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Jean Baudrillard's Theories of Simulations Applied to Recent Crime Fiction

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Preface

This dissertation deals with detective fiction, using two non-standard approaches that seem potentially well-suited to the analysis of popular literature. The first of these is Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation, understood through his prior works describing the consumer society. The second approach is intended as an empirical counter-balance to the radical views of Baudrillard – embodied cognition, as proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. The aim of this work is to compare the merits of both approaches on the grounds of literary analysis.

My reason for choosing Jean Baudrillard's theories in a dissertation devoted to popular fiction is his unique focus on the workings of the consumer society, stemming from his sociological and semiotic background. It appears to me that applying Baudrillard's ideas to a heavily conventionalised, widely-read genre can result in insights concerning not only the thematic layer of a novel, but also its structure. In particular, the idea of hyperreality, a self-referential system that seeks to supersede the things it was made to simulate, seems to be an excellent match for formulaic, engaging entertainment. And since Baudrillard was interested in mass phenomena, detective fiction—probably the most widely read literary genre in the 20th century—is a fine starting point for analysis.

However, while Baudrillard's thoughts are captivating in their own right, they are also too chaotic and obscure to be used as an analytical tool without the support of other methodologies. This is hardly surprising, since the French sociologist departed from a disciplined academic style after *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1977). *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), which inspired this project, requires some interpretative effort in order to be employed for critical purposes. Hence, I decided to broaden the methodological scope of this dissertation to provide a counter-balance to the loose character of a Baudrillardian analysis.

My choice is embodied cognition, which encompasses multiple avenues of research. Its chief proponents in the areas of philosophy and language, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, emphasised the empirical nature of their project in the book *Philosophy in the Flesh* (1999). According to Lakoff and Johnson, evidence from a broad range of academic fields points towards the conclusion that human reasoning, including abstract thinking, is fundamentally embodied – based on our bodily interactions with the world. This notion runs counter to all structuralist and post-structuralist thought, including that of Baudrillard, because it rejects the

arbitrariness of language and the idea that signs gain meaning only in opposition to each other. The proponents of embodied cognition argue that language is grounded in our bodily experience. Concepts from embodied cognition have been used by several critics in the study of literature, for purposes ranging from poetics to genre analysis.

The allure of embodied cognition in a discussion of detective fiction is its capability of explaining thought patterns which guide the structure of mysteries. Furthermore, it can serve as a good contrast to Baudrillard's ideas, since it is capable of both structural and thematic analyses. This juxtaposition of methodologies naturally leads to the question: can one perspective be better than the other? In other words, is it possible to replace Baudrillard's obscure ideas with a more systematised approach which readily defers to empirical data and requires less effort to implement? This is less a conflict of objectivism and subjectivism, than of verifiability and ease of use versus laborious interpretation and difficult implementation. Numerous concepts taken from Baudrillard require extensive explanation before they can be used in an analysis. Similar problems do not exist in the case of embodied cognition, although a literary critic will not be sufficiently prepared to take advantage of its vaunted empiricism, relying instead on the findings of other researchers.

Considering the influence that Baudrillard's works have had on culture, and the influence that proponents of embodied cognition would like their project to have on philosophy, I believe that this comparison is a useful contribution to field of literary theory. Yet another reason for which it seems worthwhile to contrast Baudrillard's theories with embodied cognition is the totality of both approaches. The French post-structuralist had an undeniable tendency towards controversial generalisations, and the claims made in *Philosophy in the Flesh* by Lakoff and Johnson, despite their common-sense delivery, are nothing if not radical to a Western intellectual. *Simulacra and Simulation* posits that reality is dead, *Philosophy in the Flesh* denies the duality of the body and the mind on scientific grounds. While the latter claim might seem less far-reaching, if we look at it closer it forces us to re-write the vast majority of Western thought, Baudrillard included. Both ideas seem philosophically exclusive, but are they like that in practice?

The specificity and mass appeal of the detective genre make it a perfect candidate for comparing these two approaches. Genre fiction is commonly analysed in the context of cultural studies, which often draws upon semiotics. Scholars are usually interested in the portrayal of social groups, implicit ideologies or protagonists and antagonists. Is the hero a man or a woman?

White or black? A masterful example of such criticism can be found in Umberto Eco's analysis of Ian Fleming's James Bond novels "The Narrative Structure in Fleming" (1966). And yet, this approach seems inadequate when we consider detective fiction.

The reason for this inadequacy is the fact that detective novels are not about verisimilitude or politics. What makes them so popular and engaging is the mystery, the game in which a reader engages even before they see the first page. If we focus on the presentation of characters in a critical analysis of detective fiction, the result will be shallow because the characters themselves are shallow. They are mere figureheads – similarly to chess pieces they exist to perform a function. And their outward appearance, characterisation, can never overshadow that role. A knight remains a knight, regardless of whether it is carved from wood, cast in metal or moulded in plastic. A detective investigates and solves the mystery at hand, and he or she is the protagonist of the detective novel.

Likewise, a chessboard can be made of any material and be intricately crafted, as long as it continues to provide the information important to the players. Too much detail might obscure the tiles and make the board useless. In detective fiction this chessboard is the setting. An author who sets out foremost to provide a vivid picture of a city or town draws the readers away from the mystery. There is room in a detective novel for thoughts about life in the inner city, or the hidden evil lurking in a small village, but if this type of content becomes the substance of the story the essence of the genre will be compromised.

One measure of a detective fiction author's artistry is their ability to combine the functionality essential for a mystery with themes and compelling characters. However, it would be unfair to expect these characters to be interesting enough that we would enjoy following them for a day if they had no mystery to solve. Hercules Poirot is not Leopold Bloom.

I believe that an analysis of detective fiction focused on portrayals of social groups or individual characters is doomed to be limited. There is a crucial structural component that defines the content of a detective novel, and we must take it into account in a critical dissertation.

The failure to acknowledge this important element inevitably leads to accepting the view that detective fiction is unworthy of extensive critical attention. The tools that work well when applied to canonical works—which we might call highbrow literature—are unable to produce interesting readings when confronted with this heavily conventionalised genre. If we want to discover why detective novels are so popular, or analyse the differences between various stories

in order to understand how the generic mechanisms function in wildly divergent settings, we should look to methodologies that were designed with a slightly broader purpose than literary analysis alone. At the same time, our choice should reflect the functional limitations of the genre described above.

For example, a feminist reading might prove dull and forced because the characters will play specific roles and their inner thoughts will revolve around solving a difficult mystery. The choice of gender is almost cosmetic – the conventions of the genre necessitate that the crime must be difficult to solve and we must learn the solution by the end of the story. Therefore, if a female protagonist has trouble cracking a case it does not really reflect on her social position. She is expected to have some problems, and she is all but guaranteed to overcome them. The story structure will remain the same regardless of whether the protagonist is male or female, which defeats the purpose of focusing on gender roles. We might draw similar conclusions if we consider a Freudian or trauma-based reading because the psychological depth of the characters will be limited by genre conventions. The true motivations of the characters will be based on their role in the mystery, not on psychology. In fact, there is no guarantee that these two factors will overlap, as unlikely events have been the bread and butter of detective fiction ever since Edgar Allan Poe wrote “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”.

Thus, the choice of a critical approach to detective fiction should be considered carefully. The conventionalised structure of detective fiction is based in large part on a model created by Poe in his C. August Dupin stories. Poe's formulas have survived through countless iterations in divergent settings, and were adapted by writers in many countries all throughout the 20th century. Baudrillard's idea of hyperreality, developed in *Simulacra and Simulation*, seems to describe exactly this – a replicable, self-referential system.

Today, when we think about police work, the images that come to our minds are probably derived from countless detective stories and their film adaptations. Television series, mini series, feature films, all utilise Poe's successful generic blueprints, often mixed with additions from Raymond Chandler, who popularised the character of the private detective, much different from the image of the genius investigator found in the works of Arthur Conan Doyle or Agatha Christie. Realism and actual investigative methods may be present in popular portrayals of crime solving, but only to add flavour that helps distinguish one mystery from another. Hence, our preconceptions about police work, especially as it relates to murder, are based on conventions

from detective fiction rather than reality. We might comment on this using Baudrillard's metaphor from *Simulacra and Simulation*, which he in turn borrowed from Jorge Luis Borges – the land has been covered by a 1:1 scale map.

This dissertation contains two sections: one is theoretical and the other analytical. In the first section, I discuss my understanding of Baudrillard's concepts, using various critical works about his ideas, as well as his own academic texts which preceded *Simulacra and Simulation*. I then write about the distinction between popular fiction and “highbrow” literature, and present an outline of the detective genre and my preferred approach to it, contained in George N. Dove's *The Reader and the Detective Story* (1997). This is followed by a chapter explaining the ideas of embodied cognition and how they pertain to the present discussion.

In the analytical section I discuss three works of fiction belonging to the detective genre: *Death in Holy Orders* by P.D. James (2001), *When Will There Be Good News* by Kate Atkinson (2008) and *Bleeding Edge* by Thomas Pynchon (2013). Each is provided with an outline of the plot to make the structure of the mystery clear, since this aspect is analysed in considerable detail. The choice of these novels is meant to take into account the breadth of the genre, and the ingenuity of the authors who each push the bounds of generic conventions in their own ways. Their experimentation or faithfulness to the established formula reveal their unique priorities.

Phyllis Dorothy James was one of the great celebrated authors of British crime fiction, whose most famous works are dedicated to the character of Adam Dalgliesh. James was born in 1920 and published her first novel, *Cover Her Face*, in 1962. She continued to write detective fiction until her death in 2014 (her last novel, *Death Comes to Pemberley*, was published in 2011), but she was also employed as a civil servant until 1979. James' *Death in Holy Orders* represents the traditional approach to detective fiction in which all the established conventions are observed. She employs the mode of the police procedural, in which the main protagonist is assisted by a team of officers. However, it is still Adam Dalgliesh who solves the mystery, despite the collective effort. On the other hand, it also sets a high benchmark because James was adept at weaving compelling themes into her work, blending them seamlessly with complicated mysteries that can satisfy a veteran reader. Nothing appears forced or contrived, while the characters and setting are remarkably well-portrayed considering the standards of the genre – neither could be made better without compromising the conventions that are required from a good mystery.

The second novel analysed in this dissertation is *When Will There Be Good News?* by Kate Atkinson, who represents a younger generation of British authors. *News* belongs to a series of novels about Jackson Brodie, which were adapted for television by the BBC under the title *Case Histories*. Atkinson's work is far less traditional than James', but it remains within the bounds of the detective genre. Her novel is written in the private eye tradition, in which the protagonist is not affiliated with the police force and has no real legal powers. *News* is experimental because it follows several characters and bears many similarities to a thriller. Nevertheless, it still remains faithful to generic conventions, although while reading it appears otherwise. Unlike *Death in Holy Orders*, Atkinson's text requires several contrivances, which result in an uneven tonality: the darker aspects are undermined by the prevalent humour.

The final analysis focuses on Thomas Pynchon's most recent novel, *Bleeding Edge*, which revolves around a noir detective plot. The protagonist is a fraud examiner and acts as a private investigator who attempts to solve a murder. It is difficult to call *Bleeding Edge* a real detective novel, in large part due its focus on aspects other than the mystery itself. Pynchon's text is about New York, the atmosphere around the 9/11 attacks, and conspiracies. It presents an exceptionally varied cast of characters, and mixes detection with elements of horror, science fiction and cyberpunk. *Bleeding Edge* is a noteworthy example of crossing generic boundaries, written in a humorous and light-hearted style. It allows us to note the differences between genre fiction and "highbrow" literature because it contains numerous elements of the former but cannot be interpreted as anything else but the latter. The aspect of detection is essential in the novel, but it remains a pretext for drawing a vivid portrait of a city.

The application of the two chosen methodologies to radically different examples within the same genre will allow us to see the strengths and weaknesses of Baudrillard's theories and embodied cognition. The intended progression of complexity stemming from a common formula will result in readings that, to my knowledge, have not yet been attempted.

Section One:
Theories

Chapter 1:

Fatal Philosophies – from structuralism to hyperreality and beyond

Jean Baudrillard is one of the most interesting representatives of poststructuralism who commented on mass media and entertainment. His works have been widely read and discussed in academia, largely due to the complexity and difficulty of his arguments. As a sociologist, Baudrillard was a keen observer of popular phenomena and his approach to them remains unique. In this chapter I will describe one of Baudrillard's seminal texts, *Simulacra and Simulation* (*Simulacra* for short) and explain the concepts presented within it. I believe that Baudrillard's work is a valuable tool in any discussion of popular culture, and it can relate to the subject of detective fiction on many levels. The French Sociologist's style is confusing, some would say purposefully so, and so in order to use his theories in the context of this dissertation, it is necessary to explain how I understand the key ideas from *Simulacra*. This will prevent misunderstandings during my analyses, since Baudrillard's concepts often seem equivocal.

For a discussion of the ideas presented in *Simulacra and Simulation* it is important to see the book in the context of Baudrillard's earlier works. A steadily developing philosophical stance can be traced throughout his publications, which were, up to a point, crafted in congruence with relevant academic standards. Baudrillard paid attention to prominent intellectual movements and worked diligently to conceive of his own approach to pertinent issues discussed by his peers. In order to understand the context of Baudrillard's work it is also necessary to have an overview of the prevailing philosophical traditions of his time.

With such knowledge it is easy to understand Baudrillard's intellectual stance found in his earlier texts and discover how this position developed later on. This chapter will focus on presenting the information that is necessary to indulge in a discussion of literature based on the ideas found in *Simulacra and Simulation*. I will provide a brief overview of the online and traditional sources that can be useful for a better understanding of Baudrillard's philosophical position. I will then describe the tenets of structuralism and semiotics, as well as Baudrillard's response to these massively influential intellectual standpoints. I will show how analysing the nature of the sign in the context of Marxism led the French sociologist to his deliberations about

simulations and their representations. This will help to understand *Simulacra* as a development of an already existing direction in Baudrillard's writing.

Afterwards, in order to put these concepts into perspective I will demonstrate how other French thinkers of the time responded to structuralism and how their efforts compare to Baudrillard's ideas. Such a comparison will hint at the diversity of viewpoints and approaches that are often labelled together as poststructuralism.

1.1 Textual Premise

As the introduction to the recently released *Baudrillard Dictionary* suggests, for a reading centred around a critical understanding of any of his later works, Baudrillard's texts should be taken into account as a whole:

[Baudrillard's writings] are not a catalogue of unrelated concepts and ideas, but rather constitute a consistent intellectual trajectory and an always developing philosophical position ... The many elements of Baudrillard's writings – which includes more than forty books – intersect to form a consistent trajectory. Indeed, a rule of thumb for reading Baudrillard is that each of his many book should not just be viewed as an individual work, but rather as a chapter of a single tome that he wrote over some forty years. (Smith et al. 2010: 2)

In practical terms, this suggestion means that it is always a good idea to check for clarification in the French thinker's previous works when the reader discovers some item that is not adequately explained in a given text. It is not necessary to know everything Baudrillard wrote up to the point of publication of the text in question, but many of the latter entries in Baudrillard's oeuvre will be difficult to follow without some prior knowledge. This is true because whilst the earlier books assume an academic mode of reasoning, the more recent texts feature an impressionistic style that draws heavily upon previously established concepts and metaphors.

Baudrillard's works, published in French but read widely in the English speaking world, challenged the common understanding of notions such as reality, death, morality, the humanities and later terrorism. Even more controversially for an intellectually oriented audience, they

utilised scientific terminology in metaphorical ways. In the practice of the latter the French philosopher was not unique among his peers, but this sort of misuse did not bring him any closer to being understood by his readers. Gary Genosko observes in his comprehensive analysis *Baudrillard and Signs. Signification Ablaze* that:

What Baudrillard learned from Jarry was how to embellish his work with scientific concepts. This ‘borrowing’ both enriched his prose—but without, ironically, lending it scientific respectability—and reduced some of such concepts (fractal, for instance) to their adjectival value. The poetic value of these rich modifiers rises as they are stripped of their substantive content, decontextualized and strung together in fast succession. As a textual practice, rhetorical science is not peculiar to Baudrillard. A rhetorical science is not to be confused with a so-called postmodern science, since the former is a science fiction practised in the service of the symbolic. (Genosko 1994: 128)

The double spiral, fractals, singularity – these terms and many others have been borrowed from science by Baudrillard in the manner described by Genosko. A reader with a background in the humanities will find them among more familiar concepts, such as the sign, symbol and reality, adding to the confusion arising from Baudrillard's unorthodox understanding of these philosophical ideas. Overall, these choices combine to create a dense prose where the “rhetorical science” is always unequivocal, as metaphors are wont to be, and the concepts familiar to academics are reused in strange ways without warning or further clarification. Such a text is at once ominous in style and difficult to understand.

Therefore, it is advisable to have some knowledge of Baudrillard's ideas before immersing oneself in his generalist ruminations, such as those that can be found in *Simulacra and Simulations*. This information is easy to acquire today, after the advent of *The Baudrillard Dictionary* and in the age of electronic access to source materials. *The Baudrillard Dictionary* is especially interesting for any reader, since it is the first such dictionary to be written and, thus far, the only one. It includes entries on a wide variety of subjects and usefully summarises the key concepts in Baudrillard's texts, in addition to providing pertinent background information about the intellectual milieu of the late 20th century. The dictionary is easy to navigate and

contains a wealth of information that can be a starting point for further research, due to a very comprehensive bibliography found at the end¹.

Regarding the source materials, all of Baudrillard's works are now translated into English and available through various publishers. A selection of Baudrillard's writings published prior to 1998 and edited by Mark Poster has been made available online for free on the editor's university web page², after a new edition was published in 2002 and the old one went out of print. The selection includes many of the defining essays from each book listed, helping to give an overview of an overarching chain of thought. Reading Baudrillard in such a form it is much easier to develop a sense of the intellectual continuity present in his work, although obviously it only offers a limited scope of his oeuvre. Poster's selection features excerpts from nine major publications.

Furthermore, a library of articles concerning the French thinker is available free of charge at the *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*³ website, 'a non-profit, transdisciplinary publication dedicated to engaging the thought and writing of Jean Baudrillard. Articles are invited on any subject that intersects with Baudrillard's writing.' (*IJBS*) The Journal is academic in nature and edited by scholars from around the world. Mark Poster and many of the authors who wrote the articles for *The Baudrillard Dictionary*, including its editor Richard G. Smith, can be found on the Editorial Board of *IJBS*. A new issue of the journal is published online twice every year, in January and July, and because of its transdisciplinary character it can be useful to researchers of various backgrounds.

More difficult to obtain are the specialised books dealing with specific aspects of Baudrillard's work. I have used the aforementioned 1994 book by Gary Genosko entitled *Baudrillard and Signs. Signification Ablaze* as it explains many facets of the relation between semiotics and Baudrillard's rejection of the sign as it was proposed by de Saussure. More such specialist books are listed in the bibliography at the end of *The Baudrillard Dictionary*, mostly concerning media studies and analyses of popular culture. As with most academic output within

¹ The list of books dealing with Baudrillard is a little disappointing. There are only 42 entries in this section for secondary sources, while the primary sources section (which does not include all of Baudrillard's texts cited in the dictionary!) lists 45 books.

² http://www.humanities.uci.edu/mposter/books/Baudrillard,%20Jean%20-%20Selected%20Writings_ok.pdf, last accessed on March 20th 2012.

³ <http://www.ubishops.ca/baudrillardstudies/contents.htm>, last accessed on March 20th 2012.

a narrow field these books are difficult to access, and even their electronic versions are expensive to obtain.

However, in the case of Baudrillard this situation is made even more difficult because there is no methodology to be derived from his works – his ideas simply do not amount to a consistent mode of analysis and were never intended to do so. Many books by the French sociologist are in fact collections of essays grouped together by virtue of a common mode of reasoning, or a unifying idea⁴. If an author were to distil a method for analysing cultural phenomena from Baudrillard's works, it would be in greater part their own input rather than the employing of a set of rules that were the result of a careful reading of source material. Hence, despite the French sociologist's popularity⁵ works dealing with the application of his ideas are still relatively niche in the academic mainstream.

⁴ *Simulacra* may be counted among such books, as it deals with a very wide array of subjects, e.g. shopping centres, the Holocaust, film and literature, TV, animals, etc. Baudrillard published many of his ideas as he conceived them, he was an active editor of two French journals: *Utopie* and later *Trarverses*.

⁵ Smith elaborates on Baudrillard's popularity in the "Introduction" to *The Baudrillard Dictionary*: Throughout his long career, Baudrillard became famous for his challenges to received wisdom and the status quo. Most well known in this regard are his works that questioned traditional sociological and philosophical paradigms from Marxism [Mirror of Production], feminism [Seduction] and dialectical thought [Fatal Strategies], to anthropology, communication studies and structuralism. However, he was also known for his critique of US foreign policy in connection with the Gulf War [The Gulf War Did Not Take Place], Abu Ghraib [The Spirit of Terrorism] and the destruction of the Twin Towers [ibid.]. He was also a well known commentator, and critic of, current affairs, from the HIV-AIDS epidemic to cloning, drugs, reality television and the Rushdie affair, not only in his books and academic articles, but also in such popular publications as the centre-left newspaper *Libération*. (Smith et al. 2010: 2)

1.2 Semiotics and Structuralism

Of all the cross-disciplinary philosophical approaches in the 20th century, the study of signs proposed by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure had arguably the greatest impact on the French humanities in the 1960s. Saussure put forward his ideas in the 1916 *A Course in General Linguistics* and they were developed independently from their author throughout the following years. In the same period, the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce created a similar approach that differed in some aspects from Saussure's. These two currents merged in the form of 20th century semiotics, understood as the study of signs. By the mid 1900s semiotics developed to a point where it became so prevalent that the major intellectuals in the French humanities all related to it in one way or another. As John Lechte writes in his entry "Sign" in the *Baudrillard Dictionary*:

Saussurian linguistics also gave rise to semiotics (the theory of signs and significations) and the wide-ranging movement of structuralism in the social sciences. Thus during the 1960s all the talk in the circles that mattered centred on the importance of the differential nature of the sign. Such was the influence of this tendency in France and subsequently in the US and elsewhere that those thinkers experienced in traditions such as phenomenology or existentialism had to stand up and be counted. (Smith et al. 2010: 194,195)

Hence, the reader will discover discussions and analyses based around semiotics and structuralism in a host of works by major scholars: Barthes, Lacan, Lyotard, Kristeva, Deleuze, Guattari, Lévi-Strauss, Derrida etc. All of the most influential minds in France of the time have related to the Saussureian notion of the sign in some form, Baudrillard included. New approaches to social phenomena emerged from applications and re-evaluations of semiotic and structuralist concepts, such as Lacanian psychoanalysis or Kristeva's take on poetics. I will discuss some of these approaches in greater detail later on, to point out the similarities and differences to Baudrillard's own concepts appearing in *Simulacra*.

