When she wants to see the original script of the play, he argues with her:

> You're like puritans about the Bible. So hung up with words, words. You know where that play exists, not in that file cabinet, not in any paperback you're looking for, but' – a hand emerged from the veil of shower-steam to indicate his suspended head – 'in here, That's what I'm for. To give the spirit flesh. (…) [T]he reality is in this head. Mine. I'm the projector at the planetarium, all the closed little universe visible in the circle of that stage is coming out of a mouth, eyes, sometimes other orifices also. (53-4)

According to Scott Sanders' essay, Oedipa's paranoia is a reflection of the Puritan heritage, paranoia being the "last retreat of the Puritan imagination" (178). The typical aspect of a monotheistic religion is that everything is understood as the result of God's will, part of the divine plan. Puritanism holds on very strongly to the belief in predestination. Sanders argues that "a mind that preserves Puritan expectations after the Puritan God has been discredited will naturally seek another hypothesis that explains life as the product of remote control" (177).

It is only natural to look for another kind of explanation, such as the conspiracy theory, which would impose meanings on the otherwise chaotic world. Oedipa expresses this in one of her thoughts: "But then she wondered if the gemlike 'clues' were only some kind of compensation. To make up for her having lost the direct, epileptic Word" (81). The Word, the text of the Bible which the Puritans regarded as the only source of truth is in *The Crying of*

Lot 49 replaced with the text of the Courier's Tragedy, the original of which Oedipa so desperately tries to find.

3.2 The City as Text

Both *The Crying of Lot 49* and *The New York Trilogy* (especially *The City of Glass*) emphasize the city as a sort of labyrinth full of potential signification. Merivale and Sweeney categorize this characteristic theme as "(2) the world, city, or text as labyrinth" (8). As the title of the trilogy suggests, in Auster's case it is New York; Pynchon situates part of his narrative in a fictional city called San Narciso (the whole narrative is placed within a larger area of California between San Francisco and Los Angeles). There is in both cases a great contrast between the limited space of the city and the unlimited number of ways it can be interpreted.

San Narciso, as Couturier points out, is more textual than real (15). Everything in it, every street was planned, invented by Inverarity: "Like many named places in California it was less an identifiable city than a group of concepts – census tracts, special purpose bond-issue districts, shopping nuclei, all overlaid with access roads to its own freeway" (Pynchon 14). As Oedipa approaches San Narciso, she views the streets from a slope and remembers the time when she saw the printed circuit of her transistor radio, the arrangement of streets reminding her of the hieroglyphic patterns on the card. "Intuitively, Oedipa feels that there is a text which underlies this city (…) and which was authored by narcissistic Inverarity." (Couturier 15)

Because she knows that everything in the city is part of Pierce's plan she feels that it is also coherent in its meaning as a text. She expects everything to be interconnected. As she realizes that the list of Inverarity's possessions does not entirely correspond to his real estate, she is disturbed. "She is an arch materialist: she insists on the perfect adequacy between the descriptive/prescriptive text and the referent" (Couturier 14). A similar theme is explored in Stillman's idea of New York of *The City of Glass*.

In *The City of Glass*, the city functions as a text almost literally. Quinn is hired to watch a man named Stillman. As he follows him in his random wanderings through the streets of New York, after a few days without any relevant outcome he decides to record Stillman's movements through the streets into his notebook. As he gradually discovers, the paths which he draws in his notebook do remind him of some shapes. Each of them can be viewed as a single letter, a part of the whole message. Quinn decodes this part as "OWER OF BAB" (70) which corresponds to the title of one of Stillman's essays "The Tower of Babel". The question is whether Stillman actually intended his walks to form letters or if Quinn is manipulated into viewing the paths as letters simply because he believes that there exists a message which has a meaning. Either way, the message does exist, after all, in Quinn's red notebook. Quinn, then, represents a reader whose "detection becomes a subset of the desire to find a single stable meaning" (Dimovitz 618).