A familiarity with Saussure's concepts is essential to a full understanding of much of the academic output in the French humanities from the 1960s onwards. There are several handbooks

that explain the most important aspects of semiotics. Of these texts, Roland Barthes' *Elements of Semiology*, first published in 1964 is among the earliest to offer a concise, if somewhat dense, outline of the Saussurian understanding of the sign, language and differential systems. It bears mentioning because Barthes was among the leading figures promoting structuralism in the 1960s. However, many more works have been published on the subject since then, and modern offerings in the field present the reader with a greater degree of information. A very good introduction to semiotics can be found in Daniel Chandler's *Semiotics, the Basics*⁶, in which the author not only explains the major themes and ideas found in semiotics, but also provides a great deal of context, both historical and general, for the discussion of the study of signs. The book was first published in 2002 and a second edition was released five years later. I will be using Chandler's text⁷ for my discussion of the sign.

The central concept in Saussure's theory is the sign. Saussure believed that it was possible to conceive of language as a system of signs, and that the study of signs, called semiology, could be used as a general branch of human knowledge, which would include linguistics. Since Saussure's time semiology found numerous other applications in cultural studies and social sciences, extending its scope far beyond linguistics. On the other hand, semiology was also superseded in linguistics by other, more popular approaches, such as generative grammar and cognitive science, and thus it is now mainly used as a tool set in other fields than the one intended by Saussure, e.g. media studies, textual analysis and literary studies. Chandler writes:

Semiotics represents a range of studies in art, literature, anthropology and the mass media rather than an independent academic discipline. Those involved in semiotics include linguists, philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, literary, aesthetic and media theorists, psychoanalysts and educationalists ... [Semiotics] is not only concerned with (intentional) communication but also with our ascription of significance to anything in the world. (Chandler 2007)

⁶ In addition to the printed edition, a free online version with hypertext indexing is available on the author's website at: <http://users.aber.ac.uk/dgc/Documents/S4B/>, last accessed on March 20th 2012.

⁷ Other popular works that can function as a general introduction to the subject include: Culler, Johnathan. *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature*. London: Routledge 2002 and Eco, Umberto. *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press 1986.

In Saussurian semiotics the sign is understood as a dyadic entity: it consists of the signifier (sr) and the signified (sd), and the relationship between these two elements is called a signification.

The signifier is the *form* of the sign, such as a sound, a graphical representation or a letter of the alphabet. In Saussure's description of language the primary signifier is the sound of an utterance, whilst written forms are seen as secondary modes of representation – in written language the sound becomes the signified. The signified is the *concept* that is being represented by the signifier. Note that the concept is immaterial – the signified is our own understanding of something rather than that something itself. For Saussure, both of these constituents, the signifier and signified, are psychological entities:

A linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound pattern. The sound pattern is not actually a sound; for a sound is something physical. A sound pattern is the hearer's psychological impression of a sound, as given to him by the evidence of his senses. This sound pattern may be called a 'material' element only in that it is the representation of our sensory impressions. The sound pattern may thus be distinguished from the other element associated with it in a linguistic sign. This other element is generally of a more abstract kind: the concept. (Saussure in: Chandler 2007)

The connection between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. Objectively, there exists nothing that would tie a sound to a specific concept⁸ and so it falls upon the users to agree on specific significations. Furthermore, taken on its own the Saussurean sign has no absolute value. Its value is based on the way in which it functions within an entire system of signs. Therefore, it might be said that there is an important distinction to be made between the *signification*, *i.e.* the result of the interplay between the signifier and the signified; and the *value* of a sign, *i.e.* the way the sign as a whole functions within the system to which it belongs. In the context of language this is visible in the way that words influence each other: the entire system

⁸ As Chandler points out, this observation is much older than semiotics – it appears in both Plato and Aristotle. (Chandler 2002) It is also widespread, e.g. comments on the arbitrariness of language can be found in the opening arguments of Nietzsche's *On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense*.

determines the semantic and grammatical value of any word – the value of an individual sign is always relative.

This idea brings us to another crucial aspect of semiotics, which is the interaction of various signs in a given system, such as a language. In principle, value is obtained by differentiation. In order to determine what a sign means it can be opposed to other signs to specify what it does *not* mean. The differences between signs establish their place in the system and specify their functions. For example, a verb is not a noun, a cat is not a dog and blue is not red. When a structuralist approach is used to analyse other systems, such as social phenomena, e.g. the way that wealth functions within a society, signs of status can be juxtaposed to see who is better off: two people drive to work, but one of them takes the bus while the other uses his own car. If both of them have their own cars it is possible to check who has the more expensive one. A similar case can be made for fashionable gadgets: two devices, such as smart-phones, can have the same technological capabilities but one of them also serves the function of increasing its user's prestige because it is more fashionable. Both of them are regarded with more respect than a regular mobile phone, etc.

These examples illustrate that many things in society can be perceived as systems in which various elements function as signs. The mechanisms of any given system can be analysed in a very methodical manner and, most importantly, the analysis can reveal how meaning is construed, in what ways value and signification work. Whether one chooses to discuss advertisements, consumer culture, social hierarchies, religious practices, tribal structures or the media, semiotics helps to provide a means to describe any social phenomenon⁹. Quoting Chandler: "Semiotics can also help us to realise that whatever assertions seem to us to be 'obvious', 'natural', universal, given, permanent and incontrovertible are generated by the ways in which sign systems operate in our discourse communities." (Chandler 2007)

A slightly different version of semiotics can be found in the ideas of Peirce, whose division of the sign is triadic. Peirce's sign consists of the representamen, an equivalent of the signifier, the interpretant, which corresponds to Saussure's signified, and the object, which is the

⁹ For some of the classic applications of semiotics to various aspects of society and culture see: Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. London: Paladin Books 1973; Barthes, Roland. *Image, Music, Text*. London: Fontanna 1984; Barthes, Roland. *S/Z*. New York: Hill and Wang 1987; Barthes, Roland. *The Fashion System*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press 1990; Williamson, Judith. *Decoding Advertisements. Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*. London/New York: Marion Boyars 1978; Eco, Umberto. *The Bond Affair*. London: Macdonald 1966.

sign's referent. The primary difference between the two models, Saussure's and Peirce's, apart from the addition of the object, is the functioning of the interpretant. In Saussurean semiotics the signified is a *gestalt*, a notion that the signifier represents. For Peirce, the interpretant itself is a sign – unlike the signified, it is a means of interpreting the first sign (the representamen or signifier), and this is where its name comes from. Chandler notes that Peirce's model allows for a possibly unending chain of interpretations, where each following interpretation leads to another sign that is interpreted by another sign, *ad infinitum*:

Any initial interpretation can be re-interpreted. That the signified can itself play the role of the signifier is familiar to anyone who uses a dictionary and finds themselves going beyond the original definition to look up yet another word which it employs. This concept can be seen as going beyond Saussure's emphasis on the value of a sign lying in its relation to other signs and it was later to be developed more radically by poststructuralist theorists. (Chandler 2007)

This assumption has other implications, such as the conceiving of semiosis as a process rather than a structure. Overall, Peirce's model is more dynamic than Saussure's and the introduction of the object, more commonly known today as the referent, creates different opportunities for semiotic analysis. Both models will prove useful in the further discussion of the development of Baudrillard's ideas.

1.3 Baudrillard and Structuralism

Baudrillard was most explicitly preoccupied with structuralism in *The System of Objects* (1968), *Consumer Society* (1970) and *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1972), although it is also fair to say that these were already poststructuralist works. In *The System of Objects* and *Consumer Society* the emphasis is not placed on structuralism itself, and semiotic analysis is not central to the discourse. These two books are focussed on specific aspects of modern life rather than a set of terms that can be used to analyse these aspects. Nevertheless, structuralist terminology is employed as an intellectual tool set, seamlessly and without significant modifications. Over the course of these works, Baudrillard's perception of the shortcomings of semiotics in the context of studying consumerism in modern society leads him to his own ideas and conclusions. Later, in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* he attempts to re-evaluate semiotics from the perspective of Marxist dialectics and ends with interesting statements about both approaches. *For a Critique...* is an important text because it represents a shift from a concern with social phenomena to a concern with the methodologies used to describe said phenomena. It is a change in optics that carries ideological implications. Baudrillard begins to discuss the issue of approaching consumer culture and mass production in a way that would prevent becoming engulfed in them, thus dragging the reader away from their lures. Whether *Simulacra and Simulation* is a successful realisation of such a strategy is debatable but it is clear that Baudrillard's early books were instrumental in the development of his signature concepts.

In *The System of Objects*, the French sociologist discusses the possibility of describing consumerism as a language. If consumption is a system of signs that can be analysed in a structuralist fashion, then it is only natural to ask how these signs correlate with each other and what their system of interdependencies looks like. Baudrillard focuses on the value and the signified of objects that are consumed by a capitalist society, as well as the very process of consumption. He analyses how people are conditioned to experience consumerism:

In fact, the ideology of competition, which under the sign of “freedom” was previously the golden rule of production, has now been transferred entirely to the domain of consumption. Thousands of marginal differences and an often formal differentiation of a

single product through conditioning have, at all levels, intensified competition and created an enormous range of precarious freedoms. The latest such freedom is the random selection of objects that will distinguish any individual from others. (Poster 1998: 11)

Baudrillard derives a justification for consumerism from advertisements, which serve to promote consumption as well as to explain it. He then proceeds to abolish each excuse, which allows him to develop his position. One of these arguments for a consumer culture is this illusory “freedom of fulfilment”, which is given to society by manufacturers of various objects. This is not only the freedom to develop a sense of personality based on one's possessions, or to fulfil one's desires through consumption, but also the freedom to be excused for doing so where it could once be seen as morally dubious or unacceptable. One of the functions of objects in this system is that by their very existence they justify hedonistic practices – the fulfilment of a desire can take the form of harmless possession instead of an act of rebellion against a society and its rules. Anything goes¹⁰, because what could once be called a transgression is now a matter that can be settled between an individual person and an object. A person who does this becomes morally invested in their decision, because they can still belong to the group while resolving an inner conflict individually through simple purchase. (Poster 1998: 12-14)

The second excuse for consumerism that Baudrillard derives from advertisements is that the system of objects creates a new form of language while relations between the consumer and the object become more complex (including personalisation through selection based on individual “needs”, etc.). If a language of consumption existed it would produce its own syntax and dynamism – an interdependent system of values. However, Baudrillard finds that this is not truly the case. What consumerism produces instead is “a set of expressions (*langue*)” (Poster 1998: 15), “a gamut of distinguishing criteria more or less arbitrarily indexed on a gamut of stereotyped personalities” (Poster 1998: 16). This is more akin to a grid of classifications rather than a real language as it lacks a cohesive syntax that would link the disparate product- and

¹⁰ And yet only if it is permitted by the system:

"Free to be oneself" in fact means: free to project one's desires onto produced goods. "Free to enjoy life" means: free to regress and be irrational, and thus adapt to a certain social organization of production. This sales "philosophy" is in no way encumbered by paradox. It advertises a rational goal (to enlighten people about their wants) and scientific methods, in order to promote irrational behavior in man (to accept being only a complex of immediate drives and to be satisfied with their satisfaction). Even drives are dangerous however, and the neosorcerers of consumption are careful not to liberate people in accordance with some explosive end state of happiness. (Poster 1998: 13)

brand-based significations. It is a matrix of signs that forces a type of personality on the user depending on available products. The stratification stemming from such a set of expressions reinforces the need for discrimination because only one referent is available to distinguish a person's social standing – the object. (Poster 1998: 20) Still, the quasi-language of consumption obfuscates social relations instead of bringing them to the fore: “society would be transparent only if knowledge of the order of signification was also knowledge of the organization (*ordre*) of its structures and of social facts. This is not the case with the object/advertising system, which only offers a code of significations that is always complicit and opaque.” (Poster 1998: 21)

In the conclusion, Baudrillard moves from commentary to an original, yet highly structuralist proposition that foreshadows his next thesis in *Consumer Society*. Objects, in and of themselves, cannot be truly consumed – they undergo this process only after they have become *signs*, i.e. after they have been externalised and projected onto a system of relations with other object-signs, where they acquire meaning through differentiation. (Poster 1998: 22) This process is then projected onto human relations:

That is to say, human relations tend to be consumed (*consommer*) (in the double sense of the word: to be "fulfilled," and to be "annulled") in and through objects, which become the necessary mediation and, rapidly, the substitutive sign, the alibi, of the relation. We can see that what is consumed are not objects but the relation itself – signified and absent, included and excluded at the same time — it is the idea of the relation that is consumed in the series of objects which manifests it. This is no longer a lived relation: it is abstracted and annulled in an object-sign where it is consumed. (Poster 1998: 22)

Baudrillard continues this line of thought, stating that consumption can thus be seen as an “idealist practice” (Poster 1998: 24), involving ideas-signs. Objects serve to mediate between ourselves and an intangible realm that we yearn to grasp: our notions of prestige, wealth, rebellion, relationships with other people, *etc.* There can never be a state in which a sign is depleted through consumption and as long as it is “consumed” by purchasing surrogate signifiers it will never be offered a chance to manifest outside the system¹¹. There can be no talk of the ultimate satisfaction of needs or an end to consumption. Baudrillard reveals it as a system

¹¹ Much like the successful tropes that make up the majority of popular culture, constantly reiterated in various guises and media.

existing outside of reality, in parallel, providing a meaning to life and denying that which we most desire at the same time. *The System of Objects* ends on a very characteristic note:

At the heart of the project from which emerges the systematic and indefinite process of consumption is a frustrated desire for totality. Object-signs are equivalent to each other in their ideality and can proliferate indefinitely: and they must do so in order continuously to fulfil the absence of reality. It is ultimately because consumption is founded on a lack that it is irrepressible. (Poster 1998: 25)

This foreboding quote outlines the problem that Baudrillard tackles in *Consumer Society*: the idea of a need-driven marketplace, propagated by theorists in various fields of study. *Consumer Society* may be read as a critique of the very idea of needs as a link between the consumer and product, as well as a critique of the postulate of rationality found in classical economy. Overall, it is a work that deals with the motivations behind consumerism, and the theories of consumer motivation. Unlike *The System of Objects*, a large portion of *Consumer Society* is structured around Baudrillard's arguments against other thinkers, most notably the Canadian-American economist John Kenneth Galbraith¹².

The French sociologist rejects the established approaches to the notion of needs. The very term is described as a tautology¹³. He refuses to see needs as the driving force behind production, but he also does not accept the view that various desires are manufactured by the system of production to increase sales. He perceives *the entire system of needs* as a necessary consequence of the system of production and as a crucial component of modern capitalist economy. In this view, motives for individual purchases are insignificant and unclear, ever prone to changing. (Poster 1998: 43)

Continuing his structuralist observations from *The System of Objects*, Baudrillard claims that needs belong with objects to the domain of signs and are therefore fluent. There is no craving that can be singled out to justify the purchase of an item. Various people will perceive an object differently: some may consider it a luxury, others a convenience, others still as a sign of

¹² Baudrillard's critique is centred on Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* and *The New Industrial State*. Although I mention classical economy in the same paragraph, Galbraith was actually a proponent of Keynesian economics. At numerous points Baudrillard criticises Galbraith for not drawing the same conclusions from observations with which both thinkers agree.

¹³ See Poster 1998: 37, 44.

prestige. People will also associate objects with notions in a whimsical and inconsistent way. This is caused by the arbitrariness of signification and Baudrillard likens the world of needs to a psychosomatic disease, the symptoms of which are incurable because they lack organic causes. (Poster 1998: 44-45)

Indirectly elaborating on the closing paragraph of *The System of Objects* Baudrillard writes:

Consumer behavior, which appears to be focused and directed at the object and at pleasure, in fact responds to quite different objectives: the metaphoric or displaced expression of desire, and the production of a code of social values through the use of differentiating signs. That which is determinant is not the function of individual interest within a corpus of objects, but rather the specifically social function of exchange, communication and distribution of values within a corpus of signs. (Poster 1998: 4)

Therefore, consumption can be seen as a form of morality or ideology. The individual consumer is needed by the system of production to justify its existence, and he or she is conditioned to assimilate into the domain of object significations. The French sociologist compares the consumer to a workforce, and the activity of consumption to labour. Each individual is taught to experience purchasing as a joy – it is their *duty* to be happy as they partake of the fruits of social order. This obligation is extensive. In order not to miss any potential pleasure, modern man must try everything, leave no available sign un-tasted. (Poster 1998: 48)

On the level of structural organisation, Baudrillard admits that his arguments are not raised to disprove the existence of *any* human needs, such as the requirement for food or shelter. What he wants to draw the readers' attention to is the fact that the phenomena in modern society cannot be seriously considered through the lens of a rational organisation of needs. Consumerism is not a provision of the essential utilities of humanity, but a mode of organising social life in the system of production. To the individual, consumerism offers neither freedom nor power, but illusions thereof, supplied by a system so extensive that its workings can remain hidden in regular life. (Poster 1998: 47-48) Just as he stated in *The System of Objects* that individuals are free only to chose from what is offered to them, so in *Consumer Society* Baudrillard claims that today's people are allowed to be free only when they are powerless:

In general then consumers, as such, are unconscious and unorganized, just as workers may have been at the beginning of the nineteenth century. As such consumers have been glorified, flattered, and eulogized as "public opinion," that mystical, providential, and sovereign reality. Just as The People is glorified by democracy provided they remain as such (that is provided they do not interfere on the political or social scene), the sovereignty of consumers is also recognized ("powerful consumers," according to Katona), provided they do not try to act in this way on the social scene. The People — these are the laborers, provided they are unorganized; the Public, or public opinion — these are the consumers, provided they are content to consume. (Poster 1998: 55)

What I have presented thus far is already enough to illustrate the consistency in Baudrillard's reasoning, which grounds many of the ideas from *Simulacra and Simulation* in acceptable academic analysis from the 1960s and 70s. The reader can find a focussed critique of capitalist values put forward from a sociological perspective. This critique is, as I have strived to demonstrate, at heart rooted in structuralism, semiotic analysis and the study of systems generated by consumerism. What remains to be said, before I begin to expound on the aspects of *Simulacra and Simulations* that I find important to my further arguments, is how Baudrillard's ideas managed to retain their gist after their author eschewed structuralism. It is a break away that explains the French sociologist's later direction, both in terms of style and in terms of ideas.

For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign contrasts what Baudrillard calls the four logics of value with the structure of the sign. These domains of value are represented by: use value (functionality), exchange value (economic logic), sign value (differential logic) and symbolic exchange value¹⁴. (Poster 1998: 57) Two of these terms have been taken from Marxian economics (use value and exchange value), one is semiotic (sign value) and the final one originates from anthropology (symbolic exchange).

¹⁴ This last term is borrowed from anthropology and relates to the concept of the gift. Mike Gane writes in *The Baudrillard Dictionary*:

The concept of symbolic exchange is perhaps the most central of Baudrillard's terms yet the most allusive. At the bottom it is very simply a term derived from anthropological studies of the gift and gift exchange in so-called primitive societies. In classic anthropological studies ... gift exchange is not gratuitous and marginal, but obligatory and central to social life. Symbolic exchange is a broadening out of the terrain of obligatory exchanges of the same kind: from simple exchanges in conversation to sacred sacrifices, and the exchanges between the living and the dead. (Smith et al. 2010: 210-211)

Baudrillard looks into the possible relations between these value logics and their functioning. He proposes that a reduction from use value to exchange value, which occurs when objects and their functions begin to be perceived in terms of economic worth, can be likened to the reduction from symbolic exchange to sign value, where the symbolic is cast within an incompatible system of establishing meanings. Signification is considered an inadequate mode of rationalising the process of reciprocal gift exchange that is found by anthropologists in many world cultures. Symbolic interpersonal exchange that formed a focal point of many cultures is ambivalent by nature and thus bereft of the values that are inferred by sign systems. Ultimately, due to its ambivalence symbolic exchange can have no value that is relevant to the other forms of logic value featured in the comparison. It is defined as a realm of non-value. (Poster 1998: 61-63)

Therefore, Baudrillard substitutes the relation between sign value and symbolic exchange value with the semiotic construct of signification. Now, the reduction from use value to exchange value is juxtaposed with the relationship between the signified and the signifier. This establishes an equivalence between political economy and the economy of the sign, both of which are domains of value. Symbolic exchange, or non-value, is pushed out of the equation to represent an opposing system:

$$\frac{EcEV}{UV} = \frac{Sr}{Sd} / Sbe (\textit{Symbolic Exchange}) \quad (\text{Poster 1998: 62})$$

In the above equation, horizontal bars represent structural relation and implication, while the slash represents exclusion. EcEV stands for economic exchange value; UV stands for use value; Sr and Sd stand for signifier and signified.

This abstracted model of relations between diverse aspects of social life is paraphrased by Baudrillard in one statement: “General political economy / Symbolic exchange”. (Poster 1998: 63) The configuration is supposed to be a basis for a new anthropology, one that would serve three purposes: 1) a critique of use value; 2) an illustration of the similarities between political economy and the system of signs that would enable a critique of the political economy of the sign; 3) putting forward a theory of symbolic exchange. (Poster 1998: 63) Due to the focus of

this paper being directed towards *Simulacra and Simulation*, I will concentrate on the second aim of this “new anthropology”.

Baudrillard attacks the signified and the referent, which he believes serve to justify the entire notion of the semiotic sign, just like the idea of needs grounded in an objective reality is used to excuse consumerism:

In reality, this moral and metaphysical privilege of contents (UV and Sd-Rft) only masks the decisive privilege of form (EV and Sr). These two terms are respectively the last "Reason," the structural principle of the entire system, of which the former terms are only the detour. It is the rational abstraction of the system of exchange value and of the play of signifiers which commands the whole. But this fundamental strategy ... is carefully hidden by the spreading out of the signification process over the two (or three) agencies (Sr, Sd, Rft), and the play of their distinction and of their equivalence. (Poster 1998: 88)

Of particular note is Baudrillard's denial of the reality of the referent (the Peircean object). The referent, instead of an entity in the external world that motivates the creation of a sign, is presented as a being or phenomenon that we notice *because* it has already been categorised in the system of signs. Rather than serving the primary function of an anchor preventing the system from straying too far from reality, it is seen as only secondary to the signified, the concept in our head. (Poster 1998: 82-88)

The two points from *For a Critique...* referred above are the most relevant to a discussion based around *Simulacra and Simulation*: that the signifier holds more importance than the signified because it serves a functional and operational role in the system of signs; and that the referent is derived from signification, rather than the other way around. Additionally, the idea that objects and signs blend into one consumable entity should also be stressed. Thus, we arrive at a philosophical position in which the system of objects and the system of signs, functioning within the framework of value-based economy, become interchangeable. From this point onwards Baudrillard's work becomes focussed on the three aims of his new anthropology, liberated from external theoretical frameworks¹⁵.

¹⁵ Although he would deal extensively with Marxism in *The Mirror of Production*, published in 1973, one year after *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*.

1.4 Simulacra and Simulation

Baudrillard's philosophical reflections upon the nature of simulations were brought about by the onset of globalist capitalism and consumerism, technological advances and the political climate in the post-war West. *Simulacra and Simulation* can be seen as the progression of Baudrillard's thought from his earlier works, such as *The System of Objects*, which discusses the objects of consumerism, *Consumer Society*, where he analyses the nature of consumption in relation to production, as well as *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, in which structuralism is likened to value-based economy and the French sociologist breaks away from its methodology.

Baudrillard's understanding of simulations has several layers, however the principal concept which is expanded upon in *Simulacra and Simulation* is the replacement of the simulated object with a copy that has no other purpose or function than to simulate. Such a copy does not *refer* to the original, or anything else for that matter, it is entirely self-absorbed by its own functioning. As a representation that is not an abstraction, it is distinct from the Latin word *simulacrum*, which stands for likeness and is used in the book in place of more standard terms, to create the eponymous juxtaposition. Among many things, *Simulacra and Simulations* also deals with the relations between these two phenomena. Baudrillard argues that since there is no imaginary attached to it, a simulation can no longer be called a part of reality. Instead, it enters "hyperreality", a realm where references, due to their purely operational nature, are reduced to malleable signs. (Baudrillard 1981: 2)

In this hyperreal framework signs have completely arbitrary meanings, unlike their structuralist equivalents. This is the grid of object-significations from *The System of Objects*, unconnected by syntax and further atomised. Because they no longer refer to anything outside of the simulation, signs in Baudrillard's hyperreality may have no meaning or any meaning at all – the simulation is artificial and so are the signs within it. Having lost connection with reality and substituting it for operational value, all differentiation in such a sign system is achieved artificially and all meaning can be manipulated at will: 'It no longer needs to be rational, because it no longer measures itself against either an ideal or negative instance ... It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real.' (Baudrillard 1981: 2)

In *Simulacra*, one of the key points is that a simulation masks the absence of reality, that it helps to cover up for the fact that, after being replaced by hyperreality, reality ceased to exist. In less general terms, Baudrillard's simulation implies the death of the object which it was supposed to replicate. If a copy can replace the original but otherwise serves no purpose beyond being a copy, the original ceases to function and symbolically 'dies'. The simulation might be more perfect, more authentic while having symbolically killed its original model at the same time – Baudrillard provides the example of embalmed bodies at a funeral home. (Baudrillard 1981: 12)

In other words, a reality that is simulated dies in a metaphysical sense. To illustrate how this process works, Baudrillard describes his perception of the functions of Disneyland. On the outer layer it is an imaginary world that reproduces the fantasies found in Disney cartoons, and stands in contrast to the dreary world outside it. It simulates the imaginary land created by the company. However, it might also be said that through ostensibly exhibiting fiction Disneyland reinforces the reality found outside. It simulates the belief in an external, adult reality by being a representation of an obvious fantasy. Therefore, on the final level it hides the fact that this external reality has already given in to hyperreality – by means of consumerism, advertising, the chasing and constant gratification of false desires supported by bank loans, handed out in currencies whose lack of objective value is masked by arbitrary transactions¹⁶. In this sense, there is no outside adult world, it belongs to the order of simulations just like Disneyland. (Baudrillard 1981: 12 -14)

Baudrillard provides many examples of such simulations and their effects on reality, some of which are cultural, others are social and others still are political. While the subject of his book is heavily focused on concepts which we now associate with the technological development of media (such as 3d cinema and virtual reality, etc.) one quickly discovers that the French thinker postulates an unusual philosophical approach which can be applied to any aspect of modern life. In fact, most of the examples of simulations in Baudrillard's work have little to do with the fantasies this term elicits in popular imagination. The ideas from *Simulacra* can be seen

¹⁶ That is to say that the value of currencies is determined by the global Foreign Exchange markets, where transactions are being made in currencies. The relative value of an American Dollar is determined by comparing it to the Euro or Yen, rather than to material objects one can buy with it. The Euro or Yen follow the same process, and the fluctuations in prices have no grounding in reality because every transaction can be made for different reasons. To reinforce the irony, financial institutions make up the vast majority of transactions, and banks constitute the vast majority of financial institutions.

as an epistemological lens for viewing contemporary phenomena from a distance, and watching the system of objects as it is contained within the hyperreal space. This theoretical framework follows the postulates from *For a Critique...*, completely disregarding the apparent functional value of objects, and therefore providing subversive insight into their nature. This is at once its strength and weakness, since analyses based on it will be strongly biased – a flaw in studies aimed at utility, but not much of a problem in cultural theory, where Baudrillard belongs. Nevertheless, it is also possible for the notion of hyperreality to describe events in a manner that yields similar results to more practical approaches. One of the most interesting cases of such an overlap is Baudrillard's discussion of the threat of nuclear warfare and mutually assured destruction. (Baudrillard 1981: 34-36)

Baudrillard discusses the situation in which, while the possibility of a nuclear war is not entirely gone, due to its excessive destructive potential and the capability to be detonated in any place in the world, atomic weaponry is so unlikely to be used, that it loses its primary significance. The real influence that the presence of atomic warheads in the arsenals of the world's largest superpowers has on the lives of normal people is not the threat of global annihilation but the resulting stalemate that makes real conflict impossible. The destruction resulting from using these nuclear weapons in conventional warfare is so needlessly large that an all-out war between the most powerful armies of the world can no longer take place¹⁷.

As we have seen on the examples of wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and also Chechnya and Ukraine, today's conflicts involving powerful armies do not pitch them against equal enemies. In these recent wars no one could truly hope that the USA or Russia would be ultimately defeated in any conventional sense. And due to the threat of mutually assured destruction other options are no longer possible. Baudrillard concludes that the situation has moved nuclear weapons into the realm of simulation. These warheads are fully functional yet unusable, the destruction that they are capable of is only displayed during nuclear tests¹⁷, but their *de facto* operational significance still influences other arenas of conflict, by means of a threat that can never be fulfilled. Mass produced, self-referring and self-obsessed replicas of blueprint models, nuclear weapons in the possession of the USA, Russia and other countries are hyperreal. Having lost their primary

¹⁷ International agreements prevent atmospheric nuclear tests from taking place, however some countries which possess nuclear weapons, or are working on developing their own bombs, have never signed any treatise in this matter. For these countries, nuclear weapons are not mere simulations – they function as currency that buys international importance and provides a stronger position in political negotiations, e.g. North Korea, Iran or Pakistan.

function they exist as signs with no outside correlates¹⁸. For the most part this situation was caused by the unnecessary production of stupefying amounts of bombs, and the subsequent construction of increasingly sophisticated means for their delivery to any place on the planet. It might even be said that already the arms race between the USA and the Soviet Union was intended to ensure that nuclear weapons would never be used, even before this conclusion became apparent. As in Baudrillard's example of the beautifying of corpses in funeral homes, atomic bombs were perfected, multiplied beyond all reason until they could be removed to the realm of hyperreality, overdone to the point where they lost their primary significance.

1.5 Baudrillard and Poststructuralism

I have attempted to show the extent of Baudrillard's ideas on simulations in light of his previous works, so that the latter might serve as a guide to the former, providing definition where the impressionistic style of the text blurs the author's intention. This pairing does nothing to lessen the controversial impact of concepts so strong as hyperreality, the death of reality, or any other conclusion that the French thinker derives from the hegemony of consumerism. My outline does provide, however, some grounds for comparison with other theorists of Baudrillard's time by tracing his path from structuralism to an original understanding of modernity. Baudrillard is often grouped together with other French academics under the label of poststructuralism¹⁹, because he was one of the many who moved beyond a Saussurean/Peircean mindset, after applying its methods in his field. Each poststructuralist theorist represents a different, usually very complex intellectual stance. Instead of analysing them all, I will briefly discuss some ideas that are commonly associated with literary studies and provide some contrast to Baudrillard's work within the context of this study. First, I will turn to Julia Kristeva's "Revolution in Poetic Language", published in 1974.

Also representative of the French academia, Kristeva revises the structuralist approach to signs and language within the framework of literature. Hers is a more specific approach than

¹⁸ Even in this framework not all nuclear weapons belong to the order of simulation. A nuclear bomb detonated with the purpose of dealing damage (e.g. by a terrorist group which does not fear retaliation) would be an actual weapon rather than a hyperreal object. Baudrillard wrote at length about terrorism and the September 11th attacks in *The Spirit of Terrorism*.

¹⁹ Cf. Smith et al. 2010: 2; Chandler 2007.

Baudrillard's, explaining creativity and the sources of literary inspiration by use of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, and the socio-economic conditions in which language arises.

Kristeva divides the process of the manifestation of language into two steps. The first is the Platonic *chora*, a maternal space of possibilities: 'Neither model nor copy, the chora precedes and underlies figuration and thus specularization, and is analogous only to vocal or kinetic rhythm.' It is not articulated in terms of signifier and signified, which Kristeva calls the symbolic (in stark opposition to Baudrillard): 'The chora is a modality of significance in which the linguistic sign is not yet articulated as the absence of an object and as a distinction between real and symbolic.' (Leitch et al. 2170, 2171)

This phase of language creation can be said to loosely correspond with the signified, and what Baudrillard would equate with use value. While not entirely interchangeable, these terms both seem to imply a deeper structure that requires articulation, the separate existence of which Baudrillard denies, claiming it to be a function of the signifier, its integral component, its excuse for existence, a mental construct and not a reality.

Kristeva attributes to the chora a plethora of motivations, inherent to the human body: Freudian drives, sections of the flesh, 'the ecological and social system surrounding the body, such as objects and pre-Oedipal relations with parents' (Leitch et al. 2177) The very articulation of these elements within a theoretical framework is proof enough in Baudrillard's analysis of their disconnection from reality, and their embodiment of the political economy inherent in Western philosophy.

The second step is articulation, the symbolic and syntactic 'algebra' of expression. This is what Baudrillard would associate with the functional role of the signifier, the exchange value. Kristeva is closer to Saussure in her perception of articulation than Baudrillard, who strived to situate the signifier at the top of his hierarchy of signification. Kristeva, like the Swiss linguist is more interested in the chora, the domain of conceptions and the signified.

Another famous theorist of literature, Jacques Derrida, approached the signified in a way that resembles Baudrillard's understanding of hyperreality. In Derrida's "Of Grammatology" a case is made for the reading of signifieds solely within the scope of the text. There are no meanings outside the text, claims Derrida:

There has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the "real" supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement, etc. And thus to infinity, for we have read, in the text, that the absolute present, Nature, that which words like "real mother" name, have always already escaped, have never existed; that what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence. (Leitch et al. 1826)

His bold statement blends almost seamlessly with Baudrillard's constataions from the opening of *Simulacra and Simulations*:

This imaginary of representation, which simultaneously culminates in and is engulfed by the cartographer's mad project of the ideal coextensivity of map and territory, disappears in the simulation whose operation is nuclear and genetic, no longer at all specular or discursive. It is all of metaphysics that is lost ... By crossing into a space whose curvature is no longer that of the real, nor that of truth, the era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials – worse: with their artificial resurrection in the systems of signs, a material more malleable than meaning, in that it lends itself to all systems of equivalences, to all binary oppositions, to all combinatory algebra. (Baudrillard 1981: 2)

In this light of other contemporary theorists, Baudrillard begins to lose some of his controversial edge. Perhaps the perception of his works in academic circles has been skewed because of his literary style. Perhaps the lack of concern for a coherent methodology was destined to situate him at the fringes of discourse, where his work would remain, ripe for being misunderstood by the representatives of post-modernity such as the Wachowski brothers. Or perhaps his texts truly are manifestations of Fatal Strategies at work?

1.6 Beyond Baudrillard

Throughout this chapter I have attempted to present Jean Baudrillard's oeuvre as a progression of thoughts and ideas that is more or less coherent. The controversial concepts, such as hyperreality, are underpinned by explorations contained in previous works, and in comparison to several theorists of his time, Baudrillard cannot be singled out as the most radical. Even the Harvard professor Stephen Greenblatt had postulated claims that are hardly verifiable and no less shocking, as early as in the 1980s. Perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that the French sociologist reflected the general tendencies in academia during the period inaugurated by the spread of semiotics and structuralism. Nevertheless, after the dust has settled, in the aftermath of the storm of poststructuralism in the humanities, what are we left with? Methodologies which defy explanations, an extreme subjectivism in interpretation, a fractured understanding of art and discourse, and no attempt at providing future generations of academics with any coherent basis for study and research. Rather, a plurality of equivocal approaches, grounded in a firmly rooted distrust for any theoretical "rightness", is now conspicuously coupled with a reverence for individual scholars who have made a name for themselves, but denied working on a discourse which might be shared with others. Now, fifteen years after the turn of the century, these works seem to express some pervasive millennial paranoia, which ultimately served to gratify the egos of the critics at the expense of everyone else. Reading through the *Norton Anthology of Literary Criticism* we find a journey from an early search for meaning, the mystical quality of human expression, and various approaches to reading, all the way to a thorough disavowal of the possibility of any real significance, the primacy of power and political factors, claims of the redundancy of the text, claims of the redundancy of anything apart from the text, etc.

I do not claim that none of the approaches criticised here holds any merit, or that the theorists who had developed them were mere charlatans whose only real motive was academic prestige or profit. Many new and interesting observations have been made. However, as the case of Jean Baudrillard clearly shows, much legwork needs to be done by any scholar who chooses to use the ideas of radical theorists just to make sure that they understand what these critics had in mind, not to mention applying that understanding to any sort of structured analysis. Therefore, a comparison between Baudrillard and embodied cognition exposes not just a difference in method – subjective interpretation of structuralism versus empiricism. The former is simply not a

unified theory, but rather a set of ideas, linked by a critical chain of thought. The latter is a model based on evidence from several academic disciplines which proposes a coherent outlook on our reasoning and cognition. And it should be added that there exists a fundamental disagreement on the nature of meaning between cognitive science and the model of the sign espoused by Baudrillard. Therefore, it would not be possible to recreate the relations between the various types of values that were discussed previously in a cognitive approach, since there meaning is not a clear equation. The corporeal grounding of aesthetics also offers a less grim view of consumerism, since the trivial freedom of choosing between items based on their formal qualities reflects an inherent property of human beings, not necessarily the yoke of capitalist ideology²⁰.

I have made no attempt to translate Baudrillard into an orderly method of reading detective fiction. It would not be a very productive endeavour to forcibly impose a structure of reading on texts as unwieldy as *Simulacra and Simulations*. I believe that the ideas from this and other works presented here should not serve as some theoretical paradigm; rather they would be better suited to view elements of detective novels in a different, if slightly paranoid, way. Several of the generic conventions that we will discuss in the following chapters can be seen as self-serving, and the subordination of literary devices that are usually central, such as characters, settings, etc. to a set of rules which further a closed formula might be construed as dangerously close to Baudrillard's procession of simulacra.

²⁰ Cf. Johnson 2007:

What we call our "highest", or most abstract, concepts may not seem to be based on aspects of our sensorimotor experience, *but this is an illusion*. Concepts that we think of as utterly divorced from physical things and sensorimotor experiences (concepts such as justice, mind, knowledge, truth, and democracy) are never really independent of our embodiment, because the semantic and inferential structure of these abstract concepts is drawn from our sensorimotor interactions, typically by cross-domain mappings (conceptual metaphors). *This is the only way it could be for a creature with a body-mind who has neither a disembodied ego nor an eternal soul, for there is no nonbodily entity or process to perform the abstraction*. (Johnson 2007: 273)

Chapter 2:

Contexts for Analysing Popular Fiction

2.1 Definitions

One might claim that the latter half of the 20th century was the first period in the history of literary studies in which a deeper analysis of popular fiction and popular culture became not only acceptable but respectable and widespread. In particular, European critics such as Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida have had a profound impact on the way academics interpret and talk about what marketers would call mainstream media. However, immediately upon entering the field we encounter difficulties with basic terminology, which suggests that, despite its prevalence, such content did not yet receive a critical treatment comparable to “real” literature. Unlike most other branches within literary criticism, in which widely accepted classifications exist to guide new attempts at analysis, there is no agreed-upon definition of what “popular fiction” is. On a more general level, scholars have no shared understanding of what constitutes popular culture and entertainment²¹. Then again, no scholar is forced to explain what “real” literature is because there are subcategories in the form of genres and literary periods which allow them to bypass this possible problem.

Perhaps the most salient to this discussion is the notion of commonly accepted definitions. One approach taken by critics is to come up with their own definitions for the purposes of a given work. To quote from Scott McCracken’s *Pulp: Reading Popular Fiction*:

In this book, I define popular fiction simply as fiction that is read by large numbers of people; but in the context of the late twentieth century that definition needs some refinement. Contemporary popular fiction is the product of a huge entertainment industry.

²¹ In the article “What’s Entertainment? Notes Towards a Definition” Stephen Bates and Anthony J. Ferri discuss the issue in great depth, observing that: “Despite the centrality of entertainment to society, however, academia has treated the subject in a disjointed, scattershot, sometimes condescending fashion ... No single discipline has undertaken to map the vast landscape of entertainment.” (Willcox et al. 1-2)

Written fiction is only a part of that industry, which markets and sells popular narratives for film, radio, television and periodicals as well as in book form. (McCracken 1)

This is the simplest path a scholar can take, but it also happens to have an obvious pitfall. The problem here is that a novel could have all the trappings of a best-seller, but without the actual sales. One can easily imagine a situation in which a writer's attempt at catching the attention of his prospective audience fails miserably at the book store. Implicit in McCracken's definition is some form of ascertaining the actual readership of a novel. Would this be done by comparing sales figures, which are often unavailable to the general public? Or perhaps by counting positive reviews in popular magazines and newspapers? In the latter approach, we are not informed about the criteria for selecting titles for review, and there is no guarantee that people who read the review will buy the novel. On the other hand, if we narrow down the list of books to those that are "obviously" immensely popular, such as G.R.R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*, or J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, we are at risk of ignoring large groups of readers who indulge in titles that receive less marketing, or which rely on word-of-mouth for sales.

Unless we utilise electronic tools for measuring readership, such as categorised best-seller lists available at Amazon.com and other Internet booksellers, McCracken's definition seems a bit impractical. The proposed solution also ignores large brick-and-mortar book store chains, such as Barnes and Noble, and is limited in scope by the information that each sales platform chooses to provide. There is also the question of whether it is the job of the literary critic to successfully and systematically measure sales. It seems that such matters are best left to entrepreneurs and the authors themselves – after all, they have the necessary data.

An interesting issue concerning the definition of popular fiction, and one which should be avoided, is attempting to codify the inherent characteristics that make a book popular. It is difficult enough to delineate the boundaries of certain genres, and critics should be quick to agree that sales result from several factors, over which authors may or may not have control. Formulas for sales are outside of the competences of literary scholars and all but a select few writers of best-selling fiction. In fact, it may be safely wagered that a deeper, academic analysis of this issue would reveal that the requirements a book must meet in order to become a hit are general to

the point of uselessness. Were this not true, the vast majority of wealthy authors would be critics²².