On pages 106-8 we come across a long and very accurate description of Quinn's own walk through the streets of Manhattan. Each street is referred to by its name; it is so precise that the question arises of whether there is not a certain intention on the side of the author in such a detailed description at this particular moment. It would be possible to reconstruct the exact route of Quinn's walk and one is tempted to make one's own map to find out whether there is not some extra meaning encoded in this passage by the author.

It is an interesting example of how our construction of the meaning of a text works. There is a pattern which we are trying to repeat. It is just like a detective's work, a hermeneutic circle where we first form a presupposition, try to verify it and if it does not work, modify the first presupposition until one of these ideas fits and we arrive at the final conclusion. "[T]he 'hermeneutic circle' … involves devising interpretive patterns to integrate signs and then using new signs to modify and adjust these patterns accordingly. One essential factor in the detective's eventual success is his ability to question preconceived notions and break through automatized modes of perception" (Hühn 455).

Moreover, what Chesterton suggests is that the reader of a classical detective story perceives each element of the story, each insignificant character, as deliberately chosen by the author for the purpose of the story and therefore carrying potential meaning. That it seems insignificant in the early stage of the story does not mean it will not be of importance later on. The classical detective story supports this theory as its main feature is that it is economical and "there is nothing wasted, no sentence, no word that is not significant" (*The City of Glass* 8). So if there is a mention in the story of a spectator climbing a tree,

> [t]he instinct of the reader, playing hide-and-seek with the writer, who is his real enemy, is always to say with suspicion, Yes, I know a surveyor might climb a tree; I am quite aware that there are trees and that there are surveyors, but what are you doing with them? Why did you make this particular surveyor climb this particular tree in this particular tale, you cunning and evil-minded man? (*How to Write a Detective Story* 279)

As Chesterton points out in the passage above, the classical whodunit is like a game of hide-and-seek between the author and the reader. That the author has to follow certain conventions such as that of economy makes it easier for the reader to guess what is relevant for the story. The strategy is to take careful notice of the seemingly insignificant details which, however, for some reason have been included in the story. This is exactly what the metaphysical detective story fails to provide. To go back to *The City of Glass*, to the scene where Quinn's walk through Manhattan is so precisely recorded, a question suggests itself: 'Why did the author chose to write such a detailed description of Quinn's route?' However, another question has to follow immediately: 'What is it that makes me think this has any relevance?' The answer to this question is the answer to why Quinn decides to record Stillman's route in the first place.

Before Quinn takes up the case, he is characterized as somebody who 'desires to be nowhere', who likes to roam the streets of Manhattan without any particular direction. So

what makes him believe that Stillman's similarly random movements around the city must have a meaning? It is because as a detective, he has to apply different strategies in order to prove individual hypotheses, one of which will presumably lead to the final solution. It is his very first hypothesis that seems to work as Quinn discovers that Stillman's walks form letters. Again, there are similar questions he might ask himself as the reader. On the epistemological level the question is: 'Why would Stillman do such a thing?' and 'What does it mean?'; on a more subtle level, there is a different problem: 'What makes me think that there really is a message?' He comes up with several options, one of which is that the message was there only because of his hypothesis, only because he imagined it to be there, or wanted it to be there:

> Then doubts came … He had imagined the whole thing. The letters were not letters at all. He had seen them only because he had wanted to see them. And even if the diagrams did form letters, it was only a fluke. Stillman had nothing to do with it. It was all an accident, a hoax he had perpetrated on himself. (71)

Even of this, nonetheless, Quinn cannot be sure and he never will. Despite these doubts, he continues searching for a solution long after Stillman's suicide and he never abandons the idea that there is a solution to be found. It is not entirely unexpectable that instead of any real closure, he fades out from the story with the last page.

3.3 The Mystery Within - Quest for Identity

In *The City of Glass*, the starting situation is almost the same as that of *The Crying of Lot 49*. Both Daniel Quinn and Oedipa Mass lead their somehow unfulfilling lives when suddenly without much of their own effort they become involved in a strange mysterious case. Just like Oedipa is named the executrix of the will of her ex-lover; Daniel Quinn is 'named' or rather names himself Paul Auster, the detective. And names do play a significant role in these novels.

Also, it is questionable whether there is any actual crime that needs to be investigated. Daniel Quinn supposes that he is following Peter Stillman because he is potentially dangerous. This presupposition is based on Stillman's history but also on the fact that Quinn is hired to watch him. Why else would he be following him? However, apart from the crime for which he had already been punished, Stillman does not seem to be doing anything against the law. Similarly, Oedipa Mass is lead by what she believes to be clues (symbols, messages and facts that do not fit inside the reality that is known to her) to believe in some conspiracy plot behind them. Nevertheless, the possibility of there being an illegal system is one of the many possibilities of explaining these 'clues', potential explanations including the fact that Oedipa might be crazy or paranoid.

Nevertheless, the fact that the existence of a crime is uncertain does not stop the detective from continuing with his/her investigation. It is the obsession with a closure that provides the detective with the energy to go on although the case seems to lack a foundation. In Quinn's case, for instance, first the client who needs his protection disappears (Quinn later tries to call Victoria Stillman several times but there is no answer) and then even the person he was hired to follow (Stillman commits suicide). When there is no response from the Stillmans he tries to justify his decision of going on with the case: "He had said yes to a preposition, and now he was powerless to undo that yes. That meant only one thing: he had to

go through with it. There could not be two answers. It was either this or that. And so it was, whether he liked it or not" (111).

It is no longer a question of finding the solution to the case; he is rather trying to find a solution to his own identity, his self. At the outset of the story, we see Quinn as a man who does not live, only exists. He is a man who desires 'to be nowhere' and in his walks virtually leaves himself behind: "[B]y giving himself up to the movement of the streets, by reducing himself to a seeing eye, he was able to escape the obligation to think, and this, more than anything else, brought him a measure of peace, a salutary emptiness within" (4). It is through the identification with Paul Auster, the detective, that he finds purpose in life. He virtually acquires a new identity. There are obstacles, however, that come into his way.

The case does not proceed according to his plans and therefore he needs help - and whom else would he ask for it other than the 'real' Paul Auster, the detective. The only man by that name in the phonebook is not a detective but a writer, one that strongly resembles Paul Auster the author of *The New York Trilogy* and, as a matter of fact, also reminds Quinn of what he had lost – his life when he still had a family. This taking on a new identity has only made him remember the self he no longer has. Once there is no Stillman, there is no need for a fake Paul Auster who came to being only to follow this man. Moreover, the option of going back to his previous life as Daniel Quinn is also not available to him. The case made him leave the apartment which is already inhabited by a new owner. He has no money; the only thing left is the red notebook, where he records everything about the case. He can do nothing but write, spends all his time in Stillman's former apartment where food is provided for him each day. He spends the time coming up with still new questions about the Stillman case that he had not thought of before, not knowing whether he is still working on the case or not. He clings to the case although it is no longer there because it is the only purpose in life that he has. Most of all he wonders what will happen once there are no pages left.

Here, the story of Quinn ends for the reader – with the last page in the red notebook. We are told by an unknown narrator, suddenly stepping into light, that all has been reconstructed from Quinn's notebook along with the information from Paul Auster whom the narrator happens to know. Quinn, like Blue in *Ghosts* and the narrator in *The Locked Room*, all surrender their past identity for the sake of their 'case'. Quinn abandons his name, his apartment; Blue due to lack of contact loses 'future Mrs. Blue'; and the narrator of *The Locked Room* is manipulated by his missing old friend Fanshawe into taking his role as the husband of his wife, father of his child, publisher of his novels.

Their new identity becomes shaped by the lives of those they are following almost to the point that they become one with them. They become characters in a narrative of which the author is somebody else. The 'author' of their lives is in fact the person whom they are hired to watch. They are easy subjects of manipulation since they strive for the ending of a plot and without it, it is difficult for them to leave it. The ending, however, will never come because the story was never intended to end. As the narrator of *The Locked Room* realizes: "Stories without endings can do nothing but go on forever, and to be caught in one means that you must die before your part in it is played out" (237).