Let us look at other ways scholars define popular fiction. In an overview article which proposes establishing popular fiction studies as a new field, Matthew Schneider-Mayerson writes:

“Popular fiction” has been defined in a number of ways (in Western, English-language criticism) over the last half-century. Although the specific terminology has often reflected the author’s approach to the topic, the subject’s actual domain is rarely questioned. Popular fiction is defined by what it is not: “literature.” Most critics openly or implicitly adhere to the following claims: Whereas “literature” is indifferent to (if not contemptuous of) the marketplace, original, and complex, popular fiction is simple, sensuous, exaggerated, exciting, and formulaic (for example, Gelder; Radway; Makinen; Warpole). “Real” writers spend decades agonizing over each sentence, while genre hacks produce a new paperback each year, to be “consumed” in airports and quickly discarded (Gelder 12-15). A persistent thorn in definitions of “popular culture” is the ambiguity of the word “popular”: If a “literary” novel—by Philip Roth, for example—sells more copies than Nora Roberts’ latest romance, which is “popular”? Can both be? Is the definition qualitative or quantitative? The significance of this distinction was highlighted by the controversy surrounding Jonathan Franzen’s rejection of Oprah Winfrey’s official endorsement of his novel *The Corrections*. When Franzen said in 2001, “I see this as my book, my creation, and I didn’t want that logo of corporate ownership on it” (Fresh Air), he publicly alluded to the wall between “real” literature and popular fiction, a distinction which would exist no matter how many copies *The Corrections* might sell. The contrast between “popular fiction” and “literature” occurs against the backdrop of continuing debates about the categories “low” and “high” culture by authors such as Lawrence

²² Neither John Grisham, Stephen King, Dan Brown or J.K. Rowling have an academic background. The most prominent modern literary critic to achieve startling success by writing fiction is probably Umberto Eco, whose *The Name of The Rose* sold over 50 million copies according to a 20-year-old editorial review from 1996 quoted on Amazon.com: <http://www.amazon.com/Name-Rose-Umberto-Eco/dp/0307264890>. If we look further back in time, the leader would probably be J.R.R. Tolkien, but his sales figures pale in comparison to yet another non-academic writer, Agatha Christie, who is cited by the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the best-selling novelist of all time, with an estimated 2 billion copies in sales.

Levine (1988) and Andreas Huyssen (2002) (among many others), but the study of popular fiction requires its own attention. (Willcox et al. 21-22)

Unlike McCracken, Schneider-Mayerson's article compiles several sources on the subject, and his definition seems less arbitrary²³. However, at first glance it introduces a new problem: how do we define "real" literature? The scope of this question goes far beyond the limits of this discussion. It has seen answers in handbooks and anthologies of literary theory, ranging from the broadest sense, to judgements of a work's merit, to formal aspects of texts. However, an interesting voice worth mentioning in this debate was raised in the very first issue of *Studies in Popular Culture* from 1977 by Jerome Stern. In his article "Highbrow Taste as Popular Culture", Stern describes the construction of cultural texts created by and for a highbrow audience. It is both a revealing and original piece, since the predominant mode of cultural analysis has the critic describing groups to which he or she usually does not belong. A scholar writing about middle-class intelligentsia breaks away from that mold. Stern defines a culture of the elite, which routinely engages in works of art and fiction that are too complex, demanding or unfamiliar to become truly popular among regular people. (Stern 1)

He goes on to describe the traits that captivate this type of audience. Firstly, the experiencing of the work in question should raise a "Problem in Understanding" (Stern 4). It should foster a sense of uncertainty which offers the opportunity of fruitful speculation (Stern 4). According to Stern, this type of challenge correlates with a distinguishing characteristic of the cultural elite, namely its scepticism towards conventional social norms and behaviours. Rather than following the accepted patterns, Stern's middle-class intelligentsia prefers unique solutions, devised through thoughtful deliberation (Stern 3). Due to this penchant for solving problems, works of art or fiction meant to entertain this type of audience tend to be particularly concerned with formal aspects. Navigating the language of an artist's craft adds another level of possible interpretations. (Stern 4)

Coupled with a sense of detachment from traditional values is a yearning for art that offers no obvious answers. Within the tastes of the cultural elite, ambiguity is closely tied with artistic pedigree, providing space for individual reception to a group made up of people who

²³ See also Bates and Ferri: "Under one approach, elite culture is whatever cultural critics give their seal of approval. Wollheim writes of the institutional theory of art; in his words, "Painters make paintings, but it takes a representative of the art-world to make a work of art" (Willcox et al. 4)

possess a heightened awareness of the internal complexities of their inner lives. Thus, these works of art or fiction are susceptible to irony, which, Stern observes, is “that rueful linguistic device by which the loss of absolutes is encapsulated. As irony gives with one voice what it takes away with another it is the natural expression of paradox.” (Stern 5).

We see a strong strain of individualism guiding the culture of the elite, a tendency to avoid commonality of experience. Stern argues that because sentimentality in art aims to create shared emotions in its audiences, it is shunned by middle-class intelligentsia: “Obviously for a culture which does not accept that communality to engage a welter of communal emotion would be false, touristy, self-Indulgent; It would be slumming, and the more rigorous of the critics are consistent in the negative reaction.” (Stern 5)

The overall picture of the Highbrow Taste which emerges from the article seems particularly true for the cultural milieu which emerged from poststructuralism and postmodernism in art and literature. The rather subversive message that Stern conveys consists in re-stating what we know about curiosity in a different way: the striving to discover deeper levels of meaning in our surrounding reality drives some of us to create problems that can be contemplated for pleasure. In the context of popular culture, which, as Schneider-Mayerson points out is most often lambasted for its overall simplicity of form or content, Stern puts the issue on its head by claiming that there exists a group of people who are conditioned to derive fulfilment from becoming entangled in complexity, especially if there is no single solution to be found in the process. In a way, this approach evens out the division into high and low, by arranging them horizontally, rather than vertically. Stern’s overall goal in the article was to propose that: “so called elite culture needs to be studied within the context of other cultures. Only then can one see that American culture is not hierarchical. We can no more argue that academic culture is better than mountain culture than we could argue that Eskimo culture is better than Maori culture. Each culture has peculiar characteristics and possibilities for excellence.” (Stern 6)

On one hand, we may argue that the presented approach is not anything special. We have seen tendencies to equalise the field of cultural studies from the New Left, structuralism and Marxist approaches. On the other hand, however, Stern’s simplicity and accurate assessment mean that we can use his distinctions without committing to an entire philosophical or ideological system. There is no need to remove or add value from signs and symbols, agree with

Marx or Gramsci, etc. Therefore, Stern's proposition serves as a viable and topical comparison for a contrastive definition of popular culture. The caveat is simply that his description of highbrow taste is specific enough to encourage definitions of other cultures and tastes, rather than grouping them together and calling the entire lot "popular". And the borders and distinctions between these tastes might run along entirely different lines than the conventional genre divisions we are used to as literary scholars.

We can also see that Stern's definition is limited to describing a contemporary group of people in America. On a cursory view it holds up rather well today, almost 40 years later, and extends further than the USA, but it would probably not be as useful in a historical perspective. There exist several examples of "highbrow" literature from the past where a proper resolution or strong interpretative guidelines can be seen as a necessary element – perhaps most famously, Aristotle's criteria for a good tragedy, including *katharsis* and a three-part story structure, but also some famous works by Charles Dickens (*Great Expectations*, *A Christmas Carol*), and medieval romances (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*). Conversely, we might also find numerous past instances where Stern's description is easily applicable – the romantic sublime, Freud's uncanny, the enduring success of Shakespeare's plays with *Hamlet*'s iconic question – are all illustrations of how intertwined the highbrow taste and the uncertainty of interpretation can be²⁴.

Despite these limitations, if we attempt to substitute "real" literature in Schneider-Mayerson's definition for Stern's highbrow taste, we might expect to find the following traits in a "popular" work of fiction:

1. It proposes character behaviour that fits within social norms over the complexity of individual experience, e.g. a detective who, despite an otherwise well-developed personality, is particularly focussed on doing his or her job; a "good cop" who is also a flawed individual, a professional that goes beyond the call of duty in order to satisfy an inner desire to do all that is possible in order to get the job done, etc. The text might also stigmatise behaviour that goes beyond what society tends to perceive as normal. Note that

²⁴ Difficulty also has its limits – James Joyce managed to engage audiences with *Ulysses*, but *Finnegans Wake* went too far in its complexity to ever receive a sizeable readership according to Joyce's biographer Richard Ellmann. As Stern writes, highbrow readers are "achievement oriented", and we can imagine that there are natural limits to the ratio of work to enjoyment that even the most sophisticated audiences are prepared to bear (Stern 5).

this does not mean that the characters must be shallow, or bereft of any type of introspection – more likely, they simply do what we would expect them to do based on their profession or social role.

2. There is a plot or a set of literary conventions that guide interpretation in a specific direction. Unlike “real” literature which actively works to subvert expectations or shies away from spelling out an absolute conclusion, a “popular” text might lead the reader towards false assumptions, but it should explain everything before the end, or at least contain enough information for the reader to surmise what actually happened.
3. The author puts a premium on communicating with the reader over formal innovation. “Popular” prose would tend to be evocative or mimetic, rather than intentionally obscure or mysterious. This criterion should be qualified in the sense that “popular” prose need not be devoid of artistic merit, but it would tend to be driven by a desire to create a common experience, crafting a clear message, in place of writerly experiments that put the text before the reader.

The fruitfulness of such a definition would need to be gauged by analysing “high” and “low” texts side by side. The three points appear comprehensive to a reasonable degree and provide some avenues for classification. In particular, the second point addresses the issue of genre conformity, which is important because the terms “popular” and “genre” fiction are often used interchangeably both in and out of academia:

“Crime fiction” and other established genres of popular novels—such as romance, thriller, science fiction, horror novel and Western—have each drawn extensive attention from a variety of disciplinary and methodological perspectives, but they have more often than not been considered and analyzed as disparate categories.” (Willcox et al. 21)

But there is another approach to the subject of highbrow and lowbrow in culture and literature which should be discussed before we settle the issue of defining the field. We already saw that a minimalistic definition poses significant problems for a literary critic. A comparative definition depends on what it is being measured against. The third route seems to be a conscious rejection of the division. A proponent of this solution is Andreas Huyssen. In a lecture given at

MACBA (Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona), entitled "After the High/Low Debate", Huyssen claims that the divide between high and low culture has been made obsolete by globalisation and cultural shifts resulting from migration: "[the division] can no longer provide the field of battle for an alternative social or political imagination as it did earlier in this century" (Huyssen 3).

This observation draws attention to a fact that can become obscured when scholars use sources from the earlier decades of the second half of the 20th century (which includes structuralists and poststructuralists). Especially during the Cold War era, the political relevance of a distinction between the elite and the rest of the population seemed much higher. In a polarised world, egalitarianism brought with it the spectre of communism, and attacks on the establishment and the system seemed to push boundaries in ways that are impossible today.

Without this *gravitas*, Huyssen proposes to abandon the high/low distinction in favour of an aesthetic analysis of individual cultural texts. Since attacking elite culture no longer has real implications for political and social change, what should be scrutinised are the ties between cultural practices and products and local discourses (Huyssen 3). Summarising the validity of a contemporary high/low debate²⁵, Huyssen writes:

[G]etting engaged in the high/low question now is either a losing proposition, because it pulls one into a fruitless and boring academic debate about the canon and the subversive thrust of the popular; or it is simply irrelevant, because high culture, apart from curricular discussions in elite universities, has lost most of the political and hegemonic cachet that used to make attacks on it somehow pertinent. (Huyssen 4)

One might counter this claim by saying that today, popular culture has claimed most of the influence that the elite used to hold. Insofar as there exist key players in the modern marketplace who have the power to suggest cultural texts to large audiences, it sometimes becomes difficult to gauge whether a novel or a film is popular because viewers/readers enjoy it, or because a corporate committee decided that it would be the safest route to increasing profits. One needs only to look at advertising space in large cities and the capability to reach targeted groups via Internet marketing to understand that the power of suggestion, leveraged by money,

²⁵ The lecture was given in 1999, before many of the technological changes which defined today's cultural marketplace.

can easily make or break the popularity of cultural texts if the alternative means sifting through an endless supply of information in order to make one's own choice. Therefore, the larger entertainment outlets seem to be vested with some authority that has traditionally been the domain of critics - "from the author/maker of best-seller x"²⁶. Does this mean that making the high/low distinction continues to be valid?

In some sense, all of the definitions outlined here highlight the central issue in the debate of "popular" versus "literary" and "high" versus "low" - the division is not grounded in research, but is instead based on subjective feeling. An immediately understandable conceptual dichotomy, it proves useful when making broad statements and sweeping generalisations, but falls apart under closer scrutiny. The saving grace for a definition of both popular fiction and culture can only be found in specifics. The more detailed the description, the more useful it is. Otherwise we may end up with "all or nothing" classifications that offer little or no insight into the subject we want to discuss. What is the use of labelling a cultural text as "popular" if we have no clarity as to what the term means? In some way, this also explains the prevalence of critical works based on genre divisions, mentioned by Schneider-Mayerson – they are far easier distinctions to make.

In conclusion, of the many ways definitions can impact the analysis of popular fiction, the most useful approach commits to specific criteria, however subjective they may appear. The primary justification for employing a critical tool, such as a definition, should be that it produces interesting results, without the need for elaborate priming or long-winded explanations. There are good reasons both for and against making the division between popular and elite fiction, but for the purposes of this dissertation the most productive approach seems to be Stern's criteria for highbrow tastes as the antithesis of the lowbrow. As we shall see in later chapters, it closely fits the general tendency found in the analysed novels for genre conformity as a potential measure of literary value.

²⁶ In accordance with the principle of social proof, which is a very powerful marketing tool described in psychologist's Robert Cialdini's classic work *Influence – Science and Practice*: "Advertisers love to inform us when a product is the "fastest-growing" or "largest-selling" because they don't have to convince us directly that the product is good; they need only say that many others think so, which seems proof enough." (Cialdini 101)

2.2 New Historicism, Cultural Studies and Exchange Value

Since the 1980s and the works of such critics as Stephen Greenblatt, a new movement now strongly associated with cultural studies gained enough ground to become the dominant discourse in American literary criticism. Greenblatt himself coined the term New Historicism²⁷. In 1989, in an introduction to a collection of essays entitled *The New Historicism*, the editor Harold Aram Veesper attempted to draw up some of the most important ideas shared by the representatives of this approach:

1. that every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices;
2. that every act of unmasking, critique, and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes;
3. that literary and non-literary "texts" circulate inseparably;
4. that no discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths nor expresses inalterable human nature;
5. finally ... that a critical method and a language adequate to describe culture under capitalism participate in the economy they describe. (Veeser xi)

Commenting on these points complements the discussion on definitions of popular culture and addresses possible questions concerning my choice of critical tools described in the following chapters. There is much to be said about responsibility in academic discussions, and the debate surrounding New Historicism is particularly revealing in terms of the stances and attitudes of literary scholars, as well as the roles they envision for themselves in society and academia²⁸. Before a closer inspection of the quoted tenets of New Historicism, let us note that in the two-and-a-half decades since this publication the field has expanded and developed, both with later works by the authors of the collected essays, and numerous other contributions²⁹. This is not a

²⁷ See Greenblatt's introduction to *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance*, published seven years before the collection edited by Veesper.

²⁸ For an overview of stances on these subjects that are opposed to New Historicism, see Marjorie Levinson's "What is New Formalism?" (2007).

²⁹ Already in 1989 Veesper notes that: "[T]here has been no systematic discussion of the methodology and implications of the tendency. Its sheer success has made the task difficult, since the volume and variety of the work done and the blurred boundaries of the concept makes a fully representative selection impossible." (Veeser xiii-xiv) It is not possible to research the works of critics whose methods are indebted to New Historicism by

dissertation about New Historicism; nevertheless, the approach receives some mention because the critical methodology adopted for my analyses of crime fiction rejects some of these tenets, while seemingly accepting others.

Veeseer's first statement points towards important aspects of any form of cultural analysis, and we can see an intellectual likeness to the Marxist concepts of base and superstructure. On the surface, this observation seems banal – literature, in its most basic definition as a body of works written by people over the course of history, has always been a product of the social and technological milieu inhabited by each author. However, when we consider the matter of literacy we can re-frame the issue of literary popularity and gain some perspective that may have been lost if we simply proceeded with reading a text. It is perhaps easy to forget, in a world flooded by an unprecedented flow of information, that the written word has been scarce and even sacred in past times³⁰. Much of the culture that filled everyday human life took on other forms: the paintings and decorations in churches and cathedrals, the very buildings in cities and important sites, plays, fairs, markets, hand-crafted objects, tools, furniture, etc. All of these focussed and reflected human creativity that could find no permanent expression or be widely disseminated using the written word. Life's truths, joys and sorrows had to be encoded into the language of craft and oral performance, because for tens of hundreds of years expressing them plainly in written form all but guaranteed that they would be read and experienced by very few people.

New Historicism points us in the right direction in terms of considering the non-textual legacy that helps describe past cultures. It draws our attention to the shapes that popular culture has taken throughout the ages. The context of technological advances and the enforcing of literacy by means of public schooling made selling printed fiction to the masses a possibility.

Let us consider the example of Ancient Greece, which is widely perceived as a “learned” society, where the emphasis we put on writing today simply did not exist. That culture was centred around public speaking, as modern scholars attest:

searching for the term alone. Rather, investigations in the vein that Veeseer describes can be seen in various fields, particularly cultural studies, feminist criticism, ecocriticism, postcolonialism and others. It is also not common to find a given work that would adhere to all the principles discussed here, apart from the writers of the essays in the collection, such as Greenblatt, Gallagher and Spivak.

³⁰ We see vestiges of the ennobled treatment of writing in ancient texts, which contain spells and incantations that were believed to hold mystical power. These formulations were sometimes buried along with the dead to help them on their journey in the afterlife e.g. the Papyrus of Ani described in E. A. Wallis Budge's *Egyptian Book of the Dead*.

Certainly there was an extraordinarily sophisticated range of literary and intellectual activity in the classical centuries. Yet most Greek literature was meant to be heard or even sung – thus transmitted orally – and there was a strong current of distaste for the written word even among the highly literate ... A civilized man in Greece (and indeed Rome) had to be able, above all, to speak well in public. Socrates pursued his philosophical enquiries in conversation and debate and wrote nothing down. His pupil Plato attacked the written word as an inadequate means of true education and philosophy: he may have published his work in dialogue form in order to recreate the atmosphere of oral discourse and debate, and towards the end of his life he may have decided against committing any of his most important views to written form at all ... Not only did philosophers discuss extremely difficult problems without using writing to help, but dense and complex literature was regularly heard rather than read by its public. The written word was more often used in the service of the spoken. (Thomas 3-4)

This informs us that literature in Ancient Greece was predominantly intended to be read aloud and that writers were not secluded from their audiences as they sometimes are today. Thus, we can understand, for example, Aristotle's *Poetics*, one of the seminal works of Western literary criticism, in a new light – as pertaining to and discussing the most popular art forms of the day. Aristotle wrote about what the *masses* of his time, admittedly fewer in number than those of today, experienced and cherished. Had we not made that observation, we would be forced by our present circumstances to conclude that Aristotle intended his work for the academe of Ancient Greece, and that plays were also read at home, as they commonly are today. With the additional context we know that the Greek philosopher would probably read his opinions in public and his audiences would refer it to the actual experience of watching a staged play, not reading one.

However, the New Historicist would also be quick to point out that Aristotle believed in the idea of natural slavery, as discussed in *Politics*, that slavery was widely accepted in Ancient Greek city-states, and that the overall socio-economic conditions in Athens allowed him to devote his time to philosophical and philological discourse in the first place – with which, ironically, Aristotle unabashedly agrees in book I of *Politics*. Hence, the “popular” character of Greek plays was limited to an audience consisting mostly of male citizens, who were free to engage in public activities, unlike the majority of the population, i.e. slaves and women. We

cannot compare ancient Greek plays to modern popular culture, such as cinema, because today there are no restrictions on watching a play or a film based on the audience's social status (bar some extreme cases, if they pay they can watch). One of the implications of New Historicism is that, because of such power structures and the shift that they underwent throughout the ages, we cannot liken the popular cultural texts of Aristotle's time, or any other historical period, to ours.

Thus we arrive at Veese's remaining points. If all cultures exist separately in time, and everything that they create is a function of how they organise themselves, then there is no thread of shared experience linking historical events and pointing to an overarching structure of history³¹. Since all the discourse we produce is itself derived from our present social conditions, we fall prey to the same processes we describe (point 2). Literature is only a part of the grand sum of what defines our culture, and cannot be separated from it, or read without the cultural context (point 3). Therefore, we must accept that the truths expressed in any discourse cannot transcend the limitations of their creation and we should deny them any claim to universality (point 4). The fifth point, pertaining to capitalism, is only a reformulation of points 1 and 2, tailored to fit our present circumstances.

The example of Aristotle's *Poetics* illustrates several of the problems we encounter if we take the assumptions made by Veese as true. Firstly, as mentioned above, the Greeks were open about their cultural practices and codified them. Aristotle discusses power and social status at great length in *Politics*. Therefore, it is not particularly revealing or productive to recount how these relations have been portrayed in the discourse of the time. This, however, is only pertinent to the example of *Poetics*, which may simply not be that well suited for a New Historicist reading. In more general terms, and perhaps more importantly, we should look at the issue of scholarly responsibility. The knowledge we have today regarding Ancient Greece is the result of hard work done by many historians and archaeologists. What historical research can a literary critic do, and how well is he or she equipped to approach it, that the reader would not be better off learning the same information from a historian's work? Veese writes:

New Historicism has given scholars new opportunities to cross the boundaries separating history, anthropology, art, politics, literature, and economics. It has struck down the doctrine of noninterference that forbade humanists to intrude on questions of politics,

³¹ Unlike the Marxist view.

power, indeed on all matters that deeply affect people's practical lives – matters best left ... to experts who could be trusted to preserve order and stability in “our” global and intellectual domains. New Historicism threatens this quasi-monastic order. (Veese ix)

Is this “quasi-monastic order” really much more than the effect of academic discipline, which enforces a type of scholarly responsibility over our claims? Are “amateur” historians and anthropologists with a degree in literary studies that well-suited to discuss these fields despite knowing little of what has already been written by seasoned practitioners³²? No scholar is truly restricted in their interests by academic divisions – the very works on which New Historicism is based, e.g. Foucault, the structuralists, showcase the uses of interdisciplinarity in academia well before the rise of New Historicism. There appears to be a proselytising tone in Veese's introduction that sounds dishonest considering where it comes from. For example, Stephen Greenblatt, a central figure in the movement, has been a part of the academic establishment all throughout this purported New Historicist revolution: he graduated from Yale, held a teaching position at Berkeley and subsequently moved to Harvard in the 1990s, specialising in the works of William Shakespeare. He was, and continues to be, one of Veese's maligned experts. While this compromised position is addressed by Veese's second point, and receives some mention further in his introduction, the reader is asked to take the view that “everyone is guilty”. A poor excuse for what might easily be construed as simple hypocrisy – depicting all writers as mere constructs of their time, while at the same time aggrandising oneself for being clever enough to notice it.