This is what happens to Quinn - he remains trapped in the case because he refuses to leave it without solving it. Blue in *Ghosts* and the narrator of *The Locked Room* are able to escape the case in the end. Blue, hired to watch Black, realizes that he is trapped in the case as if in a book written by somebody else:

> [I]f the book were an interesting one, perhaps it wouldn't be so bad. He could get caught up in the story, so to speak, and little by little begin to forget himself. But this book offers him nothing. There is no story, no plot, no action – nothing but a man sitting alone in a room and writing a book. (*Ghosts* 172)

What is so striking here is that it is not the fact that his life is manipulated by somebody else that is unbearable for him, the problem is that there is no plot. What Blue does is that he steps out of the case; he acts against the rules and tries to meet Black and talk with him several times in disguise. As he talks with him, he eventually finds out that he had been hired to watch Black by the man himself. Black needed somebody to watch him so that he could observe himself through somebody else's eyes. The written reports gave his life a meaning, a plot. When Blue finally enters Black's room, he finds Black pointing a gun at him. Blue is no longer a passive character of the story, he demands an explanation from Black but seeing that the whole time he was only being used by him, he grows furious, snatches the gun from Black's hand and shoots him. Although the detective becomes the murderer we can feel a certain sense of accomplishment on his side – he has provided the story with an ending.

The narrator of *The Locked Room* represents a third "stage of awareness" (294). He overcomes the desire for a conclusion in the process of writing the story:

> Only darkness has the power to make a man open his heart to the world, and darkness is what surrounds me whenever I think of what happened. If courage is needed to write about it, I also know that writing about it is the one chance I have to escape. (*The Locked Room* 237)

In the beginning of the story he is asked by the wife of his missing childhood friend Fanshawe to publish his novels. He agrees but through the course of events he falls in love with Sophie and eventually marries her, becomes the father of Fanshawe's child and people start to suspect that he is also the author of his books. Although the story could end there (as a love story), the narrator is overpowered by the mystery and after he receives a letter from Fanshawe he tries to find him. He almost loses himself in this quest like Quinn in *The City of Glass* but than he finally finds Fanshawe and talks to him through the locked door of his room. Fanshawe does not provide him with any definite answers but leaves him a red

notebook which was intended for him to read. The description of what he reads can be applied to the narrative strategy of the metaphysical detective story:

> All the words were familiar to me, and yet they seemed to have been put together strangely, as though their final purpose was to cancel each other out. (…) Each sentence erased the sentence before it, each paragraph made the next impossible. (…) He had answered the question by asking another question, and therefore everything remained open, unfinished, started again. (313)

It is through the experience of reading the red notebook that the narrator seems to be able to accept the lack of closure, the multitude of meanings all perceived at once; explaining to the reader: "I don't claim to have solved any problems. I am merely suggesting that a moment came when it no longer frightened me to look at what had happened" (294).

The story of *The Crying of Lot 49* is mediated through a narrator who (with a few inconsistencies) represents Oedipa's consciousness. We can therefore never be certain of what Oedipa really experiences and what she hallucinates or imagines. This inability to distinguish between what is 'real' and what is product of our own imagination is foreshadowed in the first chapter where Oedipa recalls a painting which made her cry – it is a painting that she sees in a gallery in Mexico City, the title of which, when translated into English, is 'Embroidering the Earth's Mantle'. The triptych, a part of which is described in the novel, is not fictional; it is based on an actual painting by Remedios Varo. The central part of the triptych that affects Oedipa displays several women locked in a tall tower embroidering a tapestry which is so large that it spills out of the windows. This embroidery contains houses, lakes, trees, everything there is in the world surrounding the tower, including the tower itself. The world is depicted as a fabric which we ourselves create. It reminds Oedipa of her own condition:

> She had looked down at her feet and known, then, because of a painting, that what she stood on had only been woven together a couple thousand

> miles away in her own tower, was only by accident known as Mexico, and so Pierce had taken her away from nothing, there'd been no escape. (13)

This metaphor could be applied to our position in the world. Everything we know about the world, we know through what we have created – the words, our language. We cannot know the world and even ourselves outside language. There is no possibility of seeing objectively since we fabricate our own idea of the world.