Regarding the inseparable circulation of literary and non-literary texts, we see an opposition against formalist approaches, as well as certain forms of reader-response criticism. The ease with which texts can be copied and extrapolated from their original context in today's technological age is of some concern, and we can safely claim that New Criticism would not be possible without the focus on written historical sources that modern academic culture has

³² Cf. Leitch et al.: “Historians have objected that these literary critics read a few nonliterary texts, juxtapose them with plays or novels, and think that they are doing history. But such complaints ... largely miss the point. New Historicism is part of a broader sea change in literary studies – and in history as well ... History departments were also changing ... new prominence was given to both social and cultural history which shift the historians' gaze ... to ordinary people and their mundane routines.” (2250-51)

One might claim that the counter-argument makes little sense if the historians are already focussing on the subjects the literary critics want to adapt.

promoted in the 20th century. However, the New Historicist argument is aimed primarily at a more thorough reading of written non-literary texts, and as some formalists would say, at the expense of literature itself³³. On the other hand, we are now more privy to the realities of bygone ages than ever before; due to the technological progress made in various fields, we are able to better assess the material artefacts that survived from the past, in ways that were not possible even in the 20th century. The caveat regarding New Historicism is that it is unclear how exactly a literary critic would research these objects or benefit from the technological advances.

Does this intertwining of the literary and the mundane make the interpretation of Aristotle's *Poetics* incomplete if we fail to analyse the historical context thoroughly enough? Probably not – a better candidate for such a discussion would be some play or poem from the same period, to which *Poetics* might be a companion. However, we are most certainly able to extract Aristotle's text from its milieu and find it both useful and insightful, especially if our focus is the history of ideas or of the discipline of criticism – which Veeseer explicitly denies (Veeseer xiii). The New Historicist approach would be rather limiting and not particularly productive – we would be trading all the important ideas that continue to prevail to our time in various media (e.g. the ubiquitous three-part story structure found in countless novels, films, and, since the 1980s, video games) for an ideological or political analysis, which would add little to the content, and even that mostly by reiterating Aristotle's ideas from his other texts.

Perhaps the most controversial point made by Veeseer, and one which can immediately be rejected as stemming from an a priori, unresearched assumption is his fourth statement. If no discourse can give access to unchanging truths, or express human nature at its core, then not only literature but also religion, science and philosophy should be seen as useless apart from their influence on the exchange of money and power. Veeseer offers no qualification for this claim, and it seems so radical in its relativism that it would be best to simply ignore it. Better arguments for various degrees of relativism have been made by the structuralists and poststructuralists, and I discuss some of them in the following chapters. Interestingly enough, scientists have also come forward to dismiss the notion of pure relativism on grounds of linguistic research, and their propositions are also explained later in this dissertation. Since we are dealing with popular fiction, Veeseer's lack of faith in discourse may also be countered with the timeless efficacy of

³³ For a more in-depth discussion of analysing literary and non-literary texts, see Levinson, esp. 565-566.

certain marketing techniques, based on research in psychology and sociology, which easily transcend the capitalist context in which they were described³⁴.

The final tenet shared by New Historicists, according to Veese, is the application of his first and second statements to the situation of authors and literary critics in a capitalist economy. This point relates to the subject of genre fiction more directly, and deserves a deeper look. In the Humanities, some form of critique of capitalism has been almost universal among the various schools of thought of the 20th century. Depending on their political leanings, scholars expressed their discontent with the Western economic system in different ways. Leftist thinkers tended to describe how money affects power and shapes the consciousness of hapless masses by means of the homogenising influence of the media, while conservative critics pointed out the formal and intellectual deficiencies of popular fiction as a way of justifying their lack of interest in it. The left attacked the system but enjoyed analysing its products (advertisements, films, popular fiction, music, etc.); and the right opposed ideological and political discussions in literary studies, thus allowing the *status quo* to persist, but rejected the notion that contemporary fiction written explicitly for profit or a large audience could be treated on the same terms as “real” literature.

However much the left side of the debate might argue against dividing literature into “high” and “low”, this opposition of interests, coupled with new, conflicting methodologies of interpreting texts implied, via a structuralist mode of signification, that popular fiction was indeed unlike the literature that more conservative critics analysed. Coming back to the issue of definitions, we see an illustration of Huysen’s claim that the low/high distinction was useful because it allowed critics to attack the establishment on political grounds.

However, hierarchy in literature is an academic concern which ignores both authors and their readers, and popularity is truly relative. Very few writers deliberately set out to create literary works that do not relate to what might be considered common experience – even if the group which the author intends to address is relatively small. It could plausibly be argued that only some fringe cases, often considered representatives of Outsider Art, ever decide to make serious commitments to creating works that are not shared with others. An example of such a writer would be the American Henry Darger who wrote and illustrated 35000 pages of text in

³⁴ For an overview, see the chapters on reciprocity, commitment and consistency, social proof, liking, authority and scarcity in Cialdini.

complete solitude while holding a regular day job. His life's *oeuvre* was only discovered when he was taken to the hospital and died³⁵.

Most writers are not only concerned with relating to the issues and lives of their contemporaries, they actively seek to share their work with as many people as possible. This does not necessarily mean that they are socially outgoing or seek fame – consider the case of the famous literary recluse Thomas Pynchon, for example. It does imply, however, that there is a trade of value between a writer and his or her readers. A given text tells us something about life, which constitutes some value, and the more people read it, the more value has been shared. “The moment of exchange fascinates the New Historicists. Circulation involves not just money and knowledge but also, for New Historicists, prestige—the “possession” of social assets”. (Veeseer xiv)

Authors participate actively in this exchange, and New Historicists rightly observe that the process is inevitable. Indeed, we may agree that it forms the basis of human society and allows progress to happen – we can trade products and services, agreeing on some means of abstract currency, which frees most of us from the burden of gathering our own food so that we can specialise in various professions. The exchange of resources validates cooperation and is a basic concept not unique to our species³⁶. However, if a fair trade of resources is such an integral part of society and human cooperation, then what could be more justified than two parties agreeing on the specific value of an exchange and proceeding with the transaction (not counting tax)? In answering this question, we might claim that capitalism has a solid foundation in our natural behaviour, not yet counting the potential for malicious misdeeds perpetrated by those who have attained enough wealth to enjoy a privileged position in the marketplace. Capitalism is commonplace, but it is far from being universally embraced by the literary academia.

The strong, anti-capitalist strain in the Humanities, from which New Historicism is not exempt, makes several implicit assumptions about how our economic system operates. It tends towards being critical of the global markets, but it faces no opposition in its academic

³⁵ For an illustrated analysis of Darger's work, see *Henry Darger: In the Realms of the Unreal* by John M. MacGregor. It might also be added that we know of Darger's work because the landlord who found it was an art critic and, unlike the author himself, saw the potential to profit from this outlandish *opus*.

³⁶ From an article in *Nature* entitled “Monkeys Reject Unequal Pay”: “Here we demonstrate that a nonhuman primate, the brown capuchin monkey (*Cebus apella*), responds negatively to unequal reward distribution in exchanges with a human experimenter. Monkeys refused to participate if they witnessed a conspecific obtain a more attractive reward for equal effort, an effect amplified if the partner received such a reward without any effort at all. These reactions support an early evolutionary origin of inequity aversion.”

environment. The negativity common among cultural critics and literary scholars whose approaches are based, to some extent, on Marxist views (e.g. structuralists, New Historicists) is not called into question by liberal and libertarian economists because the latter simply do not participate in the discourse of the former. Students entering colleges and universities are under no obligation to be well-versed in economic matters. The system of higher education is likely to shape the views of these newcomers rather than pose a challenge to a set of well-established beliefs. The more conservative critics focus on formalism, as mentioned above, and the arguments they make have little to do with overt ideology, whereas the texts cited by their left-leaning colleagues are explicit in that regard. The result is a situation which was outlined previously – most literary criticism is to some extent critical of a capitalist economy, often intrinsically so. This dissertation is not the best place to discuss such issues, but a metacritical analysis of the perceptions of capitalism in literary criticism might be an interesting avenue for further research.

A good reason to mention the problem of capitalism among scholars of literature, apart from relating my work to New Historicism as the discourse most often utilised in analysing popular fiction, is that the critical methodology used to discuss a text will tend to predict the outcome of the analysis, often to a significant extent. Ideology, politics and economics have become part and parcel of literary criticism in the past few decades. The outlook on popular fiction is thus strongly polarised, and despite the multifaceted nature of cultural studies, heavily one-sided towards the unmasking of power struggles and concealed ideologies³⁷. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will assume a neutral stance towards capitalism and the contemporary publishing industry.

This serves the purpose of avoiding the placement of undue emphasis on ideological and social matters that function on completely different levels in large businesses and in the work of the average author. We should agree without reservations that apart from celebrated writers, most authors who create genre fiction participate in the marketplace on fair terms. They cannot resort to the unethical methods which define the greedy face of modern capitalism – monopoly/oligopoly, unfair treatment of cheap labour in Third-World countries, the

³⁷ See Veese: “[New Historicists have evolved themes and concerns such as] the idea that autonomous self and text are mere holograms, effects that intersecting institutions produce; that selves and texts are defined by their relation to hostile others (despised and feared Indians, Jews, Blacks) and disciplinary power (the King, Religion, Masculinity).” (Veese xiii)

dissemination of untested chemicals in the natural environment to cut costs, etc. Furthermore, a majority of fiction authors probably do not have a very good grasp of, or the financial means to use backhanded skills for manipulating the market, at least not to the extent that would allow us to accuse them of avoiding the labour required to write a novel-length text. A reader cannot be thought of as being manipulated by a writer into buying their book instead of someone else's. We rarely see advertisements put out by writers and not publishing houses, excepting the world of self-publishing which is thriving on Internet platforms such as Amazon. The intention of profitability is openly admitted, since most genre authors do not shy away from gaining popularity or earning an income from their work – the reader usually enters an honest and straightforward exchange of money for entertainment.

The research assumptions in this dissertation will be outlined in the following chapters, but they will not include an implicit critique of capitalist economy that is not already contained in the statements of the presented thinkers. In particular, the works of Jean Baudrillard have a driving undercurrent of negativity towards contemporary capitalism, while Lakoff and Johnson assume a neutral stance. In the next section, we will see that the market relation between readers and authors defines the structure of the detective genre, according to some reader-response theorists, and therefore it is an important element to consider in any study concerned with that type of fiction.

Recapitulating the ideas presented in this chapter, some critique of the tenets of New Historicism outlined by Veese has been presented to distance the methodology found in this thesis from the commonly encountered discourse on the subject of popular fiction. While the entanglement of writers and literary texts in their cultural contexts is an interesting and necessary avenue for research, New Historicism, as presented by Veese, takes the conclusions of these connections to extremes that limit its usefulness. In the following section I will illustrate an approach to detective fiction based on reader-response theory from the Constance School, which takes the middle ground in the divide between relativist radicalism and a formalist narrow focus on texts as icons. In the context of popular fiction, I also noted that the position of the author in a capitalist economy, which also deserves exploring, should not invalidate their work. Their participation in the system of exchange, offering no inherent, unfair advantages, puts them in the same position as the New Historicist critic – there are no reasons to trust the latter at the expense of the former. Thus, I reject the notion that popular fiction should be analysed solely within the

context of power and social relations. The reasoning behind this dissertation assumes a relationship between formal aspects of a text and its reception, supplemented by cultural and ideological factors but not entirely subservient to them. The ideological mode of analysis will be elaborated upon further in the methodology section, both through a cognitive approach and a reading based on Jean Baudrillard's subversive denouncement of the real.

Chapter 3:

The Detective Genre

Of all the genres in popular fiction the crime or detection genre has enjoyed the biggest popularity, as evidenced by Agatha Christie's aforementioned Guinness Book of World Records entry for most popular novelist of all time. Critical discussions refer to this type of fiction in various ways. The broader term of crime fiction, used by Scaggs (2005) seems less useful due to its inclusiveness. On the other hand, scholars often simply use the names of specific sub-genres in their works, such as hard boiled, private-eye or classic detective fiction. Edgar Allan Poe, widely considered the originator of the modern detective genre, called his stories "tales of ratiocination" (Scaggs 1). In this section, I would like to focus on George N. Dove's reader-response oriented study of the genre's conventions, *The Reader and the Detective Story* (1997), and will henceforth use his terminology. For a historical outlook on detective fiction, see John Scaggs' *Crime Fiction* (2005), which is a recent introduction to the subject, or earlier works, such as *The Cunning Craft*, edited by Ronald Walker and June Frazer (1990), David Grossvogel's *Mystery and its Fictions* (1976), and Howard Haycraft's *Murder for Pleasure* (1974). Meanwhile, Dove's study will provide the basis for further explorations in the realm of methodology – Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulations* as well as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Philosophy in the Flesh*.

Dove's analysis of the specific relation between the reader and the detective story begins with Hans Georg Gadamer's notion of transformed play and hermeneutics in the act of reading. It introduces the notion of the genre as a game, made possible by a set of conventions, some of which are essential while others are malleable. Thus, the approach acknowledges the heavy formalisation which has permeated detective fiction since its very beginnings. The reception of the text presupposes a certain hermeneutic process, of attempting to figure out what will happen next, considering one's familiarity with the rules of play. Because the genre is construed as a game, the rules which govern the interaction with it cannot be seen as limitations in an arbitrary sense – rather, they offer the boundaries without which there would be no game, no possibility of play. Dove analyses these conventions and their elasticity using works from reader-response theory, especially by German literary critics Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, both

representatives of the Constance School, as well as John Cawelti, Frank Kermode and others. The revealed mechanisms shed light on detective fiction's enduring popularity and offer insights into what makes the reading mode associated with the genre unique.

Firstly, it is important to understand Gadamer's concept of play, and its potential for being transformed into a work of art. Dove outlines three elements that characterise playful activity: freedom from stress, the presence of elective tasks, and movement, which can be found in renewal and repetition. The final attribute is particularly emphasised, since the ultimate goal of a game is not the ending or resolution but the activity itself, repeated over the course of a session and across several games. Engagement in play presupposes future possibilities of repeating the same activities, always renewed in each individual instance. Hence, while a football match has a specific outcome, it is never final – the players will meet again in the future and play a new game. Renewal is also the reason for which each instance of play is separated from the previous ones – we begin with a clean slate that allows future enjoyment without referring to past results. (Dove 34-35)

For the detective genre, these three attributes of play have practical consequences. One is that the mutual agreement between the reader and the author of treating the novel as a game offers writers the possibility to escape conventional expectations found in other literary genres. Because the activity of reading a tale of detection is implicitly free of stress, certain elements of plot or setting are relieved from the burden of realism in order to satisfy the conventions that make the game work. Dove describes numerous instances of contrivances that would be unacceptable in other genres, e.g.:

I refer particularly to those instances in which the reader is without apology excluded from the business of detection, as when the detective outlines to his associates an ingenious plan for the solution to the mystery; the reader is invited to guess but not permitted to know what the plan is, and what might be considered a literary flaw in another genre becomes part of the conventional structure. (Dove 34)

Other examples may consist in a facial expression betraying a specific emotional state observed on the corpse of the victim, a dying message which is incredibly complex to decipher or the very requirement that the mystery at the centre of the plot needs to be very difficult to

solve. Indeed, the very notion of realism can be seen as secondary to the structure of a detective story, since the protagonists and the cases they work on are heavily conventionalised, to the point that a factual depiction of what actually happens during a murder investigation would make the foundations of the genre, as described by Dove, all but impossible³⁸.

Gadamer's elective constituent of play manifests itself most clearly in the optional task of attempting to solve the crime along with the detective or investigative team. The reader is free to pursue the evidence provided by the author and is often incited to do so, but any such engagement will not affect the resolution of the mystery. Active participation is entirely optional and its lack is guaranteed to have no negative bearing on the enjoyment of the story, again echoing the characteristic freedom from stress.

Thirdly, repetition of specific conventions and structures is a constant element of detective fiction. However, due to the playful character encoded in the genre, these repetitions do not create boredom in the reader. Rather, they exist to be renewed in endless variations and combinations, without which the game of detection could not take place.

As Gadamer warns, transformed play is not merely a recasting of the rules described above into a different form. In a text, such as the detective novel, play becomes a "mode of being", the "structure, the shape, form or character of a work" (Dove 35). Dove claims that in the case of the detection genre this transformation into hermeneutic structure has two implications, namely hermeneutic specialisation and conventionality. These elements are the key focus of his analysis: "the structure of detective fiction, its shape, form and the totality of its relationships. This is the structure that overrides every other influence on the writing and reading of the detective story." (Dove 37)

Dove uses the term hermeneutics in both its philosophical meaning, here taken from Gadamer, and the way it has come to be understood in the study of detective fiction. The former is summarised as follows: "an activity of the mind in which subject, object and mental process meet and act upon one another, with the result that the interpreting subject is affected by the object of interpretation, which is itself never the same for two interpreters." The latter meaning is simply the reader's need to find out what happened next. (Dove 53)

³⁸ To see how conventional detective fiction defies the realities of most violent crime dealt with by police forces around the world one can turn to prof. Janusz Heitzman's study of the etiology of violent crime (*Stres w Etiologii Przestępstw Agresywnych*) and Jürgen Thorwald's history of the development of forensic science, *Die Stunde der Detektive. Werden und Welten der Kriminalistik* (pol. *Godzina Detektywów*).

Gadamerian hermeneutics is the cornerstone of the reader-response criticism discussed in Dove's work, since both Iser and Jauss studied in Heidelberg under the German philosopher. In the detective story, the text, already a form of transformed play, guides the interpretative process utilising conventions and the reader's familiarity with them. Each reader has an "individual genre" which consists of the information he or she possesses regarding the underlying structure of detective fiction, but also the totality of their reactions to the books they have already read. (Dove 58) According to Iser, the act of reading is "an interchange between text and reader but the text is the senior partner, the guide, the pacesetter." (Dove 59)

In literary criticism, the notion of hermeneutics as the desire to see how the plot unfolds is credited by Dove to Roland Barthes³⁹, as part of his five codes of reading. While almost all works of fiction create the expectation that we will learn more about the story, this propensity to focus on what happened next is central to any mystery novel. In other literary genres it may take a secondary role, as is aptly demonstrated by James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Yet another key to understanding the reader-response analysis in Dove's work is the concept of negativity, strongly tied to the notion of indeterminacy. It is used to refer to the disparity between the information provided by the text and the images in the mind of its reader. There exists an expectation concerning what readers should know, but what is actually written in the story often leaves gaps that are left to the imagination. In detective fiction, this type of negativity is the primary form of interaction with the mode of transformed play. Iser describes the process of negativity as filling the hollow form of the text with mental images, and goes as far as to say that it is the driving force behind literary communication that enables written words to go beyond their literal meaning. (Dove 57)

Dove offers the example of two staple qualities of detective fiction that showcase the power of negativity. The first is the efficiency principle, which calls for us to expect that all the information found in the text will be somehow relevant to the main mystery. Therefore, when the narrator describes anything that is seemingly unrelated to the investigation in greater detail, we may understand that it implies a future importance of the apparent digression. Often such cues appear before the investigation even begins and can take on many forms. The second illustration of negativity at play is conventionality – certain elements of the plot that, by means of their

³⁹ Barthes presents the five codes, the Proairetic code (the voice of empirics), the Hermeneutic code (the voice of truth), the Connotative code (the voice of the person), the Cultural or referential code (the voice of science) and the Symbolic code (voice of the symbol) in his essay *S/Z* (1974).

frequent recurrence in the genre, goad the experienced reader toward developing their own interpretation of what will happen next. (Dove 61)

Before we turn to a discussion of the hermeneutic specialisation of detective stories and the conventions which make it possible, let us briefly note Dove's position in relation to the polarising tendencies of contemporary literary criticism, as described in the previous chapter. The philosophical basis of Dove's method summarised above already situates his study firmly between formalism and the New Historicist entanglement with cultural contexts. Acknowledging the undeniable importance of the formal elements of the genre, Dove insists on the inseparable relation between authors, the economic realities of the marketplace and the readers:

The basic member of the equation is the reader: because of the economics of the popular fiction market, it is the reader who determines success or failure and who therefore exerts a decisive influence on the evolution of the genre itself. Reader preferences naturally influence the development of any popular fiction but, as a result of the guidance of the play structure, it has resulted in what amounts to a covenant between readers and writers of detective fiction. (Dove 37)

However, Dove's reader-response approach points us away from culturally and socially-oriented readings of the detective genre. This is worth noting, because a good deal of analyses of popular fiction in general and the detective story in particular are focussed on the depictions of social groups and other aspects associated with cultural studies, or what Greenblatt calls cultural poetics⁴⁰. Dove makes it explicit that the genre's nature as Gadamerian transformed play and its reliance on a hermeneutic mode of reading makes the setting of each story a peripheral matter in comparison to the conventions that govern its relations with readers⁴¹. To illustrate his point, he offers a cursory analysis of the novel *All Things Under the Moon* about a werewolf murder mystery which satisfies the requirements of the genre, despite being set in a fantasy realm where supernatural factors interact with the plot (traditionally, conventions of detective fiction

⁴⁰ See e.g. Pepper, Andrew (2000) *The Contemporary American Crime Novel: Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Class*. Chicago; Fitzroy Dearborn and Plain, Gill (2001) *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body*. Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press.

⁴¹ "As a rule, the conventions of detective fiction are lacking in social or cultural relevance because of the disinclination of the convention to "go anywhere" in the real world. Conventions such as something bothering the detective, the unidentifiable victim, and the detective on vacation are consistently strong hermeneutically but completely lacking in social values." (Dove 91)

stemming from a spirit of enlightenment forbade supernatural intervention on the outcome of the investigation). (Dove 118-19) It is also worth noting that because of its apparent disregard for social circumstances, the tale of detection is very flexible in the themes it can portray, as authors are offered the freedom to explore any subject they find interesting so long as the central conventions are preserved.

Beyond Gadamer's three attributes of play, which are transformed into the hermeneutics and structure of the detective genre, Dove presents the conventions that define the detective genre, classifying them in order of importance. At the very top of the hierarchy, Dove lists the four *sine qua nons* of the detective genre, which he calls constitutive: that the protagonist is a detective, that the main focus of the text is detection, that the mystery at the centre of the plot is difficult to solve and that it is actually solved by the end of the story. These elements are often tested to probe the bounds of the genre, but they also form what Jauss calls the "horizon of expectations" for the readers and authors. The reciprocal relationship of these two groups ultimately defines what is acceptable within the detective story. Dove points out that the conventions are not set up by academics or critics, thus underscoring the popular character of the genre and its position in the literary marketplace. (Dove 98)

The second class of detective conventions is called regulative. These elements "do not define the genre so much as describe it" (Dove 77). Some of them are include:

- The seven step plot structure. It consists of a statement of the problem, usually a murder (in the private-eye story the detective is often employed to solve some other crime, and only later becomes involved with a killing); the first solution, often the most apparent one but also wrong; the complication, which offers evidence that contradicts the faulty solution; the period of gloom during which it seems that the case might not be solved at all, due to a lack of necessary information; the dawning light, when the detective discovers something which points him towards the answer; the solution; and the explanation, when we learn how the detective managed to solve the crime.
- Self-reflexivity. Another element which we frequently encounter in detective fiction is the protagonist commenting on the work of other fictional detectives in different stories. We can find in this convention aspects of meta-fiction, as well as another manifestation of the transformed play. Such references will be lost on an inexperienced reader, but a person

who reads detective fiction avidly may consider it a comment on other games played in the past. It is also a means of breaking the fourth wall by acknowledging, indirectly or otherwise, that the story is fictional.

- Remarkable temporality. The detective genre is specific in that it traditionally tells two stories at the same time, both the investigation which is located in the present, and the murder, which took place in the past. There are also more complex plots, which deal with some crimes committed in the more distant past, as well as the one that is being investigated by the protagonist (e.g. Eco's *The Name of the Rose*). (Dove 77-81)

Dove also lists the efficiency principle which was discussed above. It is worth examining how these conventions work in practice, because both the constitutive conventions described earlier and the regulative ones listed by Dove stem from the works of Edgar Allan Poe. In particular, his short story *Murders in the Rue Morgue* features every one of these conventions, and it is regarded as the blueprint for all future detective fiction. In the story, we are introduced to the eccentric detective and protagonist, Alphonse Dupin, whose unnamed friend is the narrator. Dupin is exceptionally skilled in analytical thinking and lives in 19th century Paris, roughly about the time when the police force is created in that city. The eponymous murders are particularly brutal, but are also exceptionally mysterious, since they have been committed in a locked room on the fourth floor, seemingly impossible to access from the outside. Dupin becomes involved in the investigation and manages to solve the crime. We therefore have all the main constituents of the genre: the detective, a tale of detection, a difficult case, and a solution.

The story is the one which introduced the seven step plot structure:

1. The problem is the murder of two women, a mother and a daughter, about which Dupin learns from the newspaper.
2. The police arrest the most likely suspect.
3. Dupin points out the flaws in the solution offered by the police – the lack of evidence pointing to the man's guilt.
4. The evidence at the scene of crime is contradictory – the neighbours heard voices in different languages, the room was seemingly impossible to access.
5. Dupin finds a hair which he thinks belonged to an animal, rather than a human.

6. He discovers, via placing an ad in the newspaper, that a sailor lost his pet orangutan, which escaped with his razor blade.

7. Dupin offers a full explanation of the murders: the orangutan accessed the room by climbing through the window, killed one of the women with the razor blade and strangled the other, and later escaped.

That is why the noises heard by the neighbours on the night of the murder were impossible to attribute to any one language – they were made by an animal, which was also more than capable of accessing the locked room; Dupin's explanation also accounts for why the murderer left behind several valuables that were in the possession of the victims and in plain sight at the crime scene.

Self-reflexivity is present in the story through Dupin's rather disparaging comments about the work of Vidocq, the founder of the French police. The fictional detective criticises the absence of an overarching investigative methodology which could guide the Parisian constables towards the solution of the crime. Dupin's opinions serve to underline the difference between his mode of "ratiocination", which situates evidence within a larger frame of a logical event, and the policemen's haphazard habit of focusing on individual clues, which prevent the investigators from seeing the forest for the trees:

Vidocq, for example, was a good guesser, and a persevering man. But, without educated thought, he erred continually by the very intensity of his investigations. He impaired his visions by holding the object too close. He might see, perhaps, one or two points with unusual clearness, but in so doing he, necessarily, lost sight of the matter as a whole. (Poe 12)

The comment, and the ensuing explanation of Dupin's analytical approach to solving crime ties in to self-reflexivity in a two-fold manner. The first being the one explained by Dove, and the second making plain the difference between the story of detection and real police work. Dupin distances himself from reality by indirectly admitting that a good piece of detective fiction operates on its own set rules. He explains them to the reader, who is then expected to follow the trail of evidence in order to arrive at the conclusion. It is an admission of the hermeneutic mode of the genre, at its very inception.

Finally, the temporality is simply a part of the plot. Dupin investigates the crime to show us how the events unfolded in the past. Temporality is even more pronounced in one of Poe's other detective stories, "The Mystery of Mary Rogêt". In it, Dupin solves a complicated case of a young woman's murder solely by analysing clues found in the local newspapers. The element of mediating between the discovery of new evidence and the protagonist learning about them only after the publication of the next day's round of press underscores the impression of several linked events taking place at various points in time – the murders, the police investigation, and Dupin's own analysis.

Overall, the influence of Poe's story on the genre as a whole is so great that Dove makes the following statement: "unlike any other genre, the detection formula is based upon a single literary prototype: in a sense, every detective story is a retelling of Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." (Dove 9) We might consider the irony of the author of "The Raven's" fate if we take into account the persisting popularity of the genre he single-handedly codified, since Poe himself lived and died in poverty.

Despite the obvious debt to *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* that all detective fiction authors share, there is a tendency to innovate on the regulative conventions outlined above, since unlike the constitutive ones they can be changed to some degree. The plot structure can be altered, with the reader knowing the identity of the killer from the beginning and then anticipating the detective's explanation (e.g. the popular TV series *Columbo*). The self-reflexivity may take on different forms or not be present at all. The limits of what can be done are defined by the bounds of the genre, which are negotiated between readers and writers. Dove turns to Jauss in order to explain how this process of stretching the boundaries functions in phenomenological terms.

Any innovation introduced to the genre by imaginative authors has the potential to modify the horizon of expectations, provided that it becomes accepted by the audience. The new element distances itself from the horizon, creating "negativity" through a lack of compliance to the established norm. However, if the novelty becomes accepted, it will be reiterated numerous times, according to the principle of repetition and renewal, and form a part of the "henceforth familiar expectation". Dove offers examples to both effects – rejection and incorporation into the bounds of the genre. The former is the "Had I But Known" story, in which the reader is denied clues necessary to the solving of the case, and the latter is the hard-boiled mode, which broke off

from the tradition of classical detective fiction by introducing first-person narration by the protagonist. (Dove 97-99)

Other conventions characteristic of the detective genre are numerous: the dying message, the death warrant, the unidentifiable victim, something bothering the detective, etc. We will not list or explain them all here, because more important than the conventions themselves are their underlying structure and hermeneutic value. Dove claims that only the conventions that are hermeneutically strong become accepted by readers and are subsequently incorporated into the genre, expanding the horizon of expectations. According to him, each successful convention has a deep structure, consisting in anticipation, disappointment and fulfilment. If we take the example of the dying message, which is a crucial piece of evidence regarding the murder provided by a dying character, we see this structure at work. Firstly, there is the anticipation of discovering a vital clue, straight from the person who seems best qualified to offer it. This information is never a plainly stated identity of the killer, but usually a cryptic hint, hard to understand without first knowing several other details. The protagonist does not yet hold the key to interpreting the dying message, and so a period of disappointment ensues. However, over the course of the investigation, enough context is gathered that upon returning to the encoded hint all is made clear. The hermeneutic value of this convention is indeed very strong: the appearance of the dying message invites the experienced reader to search for some way of deciphering the hidden meaning, future clues are further contextualised by possibly relating to the explanation of the message, the challenge cannot be solved yet, but is also guaranteed to have an answer. The deep structure of a strong convention such as the dying message creates additional tension in the experienced reader, calling upon past instances of the same motif in other stories, it drives the desire to continue reading, constitutes an elective task in the transformed play of literary detection, and has the capacity for repetition and renewal through an almost unending variety of possibilities. We also see this deep structure in the seven step plot, and perhaps that is where it was first derived from, as an echo of the main structure. (Dove 88, 104, 110)

The final piece in the puzzle of detective fiction presented by Dove is programming, or what he also calls, a “what-to-watch-for guide” (148). These are cues that help readers to anticipate the strategy of the text. Following Iser’s statement about the relation between text and reader, Dove claims that we are free to input our expectations into the story, but our experience is still guided by our interpretation of the genre. There is a difference here between Iser and Dove,

in that the former attributed the guided interpretation to the text itself, while the latter expands it to the entire experience of dealing with hermeneutically focused detective stories. (Dove 149)

The function of programming is to map negativity and indeterminacy by providing the reader with an interpretative key to later developments. There are two areas that programming affects – the blanks between positions of the text, as well as the present investigation and the past crime. It also influences our general perception – if we come back to the efficiency principle, we see how a reader aware of the convention will be programmed into expecting a longer digression to somehow tie in with the plot. (Dove 149-150)

In his closing notes, Dove offers an analogy of the discussed genre and its playful mode to a game of jackstraws, following Chandler in his *Simple Art of Murder*. We see in the paragraph an analogy for the crucial elements discussed in this chapter:

The game involves terrific effort and a steady hand, but it is completely free of stress: ordinarily it is not played for any purpose other than relaxation. It has picked up a number of conventions during its history, one of which is that the player must not touch the pile with fingers, or anything other than the hook provided. Finally, the game offers optional tasks, which the player may accept or reject: players can, if they wish, add various kinds of jobs on the side just to make the game more interesting. (Dove 189)

Overall, we saw in Dove the insistence upon the structure of a detective story being determined by Gadamer's notion of transformed play. The realisation of this particular mode of being was attributed to the hermeneutic focus in detective fiction, as well as the heavy conventionality of the genre. Certain bounds could not be transgressed for the game to remain in tact, while thematic variety received only secondary importance, but also significant freedom as long as it did not attempt to supersede the hermeneutic structure. A summary of the underlying principles that guide the construction of strong conventions which remain with the genre was presented. We discussed how the entire genre is based on Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*.

At this point, returning to the definition of popular fiction based on Stern's characterisation of "high" art may prove interesting. In the first chapter I have outlined three traits that one might predict to find in "popular" texts: that the characters would fit within social bounds, that the story would be guided primarily by plot and generic conventions, and that

communication with the reader would supersede formal innovations. To an extent, we find all these elements in Dove's characterisation of detective fiction. At the very least, the constitutive and regulatory conventions establish a set of limits, which seem to guard detective stories from straying too far into the territory of the "high" brow. While considering that Stern's definition might be contested, and that my own definition derived from it could also be criticised, there does exist a certain line of commonality between what Dove points out and what we have discussed previously. More light will be shed on this issue when we deal with conceptual models established by embodied cognition.

Dove's study will serve as a basis for the analysis of detective fiction in two modes that will be described in the following chapter. The notion of transformed play can be likened to Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulation, and thus become more ideological than Dove makes it to be. However, the constitutive and regulative conventions might also be seen as cognitive constructs, explained in detail in George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Philosophy in the Flesh*, within an even larger cognitive model of a game. In the cognitive approach we gain a deeper understanding of how Gadamer's concept and Dove's analysis reflect the workings of the human mind. Using the concept of centrality, we will be able to analyse whether adherence or departure from the conventions presented by Dove can predict the literary quality of a detective story.

Chapter 4:

Embodied Cognition and the Detective Genre

Cognitive science is a field of study preoccupied with understanding how the mind works. It includes various disciplines, such as psychology, linguistics, neuroscience, and others. Around the 1980s however, some scientists began to question the paradigms on which, they believed, cognitive science was based. The central notion that came under criticism was the computational theory of the mind, in which our cognitive processes are construed as operations on abstract symbols. This approach presupposes that the mind, just like a computer is an operator which manipulates data, and that all the information it receives is represented within the brain by neural activity. The critics of this idea argued that our notions of the world were not limited to abstract representations in the brain, but that they were fundamentally grounded in our bodily experience, which was the outlook arising from a growing body of empirical evidence. This view came to be known as embodied cognition, and has been espoused by researchers such as Lakoff, Johnson, Turner, Clark, Varela, Thompson and others⁴². The empirical basis of embodied cognition, stemming from various fields of research, means that it is not a discipline itself, but rather, as Shapiro calls it, a “research programme”, guiding some experiments. (Shapiro 2) It is not accepted by all cognitive scientists.

In this chapter I will explore the works of some proponents of embodied cognition, particularly Lakoff and Johnson, and attempt to reconcile their ideas with the subject of literary analysis, especially as it pertains to detective fiction. While a scientific view of the inner workings of the brain remains well outside the scope of this dissertation, Lakoff and Johnson focus on the philosophical and aesthetic implications of embodied cognition, both in their personal work and in their collaborations. In presenting their findings, I will often return to George Dove’s reader-response approach to the detective story. While some discussion of other genres of fiction will help to illustrate how embodied cognition can relate to literary criticism, the main focus of this section will be providing a cognitive reworking of the concepts presented by Dove. Thus, we will arrive at a methodology for novel readings of detective fiction in the

⁴² For a broader overview of the subject, see Lawrence Shapiro’s *Embodied Cognition* (2011). Note, however, that Shapiro misrepresents the positions of Lakoff and Johnson that are discussed in this chapter.

latter part of this dissertation, and gain a deeper look at the interplay between processes described by literary critics and scientific theories about the mind.

There is also the issue of juxtaposing embodied cognition and Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulations and simulacra. As we shall see in this chapter, the findings of embodied cognition are fundamentally at odds with the structuralist notion of the sign. In the latter, all meaning is arbitrary, derived from the opposition of one sign to another. For linguists such as Lakoff meaning is embodied – it comes from our corporeal interactions with the world. Thus, at first glance it would seem impossible to find commonalities between a radical vision of society as the one proposed by the French sociologist and the empirically responsible models created by cognitive scientists. Nevertheless, Baudrillard's insights concerning mass culture remain interesting and productive in explaining one aspect of the reader's interaction with a text which was mentioned in the previous chapter – how we are influenced by the fiction we read.

This chapter is based primarily on George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Philosophy in the Flesh*, Lakoff's *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things*, Johnson's *The Body in the Mind* and *The Meaning of the Body*. Their 1980 collaborative work *Metaphors We Live By* is also the foundation for Lakoff and Johnson's later discussions of conceptual metaphors. While embodied cognition does not constitute all of cognitive science, especially computational cognitive science, I have chosen to use the term "cognitive" to refer to embodied cognition as it is understood by Lakoff and Johnson, who also call it "second-generation cognitive science". (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 74-80) What follows is an introduction to conceptual metaphors, which are at the heart of Lakoff and Johnson's argument.

The cognitive approach to philosophy begins with analysing the basic components of language and thought: conceptual metaphor, understanding one thing in terms of another, not because of any poetic inclinations, but out of necessity. Defining many of the constituents of abstract thought, as Lakoff and Johnson argue, requires projecting them onto much more basic categories in the physical world:

Metaphor allows conventional mental imagery from sensorimotor domains to be used for domains of subjective experience. For example, we may form an image of something going over us or our heads (sensorimotor experience) when we fail to understand

(subjective experience). A gesture tracing the path of something going past us or over our heads can indicate vividly a failure to understand. (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 45)

Lakoff and Johnson describe the mechanisms by which humans internalise metaphors to incorporate them into their understanding of various experiences. Drawing upon multiple studies, they propose the notion of primary metaphors, which form inevitably and in large numbers during childhood, and remain with us through repeated use. Primary metaphors are very basic, e.g. seeing is touching (“she *picked* my face *out of* the crowd”), time is motion (“time *flies*”), knowing is seeing (“I *see* what you mean”), purposes are desired objects (“I saw an opportunity for success and *grabbed* it”), more is up (“Prices are *high*”), similarity is closeness (“these colours aren't quite the same but they're *close*”) etc. (Lakoff and Johnson 52-54)

Primary metaphors are also embodied, according to Lakoff and Johnson, because: 1) they are based on our embodied interactions with the world; 2) the source domains of the metaphors come from the sensorimotor system; 3) they exist in the body in the form of neural connections. (Lakoff and Johnson 54) Here is how Lakoff and Johnson describe the way a primary metaphor is formed in the brain:

A primary metaphor like More is Up arises via a neurally instantiated correlation between (1) a sensorimotor operation (such as a determination of a degree or change of verticality) and (2) a subjective experience or judgement (such as a judgement of degree or change of quantity). The conflation of these two is the simultaneous activation of their respective neural networks.

Neural connections are established in early childhood during such a period of conflation, when the networks characterising the domains are coactivated in everyday experience, as when we pile more books on the desk and their height goes up. The sensorimotor networks perform complex inferences; for example, if something shoots up, it moves upwards rapidly and in a short time is much higher than before. Via the neural connections the results of these inferences are “projected” from the sensorimotor source network (verticality) to the subjective judgement target network (quantity). (Lakoff and Johnson 54-55)

It is visible in this description that the process of acquiring primary metaphors is largely unconscious and begins very early – a child is frequently exposed to processes (like stacking books) that result in specific concepts (as the book pile *rises*, the quantity *increases*), and its brain creates neural connections that link the two together (more is up). A reader who accepts Lakoff and Johnson's argument will swiftly surmise that these types of correlations are all but impossible to avoid. While primary metaphors do not form the entirety of human reasoning, (e.g. sensorimotor experiences are not, in turn, conceptualised through some other domain, but are straightforwardly represented in language), they cannot be relegated to the position of a linguistic or literary “device”. Not only are they central to our understanding of many processes and events in the world, they *constitute* our understanding of subjective experiences that have no other means of being expressed, especially abstract concepts. (Lakoff and Johnson 58-59)

Abstract reasoning is particularly indebted to metaphors and naturally combines various primary metaphors to create complex ones. Consider the example of time as it is understood through spatial relations. In the “Time Orientation Metaphor” the location of the observer stands for the present, the space in front is the future, while the space behind is the past. For example: we have a hard day *in front* of us; that is *behind* us now; the moment of truth is *here*. (Lakoff and Johnson 140)

Philosophy in the Flesh provides several analyses of fundamental philosophical concepts from the perspective of such conceptual metaphors: events and causation, the mind, the self and morality. The key element that these discussions introduce to philosophy—embodiment—is based on proving that conceptual metaphors are intrinsic to domains previously considered in isolation, e.g. pure reason, ethics, etc. A cognitive approach enriches these concepts, but at the same time it robs philosophers of some methodological freedom. To illustrate this limitation, once we accept a metaphorical grounding for the discussion of moral issues (such as physical well-being and cleanliness), it becomes difficult to argue for a “pure” moral reason, which defines all concepts in a universally applicable manner – we know that this reasoning draws upon metaphorical source domains. It is equally implausible to consider morality as arbitrary and unconstrained, because it is plainly grounded in human experience, and therefore motivated to a large extent. Good aspects of morality are conceptualised in terms of physical well-being, such as health, strength, control and wealth, not just any domain that comes to mind, like hardness, density, coolness, etc. (Lakoff and Johnson 330-331)

The claims made in *Philosophy in the Flesh* are not beyond criticism, but the theory of primary metaphor and the heavy use of conceptual metaphors in philosophical discourse are difficult to refute. Even if Lakoff and Johnson's proposals can be disputed on empirical grounds by cognitive scientists operating on the computational theory of the mind (which, likening the brain to a Turing's machine, considers the mind to be disembodied), one must admit that it enforces a certain degree of discursive self-awareness that went largely unnoticed before. It is this awareness that will offer us a new perspective on the properties of detective fiction which were discussed in the previous chapter.