The alternative solutions are given; as Oedipa suggests there are four, none of which can be selected as the correct one, none of which can be entirely eliminated. The story ends in uncertainty, the only thing that is explained in the end is the novel's title (Tani 95) – 'lot 49' being a set of forged stamps, presumably connected with the Trystero organization, which are to be sold at an auction that Oedipa attends. It ends there at the auction just before the moment of discovering some possible next clue. Oedipa has undergone a process at the end of which she views the world as that of endless possibilities, endless ones and zeroes.

What Sanders suggests is that despite this understanding of things as they are, Oedipa still desires for some plot that would provide meaning to her struggle: "Oedipa Maas at the end of *The Crying of Lot 49* faces the same binary choice, believing either in conspiracy or anarchy, and between the two she prefers conspiracy, however sinister" (185). The novel shows this to be a natural human need which is difficult to repress. Although Oedipa proves to desire this, her perception of the world has undergone a change. In the beginning, she had the expectations of the classical detective; now she is aware of them, yet she does not let herself be completely overruled by them and accepts the multitude of possible meanings:

> The dead-ending of epistemology in solipsism can be transcended, but only by shifting from a modernist poetics of epistemology to a postmodernist poetics of ontology, from Oedipa's anguished cry, 'Shall I project a world?,' to the unconstrained projection of worlds in the plural. (McHale 25)

Couturier takes this notion further in his suggestion that Oedipa's supposed pregnancy could be a metaphor for a person of a completely new identity being formed inside her about to be born: "She is indeed pregnant, but not with a baby: her hopeless quest has led her to discover that another person was hiding in her whom she didn't know, a foreign body as it were" (28).

Conclusion

While the first two chapters of the thesis provide the necessary theoretical framework concerning the classical detective story and the metaphysical detective story, in the third chapter this framework is employed to analyze the particular themes that are present in *The New York Trilogy* and *The Crying of Lot 49*.

To explain the metaphysical detective story, a step back to the classical detective story as its predecessor is required. To sum up the oppositions expressed in criticism dealing with this subject, the contrast between these two genres has been defined in terms of high art and popular art (Todorov), art and kitsch (Holquist), ontological dominant and epistemological dominant (McHale), postmodern and positivistic mode of thinking (Spanos).

The metaphysical detective story takes the conventions of the classical detective story and distorts them in order to betray the reader's expectations. Since the popular genres are constituted by their corresponding sets of conventions which need to be familiar, any change in them causes the work to lose its status as part of the genre. In this case, the classical detective story has served as a point of departure for many authors who transformed it into a completely different genre which had no longer anything to do with popular literature.

Classical detective stories are often included in the popular literature category because of their constant repetition of the same pattern and their sense of completeness. These stories can be consumed like fast food, since the point of reading them and the pleasure of it consist only in the gradual revelation of the solution. Once we know the solution, there is no need ever to read the story again.

The classical detective story follows the Saussurean view that all signifiers do have their corresponding signifieds, together forming the units of meaning, signs. The classical detective never fails to connect the signifieds (clues) with the signifiers and always reaches

the final solution in the end which provides the reader with a satisfaction of bringing the world of chaos back to order.

The metaphysical detective stories fail our expectations. There is never a single undisputed closure. It disturbs our accustomed way of reading and preconceived notions about the world. It asks questions which the detective within the text does not provide clear answers to, the readers have to be the real detectives who engage in a thought process and try to answer these questions for themselves. As is said in the opening of The City of Glass: “The question is the story itself and whether or nor it means something is not for the story to tell” (3).

Many essays discussed deal with the fact that it is only natural for humans to strive for closures. What is needed is an idea of a world that is structured in a certain way and therefore makes sense. It is an important aspect of many religions that the world has been created by a god, an ‘author’ and everything in the world is part of his plan. The classical detective stories perfectly satisfy these needs. Although we desire our life to form a meaningful plot, it is important to be aware of these plots as certain constructs that we ourselves create. It is necessary to be conscious of them in order not to become manipulated by them. By disturbing our accustomed patterns, the metaphysical detective stories enhance our consciousness of these constructs. Unlike classical detective stories which end with the solution and their energy is spent, the metaphysical detective story is in its nature circular, always pointing back to the text itself, provoking still more questions.

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