From the many concepts presented in *Philosophy in the Flesh* one idea that can immediately relate to our discussion of the detective genre, and popular fiction in general, are basic-level categories. Lakoff and Johnson describe the process of categorisation as immanent in all living organisms – from primitive animals such as an amoeba, which has no choice but to distinguish food from non-food, through creatures higher up in the evolutionary chain, all the way up to humans. Categorisation is the result of our experiences, and constitutes our experience, not merely describes it. We are incapable of functioning without categories. (Lakoff and Johnson 17-19)

Humans have developed a class of categories, called basic-level categories, which provide a natural fit between what our bodies experience and the most important differences between the entities we encounter in the world. We readily distinguish between examples of such categories, e.g. trains and cars, dogs and cats, elephants, crocodiles, etc. However, if we attempt to move further up or further down in the classification, we may encounter problems. We can tell the difference between one species of cats and the other only if we have made an effort to study them to some extent. It does not come naturally. Conversely, the higher level of categorisation introduces a level of abstraction, in which it is impossible to offer a specific example – there is no prototypical animal, which exhibits the traits of the entire group and no signs of a particular animal. The category is broad enough that its representatives are too divergent. Similarly, there is no basic “vehicle” or “piece of furniture”. In comparison, differences on the basic level are ones which we perceive easily. (Lakoff and Johnson 27)

There exist four characteristics of basic-level categories – I will quote a description of each below and offer an explanation:

1. “It is the highest level at which a single mental image can represent an entire category.” It is possible to imagine a cat or a dog, but it is not possible to have a picture of an animal which does not exhibit the features of any one particular species, an abstract entity that embodies only the traits of an “animal”.
2. “It is the highest level at which category members have similarly perceived overall shapes.” We recognise objects and creatures by their shape, such as the characteristic outline of a cat. There exists no familiar silhouette of an animal. As Lakoff and Johnson observe, the basic level is the highest category which operates on gestalt perception.
3. “It is the highest level at which a person uses similar motor actions for interacting with category members.” We have an established pattern of interaction with a car, or a train, but we do not have one for a vehicle.
4. “It is the level at which most of our knowledge is organised.” It stands to reason that since this is the category of our most basic interactions with the world, we organise our experience using these distinctions. We know a lot about cats or dogs, but not so much about animals in general. (Lakoff and Johnson 27-28)

We can infer from these properties of basic-level categories why it is so hard to arrive at a single, satisfactory definition of phenomena such as popular culture, popular fiction or entertainment. They do not belong to the class of entities which we most readily conceptualise. They are superordinate categories, which exhibit few traits of their own, and are used most often to group together various basic-level entities, such as sports, music, literature, or in the case of popular fiction romance, thrillers, detective fiction, fantasy and science fiction. Therefore, we observe an instinctive tendency to use broad classes without bothering to define them precisely. The problems arising from the imprecise descriptions of superordinate categories which concern us in this dissertation are largely academic. In a community centred around critical responsibility and peer-review it is not appropriate to say something to the effect that “all popular fiction is poor quality” because we can easily find examples to the contrary.

The gap between “low” and “high” culture is a very good example of this phenomenon. We have seen in the previous chapter that the lack of clearly distinguishable attributes in both cases has led theorists to construct definitions based on opposition. There is a very conspicuous parallel here with the structuralist concept of the arbitrary sign. The latter was essentially

meaningless and could only be defined in terms of what it was not. In the case of the superordinate categories of “high” and “low”, “popular” and “literary”, the terms are so broad that they make sense only in opposition to one another. As we have seen, Huyssen called the entire hierarchical debate pointless because it had lost its political relevance – attacks on “high” culture no longer held the potential to disturb the system⁴³. A definition of a certain type of “high” art was proposed by Stern, which provided the possibility of including several basic-level categories while remaining specific enough to still be useful. Nevertheless, by virtue of the essential properties of categorisation demonstrated here, it would be fruitless to become too preoccupied with defining superordinate groups.

On the other hand, we see clearly how it is possible to come back to Dove’s analysis of the detective genre and apply Lakoff and Johnson’s four conditions to it in order to come up with a basic-level category:

1. As per the analysis in the previous chapter, Poe’s “Murders in the Rue Morgue” fits here as a description of the entire category.
2. We have discussed the specific constitutive conventions that give the detective story its particular feeling that separates it from other types of popular fiction: that the protagonist is a detective, that the story is primarily about detection, that the mystery is very difficult to solve, and that we will discover the solution by the end.
3. The specific mode of interaction with detective fiction is Gadamer’s transformed play, further articulated by constitutive and regulatory conventions, as well as the hermeneutic specialisation on behalf of the text and the reader.
4. We easily contrast various genres of popular fiction, and literary fiction in general. The tale of detection is on the same level of categorisation as science fiction, the Bildungsroman, magical realism, tragedy, etc.

It would be much harder to match these cognitive criteria with a category such as popular fiction – there is no one example that stands for all the other representatives. Perhaps the only presupposed characteristic that fits the class would be a vague notion of “fun” which is highly subjective for each individual. We read the genres belonging to the category differently because

⁴³ Which in itself is a superordinate category broad enough to accommodate enthusiastic critics of various persuasions.

each has its own specific focus. Likewise, if we go one level below to the sub-genres of detection, such as hard-boiled, private eye, Golden Age or police procedural all satisfy the four constituent conventions and cannot be conceived of as basic-level categories.

An additional correlation between basic-level categories and Dove's description of detection stories is the insistence on reader specialisation. Throughout his study, Dove argued that much of what makes up the constituent properties of the genre is lost on a reader who has had little experience with detective fiction. The point at which we begin to map the conventions which were discussed in the first chapter relies on the amount of information about the genre that we have come to possess. This is also a property of basic-level categories, as discussed by Lakoff in *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things* (1987): "The point is that the level of categorization is not independent of who is doing the categorizing and on what basis. Though the same principles may determine the basic level, the circumstances under which those principles are employed determine what system of categories results." (Lakoff 1987: 50)

On this point, we find a strong correlation between the reader-response hermeneutic mode of detective fiction and the interactional quality of basic-level categories. On a higher level, the reason why the two outlooks match so easily should come as no surprise, although it is not immediately obvious. Both Dove's study and embodied cognitive science are fundamentally based on empiricism. The former collates the author's knowledge about the prevalence of generic conventions and characteristic traits found in detective fiction, and *then* constructs a model from the works of Gadamer, Iser and Jauss, among others, that is capable of explaining how these conventions work together. The latter makes no a priori assumptions about the world, but departs from gathered evidence in various fields of study, and *only then* makes generalisations. We can assume, although we will not explore this possibility any further, that had Dove prioritised a critical or ideological model over the interactions between author, genre and reader, the compatibility of his conclusions with models described by cognitive science would not have been so plain. This is also the reason why Dove's book is a valuable addition to the study of the genre and popular fiction.

Cognitive categorisation is a different outlook on the process than the simplified approach of an entity either belonging to a particular class or not. The latter might be likened to putting objects into a container or taking them out, which is a binary state. On the other hand, Lakoff (1987) describes the structure of cognitive categories as radial, i.e. having central and

peripheral members. If we go by a study quoted by him, most English speaking subjects identified the robin as a typical representative of the category of birds. Other birds, such as chickens or ducks, were seen as less typical, and some, such as the ostrich were considered poor exemplars. The participants in the study graded the appropriateness of various species on a numerical scale. (Lakoff 1987: 41-42)

Radial membership in a category points us towards a prototyping effect in thinking. People seem to look for best case examples and situate other cases in relation to them. Hence, we may say that Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" is a central representative of detective fiction. Its properties, which are considered standard in the genre, make it a go-to example. However, if being classified as a detective story required all the elements we find in Poe's first Dupin investigation, the genre would be limited indeed, disallowing sub-genres such as the police procedural. As we have seen in the previous chapter, genre membership is not binary. It cannot be likened to, e.g. relations in formal logic. What Dove described as the negotiation of the bounds of detective fiction through innovation is the possibility of more peripheral stories, ones that purposefully subvert or eschew certain regulative conventions, to still be included in the same category. Thus, the hard-boiled first person narration, which would spoil the Dupin stories, as well as many other works of fiction based on it, could enter the genre and become accepted. Note that by properties we are referring here to the conventions described in the first chapter, where it was established that the actual setting, plot and characters were secondary to their hermeneutic function. The prototypicality of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" does not in any way imply that a detective story must take place in the mid 1800s in France or that the main characters must enjoy leaving the house only at night. The conventions of the genre have nothing to do with social themes.

The ideas presented above illustrate the relationship between the genre of detection in general and cognitive models of categorisation. They are another way of describing what detective fiction is and is not, and of defining the centre from which we can only stray so far before we land outside of generic bounds. However, as we saw earlier, a large portion of Dove's discussion concerned the particular "mode of being" of the detective story, the hermeneutic specialisation that gives tales of detection their unique allure. We should therefore attempt to map this reading mode within the cognitive methodology. In Lakoff (1987), what has already been said about categorisation, radial membership and prototyping functions together within

cognitive models. Cognitive models frame our understanding of particular concepts by offering idealised or refined descriptions of conditions within which categories and prototypes operate. We can take the example of days of the week from Lakoff: Monday only functions within a seven-day week, established on the movement of the earth around the Sun, within a year divided into 12 months and 365 days. Within that configuration, Monday is the day that follows Sunday and precedes Tuesday. Cognitive models have properties which can account for several factors, such as categories in which membership is gradual, e.g. height; or has more defined boundaries, e.g. birds; basic levels; interactions between categories; prototype effects resulting in the central position of a particular type; and others. (Lakoff 1987: 56)

Cognitive models can function within other cognitive models, and they can consist of complex clusters of more simple cognitive models. I believe that what Dove described as the special mode of being of detective fiction is a cognitive model of hermeneutics – a structure within which the reader becomes chiefly concerned with the progression of the plot and the solving of the riddle. The transformed mode of play is an unspoken agreement about assuming a cognitive model described by the four constituent conventions of the detective genre, as well as the less important regulatory conventions. Furthermore, I posit that the conventions themselves, due to their strong hermeneutic specialisation, are also cognitive models. It is their clustering within a detective story that gives us the mode of reading based on the structure of play. This interpretation is consistent with Dove's insistence upon the experience of the reader as a precondition for the game of detection to work. Almost every important notion in Dove's work can be re-framed using cognitive structures.

The hermeneutic specialisation of the text, driving us onwards to discover more clues and learn the conclusion of the mystery, which is at the forefront of the cognitive model of detective fiction is explainable with the image schema structure. Mark Johnson comments on the image schema in *The Meaning of the Body* (1987):

A schema consists of a small number of parts and relations, by virtue of which it can structure indefinitely many perceptions, images, and events. In sum, image schemata operate at a level of mental organization that falls between abstract propositional structures, on the one side, and particular concrete images, on the other ... [I]n order for us to have meaningful, connected experiences that we can comprehend and reason about,

there must be pattern and order to our actions, perceptions, and conceptions. A schema is a recurrent pattern, shape, and regularity in, or of, these ongoing ordering activities. These patterns emerge as meaningful structures for us chiefly at the level of our bodily movements through space, our manipulation of objects, and our perceptual interactions. (Johnson 1987: 29)

Classic examples of image schemas, presented by Lakoff and Johnson (1999), are spatial relations between a trajector [TR] and a landmark [LM]. Of particular interest to our present discussion is the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema, described in *Philosophy in the Flesh*. Within this schema, a trajector moves from a source along a path to a goal. There is an actual trajectory of motion, the position of the trajector at any time, its direction and the destination where it arrives, which may or may not be the same as the intended goal. (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 33)

Via the idea of conceptual metaphor, described earlier in this chapter, we are able to fill this image schema with elements of detective fiction. It will work on at least two levels – that of the reader attempting to solve the crime, and the plot itself, in which it is the detective who undertakes the task. The source is the committed crime; the path is everything—evidence, clues, witness statements—that leads us towards discovering who the perpetrator was, how exactly did he murder the victim, and for what reason. The trajector is the main protagonist, and the landmarks are a mystery at the beginning and a solution at the end. We can derive from this a conceptual metaphor of detection as a journey, one which never goes along a straight path. Rather, it meanders through twists and turns as evidence is evaluated, new information appears, and regulative conventions come and go. We can illustrate this with a diagram of the regular schema, and a version adjusted for the inevitable complications required by the detective genre's third constitutive convention, that the crime must be difficult to solve.

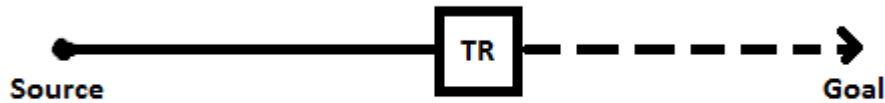


Fig. 1 The SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema. (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 33)

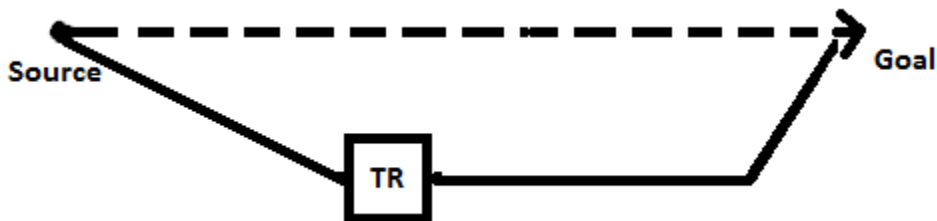


Fig. 2 The SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema likely to be found in detective fiction.

In the second diagram the dotted line is a simple path to solving the crime, often suggested in the form of the most likely suspect. Most often, the detective realises that there must be more to the case, since the evidence does not allow for pursuing the initial lead much further. The solid line represents the actual process of investigation. As Lakoff and Johnson suggested, the path actually taken by the trajector does not need to match the anticipated path. Moreover, it is possible that the trajector changes direction – it is not uncommon for a protagonist investigating the crime to go on a “detour” suggested by some clue, only to later return to the hypothesis outlined at the start. For example, there exists a convention in detective fiction where a suspected killer is apprehended by the police, and while he remains under custody, a second murder with a similar modus operandi is committed. As the story progresses, so does the trajector along its path to the solution at the end. It would therefore be more appropriate to chart the hermeneutic movement in each mystery as an animated diagram, with changes in direction and other complications appearing dynamically, or as a set of diagrams charting each stage of the investigation in order. Such an approach might be a useful way of visualising the phenomena

discussed by Dove, especially if a given mystery is complicated. For the analyses in this dissertation however, these steps would be unnecessary.

This image schema provides the context for our conceptual model and is reiterated in the form of regulative conventions, each of which can be seen as a miniature version of the detective story itself. The deep structure of hermeneutically strong regulative conventions proposed by Dove, namely anticipation, disappointment and fulfilment can also be mapped onto the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema. The success of certain conventions is related to their tendency of being similar to the overall structure of the detective plot. Disappointment, hardship in solving the riddle is an essential part of the game, which cannot afford to be trivial. Yet always there must be the promise of discovering the truth. We might say that detective fiction has a “fractal” structure, with mysteries enmeshed in mysteries and a similar schema at the heart of each riddle. Dove notes that in order for the structure to not become boring it must hold the potential for seemingly unlimited variations. This is consistent with Johnson’s observation in *The Body in the Mind*:

Unlike templates, schemata are flexible in that they can take on any number of specific instantiations in varying contexts. It is somewhat misleading to say that an image schema gets “filled in” by concrete perceptual details; rather, it must be relatively malleable, so that it can be modified to fit many similar, but different, situations that manifest a recurring underlying structure. (Johnson 1987: 29-30)

There is also another similarity between regulatory conventions in detective fiction and cognitive schemata that is particularly interesting. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) argue for a relationship between motor functions in the body and conceptualisation. We have already outlined the case for the embodiment of abstract notions in the form of conceptual metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson present three models for how physical movements can be transposed into higher-level conceptual tasks. In Narayanan’s model, there exists a structure for all motor schemas, which is transposed by means of conceptual metaphors onto mental tasks, especially language. In the article “Embodied Meaning in a Neural Theory of Language”, Feldman and Narayanan explain the guiding principles behind this model:

The central idea behind Narayanan’s model is that the reader interpreting a phrase that corresponds to a motion term is in fact performing a mental simulation of the entailed event in the current context. The basic idea is simple. We assume that people can execute x-schemas with respect to structures that are not linked to the body, the here and the now. In this case, x-schema actions are not carried out directly (as in passing the salt), but instead trigger simulations of what they would do in the imagined situation. This ability to simulate or imagine situations is a core component of human intelligence and is central to our model of language. (Feldman and Narayanan 2004: 4)

Without arguing whether the model is in fact correct or not, we can trace the structure of Narayanan’s motor schema and map it, with small adjustments, to the seven step plot structure of detective fiction, via the metaphor of Detection Is A Journey, as we previously demonstrated on the basis of the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema. The two models, that of the motor schema and of the plot of a classic detective story, overlap easily:

Getting into a state of readiness	>	-
The initial state	>	statement of the problem
The starting process	>	first solution
The main process (instantaneous or prolonged)	>	complication
Options to stop, resume, iterate, or continue	>	period of gloom
A check to see if the goal has been met	>	the dawning light
The finishing process	>	solution
The final state	>	explanation of the solution

Fig. 3 Left: “Narayanan’s Model of Motor Schemas, Linguistic Aspect and Metaphor” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 41); Right: the seven step plot structure of detective fiction.

The conceptual similarities are easy to spot, since apart from the first step of getting into a state of readiness in Narayanan’s model, every other stage has a corresponding phase in the seven step plot structure⁴⁴. While it may seem strange to make such a comparison, it might also

⁴⁴ It might be noted that detective stories sometimes include a short introduction which sets the mood of that particular mystery before the statement of the problem. In keeping with the principle of efficiency, this

be argued that this is precisely the type of correlations that embodied cognition seeks to address. Lakoff and Johnson use metaphorical mappings representing various schemas in order to discuss philosophy. If we assume that Narayanan's model accurately describes most of our motor functions then it becomes clear why the plot structure of detective fiction has endured through countless iterations in short stories and novels – it translates the common structure of everyday processes into problem solving. Perhaps it simply “feels right” to have a complex mystery explained in this manner. There is a sense of satisfaction in selecting the option to resume investigating a difficult case instead of abandoning it during the period of gloom, and in knowing that all the avenues have been sufficiently explored before we arrive at the conclusion. Especially since mental tasks in real life do not always offer us such possibilities. We can imagine that in actual police work the most obvious suspect is quite often guilty, but it may be difficult to find enough strong evidence to sentence him or her in court. Several such cases are described in Jürgen Thorwald's history of forensic science. In various instances, the perpetrator had been arrested with reddish stains on his clothes or shoes, but only scientific advances in analysing blood samples enabled the detectives to ensure that he got sentenced in court. The ability to prove that the blood belonged to the same type as the victim, and did not originate from an animal or the suspect himself, was sometimes enough to elicit a confession.

I believe that Narayanan's model can also be seen as an elaboration of a basic, three-part division that people enjoy making – a beginning, a middle and an end, which is perhaps a schema originating from a primal cognitive model whereby events are structured and discrete. This final quality of distinctness in the world around us brings us back to the necessity of categorisation, but it also points us to another basic cognitive concept, that of figure and ground. A good example of figure and ground is the trajector and the landmark in an image schema. A duality based on focus is indispensable for our ability to perceive: “some choice of figure and ground is necessary. Perception requires a figure-ground choice. We do not perceive scenes that are neutral between figure and ground.” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 198)

This type of duality is also present in literature and it is often fairly obvious. Readers usually have a good idea of what the focus of a given story or novel is. This can be the

introduction hints at the events to come, and might correspond with Narayanan's first stage. Also, from an extradiegetic, meta-textual perspective, the reader often experiences the “getting into a state of readiness” stage by means of blurbs on the front and back covers, and as we shall see in the analysis of P.D. James's *Death In Holy Orders*, by reading the table of contents.

development of a character, as in a Bildungsroman, social categories, such as knighthood in medieval romances, the characterisation of a group of people, as in James Joyce's *The Dubliners*, the conceit of the metaphysical poets, and so on. We know if we are following a character because that character is important, or whether he or she is just a vehicle that lets us explore something else. In some works of fiction the formal aspect is brought to the forefront and the text itself becomes the focus, e.g. in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. It is possible that the figure a reader focuses on is not the one the author was concerned with, or that other readers would follow. This can be the case in specialised readings, particularly in a critical context⁴⁵.

Relating the idea of figures and grounds to the detective genre, Dove's analysis explicitly suggests that the most important element an experienced reader follows is the hermeneutic aspect. Not only the investigation, but also all the elective tasks that a story offers in the shape of regulative conventions. The figure, the trajector in the image schema discussed above, is this progress in the solution of the problem. Other aspects of the text, which in most literary genres would be considered far more important, become the ground. Whether the story takes place in rural England or the mean streets of New York is the flavour, not the substance of detective fiction. And experienced readers do not buy novels because of their accurate portrayal of the lives of British aristocracy in the interwar period, but because they expect a complicated mystery that will be solved by a brilliant detective.

So far, we were able to ground most of the important concepts presented by Dove in cognitive terms from Lakoff and Johnson. However, this does not mean that a cognitive framework would not be able to accommodate other aspects of a detective story. Let us take a closer look at the possibility of discussing the setting of a detective story using some of the cognitive terms presented above. Any literary setting will require certain assumptions on behalf of the reader, as it would be impossible for an author to include absolutely all the necessary information required for presenting a believable world in the text. All readers routinely engage in the activity of filling in the blanks, or creating a cohesive mental image from the available fragments of information actually presented on the pages of a book. This phenomenon has already been illustrated in the previous chapter by Iser and Jauss' concept of negativity – what the reader has to put into the text in order to make it come alive in his or her head. This is also

⁴⁵ E.g. social critiques that focus on the position of specific groups in the fictional world.

called indeterminacy. We might make the case that quite often, the negativity is programmed to require from us a certain world view if a setting is to make sense.

It is possible to rephrase this process to include cognitive models and make the case that the cognitive models required to read a specific novel contain the implicit ideologies which are so often analysed in cultural studies and literary criticism. An author might presuppose that the reader shares his or her beliefs and that they require no explanation. We have touched upon this subject via the efficiency principle in detective fiction – if a technical detail is described we have good grounds to suspect that it will be a necessary clue for solving the crime. It is therefore implied that everything that does not receive this special treatment simply works “normally”. In a detective story, the careful interplay between what we know is normal and what is suggested by the text as deserving attention is what creates the opportunity to solve mysteries.

In other genres, negativity can also be used to create a sense of mystery, but without the promise of a future explanation. Particularly, in magical realism and in fantasy fiction authors do not have to explain why something is possible: how a spell or magic item works, why the setting or characters are so strange. For example, in Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* and *Hobbit* books it is not explained how Gandalf is able to cast spells, we are just told that he is a wizard. We know that there are other wizards, such as Saruman and Sauron, and that they also cast spells. There are characters which possess magical abilities, such as Beren, Galadriel and Tom Bombadil. Certain items, such as the One Ring or Elendil’s sword, can be enchanted or especially made to bear magical properties. But we are never explicitly told how or why magic itself works in that world⁴⁶. Instead, we form our own cognitive models, on the basis of the information presented to us, in which we account for all the necessary factors: what seem to be the limits of a wizard’s power, whether he gets tired from using magic, why are most people unable to have similar abilities, that certain magical skills are hereditary, as in the case of Aragorn, that ordinary humans, dwarves and hobbits are unable to use magic, etc. From the point of view of reader-response theory, if the author were to explain how everything works we would not be as engaged. The lack of precise definitions creates a sense of wonder *within* us, by means of a cognitive model that is intentionally incomplete – we cannot know for certain what can happen, anything is possible. We might call such a mental structure a “model of amazement”, which

⁴⁶ Unless we also decide to read the companion volumes to Tolkien’s two best-known works, such as *The Silmarillion*, from which we learn why Gandalf, Saruman and Sauron are wizards, or rather, that they are not wizards in the same sense that e.g. Harry Potter is.

speaks to a basic capacity we all share at one point or another, and especially in childhood. It is definitely a strong element contributing to the enduring popularity of fantasy fiction and Tolkien's works in particular⁴⁷.

The reader-response notion of negativity derived from the works of Iser and Jauss is also indirectly mentioned by Johnson in *The Meaning of the Body* (2007). However, Johnson goes beyond literary interpretation, into a more philosophical explanation of how the body generates meaning in humans. Expanding on some of the closing statements from *Philosophy in the Flesh* and *The Metaphors We Live By*, *The Meaning of the Body* illustrates the fundamental grounding of aesthetics and art in our corporeal interactions with the world. While Johnson's latest book is based to a large extent on the ideas of the American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey in addition to cognitive science, the conclusions presented at the end of that work strike a chord which strongly resonates with the methodology discussed in this dissertation, and deserves more than a cursory mention. To illustrate my point, I will quote at length the fragments from Dewey's *Experience and Nature* which Johnson brings to the attention of his readers:

A thing is more significantly what it makes possible than what is immediately is. The very conception of cognitive meaning, intellectual significance, is that things in their immediacy are subordinated to what they portend and give evidence of. An intellectual sign denotes that a thing is not taken immediately, but is referred to something that may come in consequence of it. (Dewey in Johnson 2007: 265)

That is to say, difference in qualities (feelings) of acts when employed as indications of acts performed and to be performed and as signs of their consequences, mean something. And they mean it directly; the meaning is had as their own character.... Without language, the qualities or organic action that are feelings are pains, pleasures, odors, colors, noises, tones, only potentially and proleptically. With language they are discriminated and identified. They are then "objectified"; they are immediate traits of things.... The qualities were never "in" the organism; they always were qualities of interactions in which both extra-organic things and organisms partake. When named, they

⁴⁷ It is also present in science fiction and stories of the supernatural, and helps to explain the popularity of TV shows such as *The X-Files*.

enable identification and discrimination of things to take place as means in a further course of inclusive interaction. (Dewey in Johnson 2007: 266)

Johnson's discussion of the implications of the presented statements ties them in with the cognitive frame of reference of "concepts, images, image schemas, metaphors and metonymies" (Johnson 2007: 268) and other notions. He arrives at the conclusion that to construe meaning, we draw upon all our past experiences and future expectations. Therefore, no isolated concept holds meaning in itself, but rather gains meaning due to its connections with what we have lived through before and what we imagine is possible. Johnson claims that meaning is "relational and instrumental" (Johnson 2007: 268). At this point, one might be tempted to draw parallels with the structuralist notion of signs, but this idea is fundamentally different. For one, it is grounded in embodiment – the experiences that Johnson mentions are based on our physical functioning in the world. Secondly, because of this embodiment, meaning cannot be said to be arbitrary, it is always grounded in actual corporeality, which in the history of Western thought has often been obscured by our capacity for abstraction. Hence, the ideas found in *The Meaning of the Body* contradict the structuralist and poststructuralist understanding of meaning, but strongly support reader-response theory, e.g., the following claim by Johnson: "Things and events have meaning by virtue of the way they call up something beyond them to which they are connected." (Johnson 2007: 269)

Let us compare this discussion of meaning inspired by cognitive science and pragmatist philosophy to the discussion of negativity found in Dove:

Negativity makes possible the comprehension that comes about through the reading process; it enables the reader to perceive hidden or implied meanings. It traces out the non-given by organizing things into meaningful configurations; the individual viewpoints of the text have meaning only when linked together. Negativity, then, is the blank sheet on which the "not yet" text is written by the reader, with the guidance of the "no longer" text; it is that which has not yet been comprehended. It involves both question and answer, and it thus becomes the condition that allows us the reader to construct the meaning of the text on a question-and-answer basis. This process provides the meaning

of the literary text with its unique quality, as the reverse side of what the text has presented. (Dove 57)

On the basis of these examples from Johnson and Dove I believe one could confidently state that the two authors are in fact referring to the same phenomenon. In literature, the gap between what we are told and what we end up reading is the very process of meaning-making, fuelled by experience and imagination. Thus, the power of fiction rests in not saying too much, in not presenting dry problems and solutions in which everything is accounted for. This pertains to the intended function of a text, such as the hermeneutic specialisation of the detective story, as much as it does to all the remaining components of fiction: the setting, characters, narration, focalisation, etc. In both cases, the same cognitive process of reading “between the gaps” stimulates the mind and drives our interest. It is the capacity of the text to relate to us, our embodied experience, even in the most outlandish tales of science fiction and fantasy, and the most complicated murder mystery.

Nevertheless, If we are to analyse cognitive models in detective fiction for ideological or social implications, the factors described in Dove should make us wary about confusing the hermeneutic convention for an honest attempt at conveying the author’s opinions about some issue⁴⁸. We might anticipate via the principle of efficiency that in a prototypical detective story all the ideological content would be shallow, but that does not need to be the case. Often, the setting is described in considerable detail, as in the case of the well-rounded prose of P.D. James. There is place within it for characters whose personality, opinions and beliefs are not simply perfunctory. On the other hand, readers are regularly treated to fantasies that are reminiscent of some stereotype which easily evokes an atmosphere the author wanted to convey. The themes encountered in the novels analysed later in this dissertation range from inklings of large, inevitable social transformations, to shallow takes on subjects the writer admits have been gleaned from television programmes. In between, there is a great deal of thematic matter that we shall explore.

⁴⁸ I contend that this is a key problem facing critics who focus on one ideological aspect of fiction, e.g. the representation of social groups or classes. In a detective story a character must always combine two roles at the same time: a hermeneutic function and a social one, with the former taking precedence over the latter. There is the risk then, of putting one’s efforts into over-analysing a shallow figure that serves an entirely different purpose than it might seem at first glance.

Perhaps a good way to judge the skill of a detective fiction author is considering the way he or she has been able to marry the generic conventions required from a good tale of detection with a well-crafted setting. After all, what Dove mentions as the propensity to include material which would be unacceptable in any other type of fiction need not be so well-pronounced in every book. However, the fine art of balancing hermeneutic specialisation with a believable world has its limits, and we should expect that authors set out to write in the convention of their own accord, very likely just as fascinated by the game of detection as their readers. Like figures in chess, the characters we encounter in the novels may be masterfully crafted of exotic materials, but they remain pawns, knights and bishops, whose movements are cast within preset boundaries. And without knowledge of the rules, we may get caught up in a rather pointless analysis.

I believe that embodied cognition enables us to draw some tentative conclusions about not only detective fiction but also the reader-response criticism that we have seen in Dove's study. There is a strong grounding of the popularity of detective fiction in cognitive processes that bring us pleasure. It would be wrong to say that people read such an inordinate amount of detective fiction because they are endlessly fascinated by death, or that they enjoy the conventionalised settings of rural England and urban America. These factors are important, especially in the hands of a skilled writer, but the game of detection which Dove describes relegates them to the back seat. We have seen that the rules which readers and authors adopted for this game reflect a basic model of human activity within the context of problem solving. Therefore, the pleasures derived from the constitutive and regulative conventions are at least two-fold: the conceit of a neatly-solved, difficult riddle at the end, and an undercurrent of suspense flowing from an unconscious, cognitive model which dictates the inevitable progression of the structure while reading takes place. It is small wonder that compelling descriptions and ingeniously crafted plots coupled with such a strong, underlying structure continue to produce bestsellers some 170 years since Poe wrote "Murders in the Rue Morgue".

Perhaps, then, it was inevitable that literary scholars would finally map the secrets of this ascent of the detective genre. Nevertheless, I believe that to find such strong similarities between embodied cognition and reader-response criticism as it is seen in Iser, Jauss and Dove deserves special mention. That the idea of negativity has been developed by critics independently of any turn in the dominating scientific discourse – and embodied cognition still cannot be called that –

at a similar time as structuralism became exceedingly fashionable in the humanities, speaks to the notion's value. One of the most prominent factors that make Lakoff and Johnson's work convincing is the fact that it is based on empirical evidence gathered from a spate of academic disciplines. I believe that negativity in literary criticism is yet another piece in the larger puzzle of our cognition. To my knowledge, it has also not been explored as such, despite a strong body of work which crosslinks literary studies with embodied cognition⁴⁹.

In summary, this chapter presented several ideas taken from cognitive studies and contrasted them with the reader response methodology discussed by Dove. There are many similarities that enable us to position the mechanisms of detective fiction within the larger framework of embodied cognition. Image schemas and cognitive models ground our experiencing of the detective story in embodied interactions with the world. Radial categorisation explains how the genre is able to draw upon the same set of conventions invented by Poe and re-imagine them in ways that are innovative while remaining within well-established bounds. Finally, the cognitive methodology offers us a means of taming the radical philosophies of Jean Baudrillard, whose ideas are useful in explaining several phenomena surrounding detective fiction. By juxtaposing these two modes of thinking we will be able to determine whether Baudrillard's radical brand of poststructuralism competes with an empirically responsible alternative as a tool for examining cultural phenomena, or whether it addresses issues that would be difficult to explain using embodied cognition.

⁴⁹ One of the most popular of these is Peter Stockwell's *Cognitive Poetics* (2002), which is a general introduction to embodied cognition for students of literature. A more recent, extensive overview article is Margaret Freeman's "Cognitive Linguistic Approaches to Literary Studies: State of the Art in Cognitive Poetics" (2009), available at: http://www.researchgate.net/profile/Margaret_Freeman/publication/228300186_Cognitive_Linguistic_Approaches_to_Literary_Studies_State_of_the_Art_in_Cognitive_Poetics/links/00b49519e48f5ca89a000000.pdf (accessed 07/17/2015).

Section Two:

Analyses

In this section, I will analyse a selection of modern detective stories, written by popular authors. All of the material discussed here has been adapted for television or the big screen in the form of series or feature films. Almost all Adam Dalgliesh mysteries by P.D. James appeared on TV, as did the Jackson Brodie novels by Kate Atkinson. The final analysis features Thomas Pynchon's most recent novel *Bleeding Edge*. Pynchon is popular to the point that *Inherent Vice* has been made into a film release, and his latest work has strong ties with the hard boiled detective tradition.

In order to fully employ the analytical tools described in the previous chapters, it will be necessary to provide a close reading of the selected texts. Therefore, unlike some critics dealing with detective fiction (including Dove), I will make no attempt to conceal the identity of the killer or the intricacies of the plot for any of the books. Should the reader feel inclined to peruse the novels analysed in this dissertation, he or she would be advised to do so before proceeding any further. The hermeneutical drive to discover more with each page will be utterly spoiled otherwise, as will the joy of reading the texts with a fresh mind.

Chapter 5:

A Traditional Detective Story – *Death in Holy Orders* by P.D. James

*Death in Holy Orders*⁵⁰ is a 2001 novel written by the acclaimed author of detective fiction P.D. James. It can be examined as a classic tale of detection, but the depth of characterisation and an evocative setting also make it a candidate for a more thorough reading. James' novel does an excellent job of combining the hermeneutical mode of detective fiction with literary quality, utilising various layers of description to underpin a central motif of transience. Many of the characters in *Death* need to let go of the past to salvage a future, and some have that chance brutally taken away from them. Others still live lives of resignation and welcome death as a release.

P.D James was one of the best-known contemporary British crime writers, and she continued to practice the craft until her death in 2014. Interestingly enough for a discussion of literary quality in detective fiction, P.D James saw the genre as an avenue of expression for “serious” novelists:

[I] saw the writing of detective fiction with its challenging disciplines, its inner tensions between plot, character, and atmosphere, and its necessary reliance on structure and form as the best possible apprenticeship for a serious novelist. Perhaps the chief reason why I am glad to have these three early books reissued in hardcover is that each was a landmark in my gradual realization that, despite the constraints of this fascinating genre, a mystery writer can hope to call herself a serious novelist. (Bargainnier 1981: 109)

James wrote in a formal, well-mannered and realistic style, with the focalisation centred on one of the characters and the narration always remaining in third person. There is much observation of detail, especially in terms of clothes that characters are wearing, but also on a psychological level. The sort of descriptions we are presented with should be expected, since most of the time we follow the protagonist, who, being a brilliant detective and a keen observer

⁵⁰ Thereafter also referred to simply as *Death*.

would naturally pick out the important minutiae which could tip the scales of an investigation. Although James is not sparse with words the descriptions are not particularly overdone, with no element taking centre stage at the cost of others. The reader will swiftly recognise the care that was put into the craft of writing, but should not be fooled into thinking that the intention was only formal – the balanced nature of the prose allows James to conceal some of the thoughts of the characters which might spoil the mystery. Nevertheless, in *Death* there are few intentional cases of omission, and the reader can participate in the ongoing investigation on fair terms with the main character. I will provide a synopsis of the plot in order to employ the cognitive methodology based on Dove's *The Reader and the Detective Story*. Focusing on the regulative conventions of the genre will allow us to see how much happens in the space between text and reader. In the latter part of the analysis we will focus on the themes and motifs presented in the novel, and subject them to a Baudrillardian reading.

5.1 The Structure of the Mystery and Generic Conventions

Death in Holy Orders reintroduces a well-known protagonist familiar to readers of James' works – Adam Dalgliesh, an officer at New Scotland Yard, who progresses in rank throughout a series of novels which began in 1962 with *Cover Her Face*. Dalgliesh is the son of an Anglican parson, a background which serves him well in *Death*, which takes place at St. Anselm's theological college, a fictional institution for training young candidates for the Anglican priesthood. The college is located on the coast of East Anglia, near Norwich but administratively under the care of the Suffolk police. In the novel, Dalgliesh is already a Commander, a senior officer whose squad is renown for solving difficult cases of murder. His ties with St. Anselm's go back to childhood – the young Adam used to take his summer vacation there. Dalgliesh is summoned to the office of his superior in New Scotland Yard to meet a powerful businessman, Sir Alred Treeves, whose recently deceased son, Ronald, was an ordinand at the college. The verdict of his death was accident, but Treeves receives an anonymous note suggesting foul play. Deciding to investigate the matter further he visits the Metropolitan police and manages to convince Dalgliesh to revisit the case. The latter accepts to go to St. Anselm's since he is planning a holiday in the area. Expecting to find little else than was already established at the inquest performed by the Suffolk police, Dalgliesh's foremost care is spoiling his fond memories of the

college by experiencing it again as an adult. In keeping with the Detective on Holiday convention, however, his peaceful, if rather uncheerful stay at the college is interrupted by the brutal murder of a visiting Archdeacon.

Overall, there are three murders which take place during the plot of *Death*, in addition to the suicide of Ronald Treeves, the circumstances of which Dalgliesh decides to keep to himself. All three deaths are connected by the person of the killer and the motive for the main murder of Archdeacon Crampton. Throughout the novel we are presented with a broad cast of characters who are described in good detail, although never to the detriment of the advancement of the investigation. I will begin this analysis by outlining the plot, which will reveal several regulative conventions of the detective genre at work. They can be perceived as cognitive models based on the image schema discussed in the second chapter. After assessing the presence of these conventions, it will be possible to evaluate the novel's membership within the radial category of detective fiction by determining its closeness to the prototype. While *Death* was chosen for the first analysis because it closely matches the classic image of a detective story, it does contain elements that are not necessarily standard, which will be discussed later.

The novel begins with a journal entry, which provides the context for the events that are about to transpire. The diary's author is Margaret Munroe, an older nurse who took a job at St. Anselm's college due to a heart condition which prevented her from continuing a more demanding job at a retirement home. She writes the journal at the encouragement of one of the resident priests, Father Martin Petrie, who advises Margaret to commit to paper the shocking experience of discovering Ronald Treeves' body in order to ease her mind. In addition to the discovery of the unfortunate ordinand Margaret is also a childless widow, whose only son was killed by the IRA while serving in the army. Like many victims in detective fiction, her life is made to be sad enough that readers will not regret her death at the very beginning of the tale.

Although this is not immediately apparent, the journal is the presentation of the problem in the seven step plot structure, because it contains hints of all the information that will be necessary for solving the "main" murder of the Archdeacon later on: the identity of the killer as well as his motive. It is, in fact, a piece of evidence without which the case would have been hopeless, since Margaret Munroe is the only person at the College apart from the killer who is privy to secret information regarding the inheritance of a large fortune.

The journal describes Margaret's discovery of the neatly folded clothes of one of the ordinands on the beach. The beach near St. Anselm's is surrounded by low cliffs which are constantly being eaten away by the sea. Due to this, the area is always in danger of falling sand and rocks, a peril which is known by everyone at the college. At other points in the story several characters mention that in 20 years time the sea will advance enough that the college and the cottages around it would have to be abandoned. This underpins the strong theme of transience and its inevitability which permeates the novel. St. Anselm's had been founded in the 19th century by a rich aristocrat to provide elite education for future members of Anglican clergy - as the Church of England succumbs to social shifts in the perception of religion, its traditions can no longer be upheld in the same manner as before; it must change itself or disappear. Margaret notices that the cliff wall besides the clothes had collapsed, and when she digs into the sand, she discovers the body of Ronald Treeves. Very soon she is joined by George Gregory, who teaches Greek at St. Anselm's. He notices the woman and helps her uncover some of the body. He takes off his gloves to feel Ronald's pulse and declares him dead. They call the priests from St. Anselm's, as well as the police and an ambulance. The scene of the young man's death is not disturbed any further.

In the final entry of the journal, Margaret writes that a recent delivery of leeks by the college's handyman, Eric Surtees, made her remember something connected with the day when she discovered the body. This unexplained event happened 12 years ago. The memory unsettled her to some degree and she decided to talk to the "person most concerned". The conversation, undescribed but mentioned, dispelled her troubles. After that final entry we are presented with the scene of Margaret's murder, which, while described from her point of view, does not reveal the killer's identity - all that we know is that she knew him before. Margaret Munroe is declared by the doctor to have died from natural causes. Her weak heart is said to have been expected to stop at any time. No clues are left at the scene - the journal is taken by Father Martin, who is curious to discover what the woman wrote, and the furnishings of Margaret's cottage are removed by her sister. Her body is subsequently cremated, preventing any possibility of further investigation after Dalgliesh arrives at the college.

The character of Margaret Munroe and her journal combine two regulative conventions of the detective genre, namely the death warrant and the dying message. In the first, a person who has valuable information to reveal to the police is invariably found dead before he or she is

able to disclose it. Undoubtedly, had Margaret stayed alive, she would have been able to hasten the investigation to a significant degree, providing that Dalgliesh would succeed in obtaining the vital information during an interview⁵¹. Her death is necessary to prevent the case from being too simple to solve. On the other hand, the dying message convention, described in Dove's study, introduces a clue leading to the identity of the killer, left by the victim. The clue never makes sense at first glance, but holds the promise of revealing more information in the future. In *Death*, Margaret does not call the police to promise any evidence, but the reader knows she has important information before her death is described. In a similar, if mild twist, the dying message is not at the scene of crime – it is not written in blood or left in a typewriter sitting on some office desk. Rather, it is given to Dalgliesh by Father Martin who had taken it prior to the investigation headed by the New Scotland Yard Commander. Margaret Munroe's journal suggests that there is evil in St. Anselm's at the very beginning, but the main murder takes place halfway through the novel. It is the reader's experience with solving mysteries in detective fiction that might clue them into the conclusion which Dalgliesh draws only after the death of the Archdeacon – that all the deaths are somehow connected.

After Margaret's death, Dalgliesh meets with Sir Alred Treeves and decides to visit St. Anselm's during his vacation in Norfolk. Dalgliesh first meets with the Suffolk police in order to learn about everything that was discovered during Ronald Treeves' inquest. The local sergeant tells him about the rather peculiar circumstances described in Margaret Munroe's journal, but also adds that unless Ronald was trying to climb the cliff for some unfathomable reason, he would have to remain in place purposely letting himself be buried alive. Therefore, the verdict should perhaps have been left open, but the death was ultimately declared an accident. Dalgliesh then makes his way to St. Anselm's. He expects to meet none of the staff which he got to know in childhood, but to his surprise the previous Warden, Father Martin Petrie, still resides at the college. During his investigation he is introduced to the other inhabitants of the isolated community, the resident priests, the staff and a few of the ordinands. The circumstances of the

⁵¹ In the TV adaptation, Margaret Munroe is alive when Dalgliesh comes to St. Anselm's but does not tell him what she knows, and is murdered when he departs to London before the killing of the Archdeacon (a trip that does not take place in the novel). This is probably a decision on behalf of the screen writer that was aimed at circumventing the necessity of showing the contents of the journal. Otherwise, a flashback would have been necessary. The fact is worth mentioning because if we assume that the journal is the statement of the problem then the desire to make the plot more presentable on screen disrupts the seven step plot structure which should hold a special appeal to audiences.

young man's death are exactly as described by the Suffolk police, but Dalgliesh learns that Ronald was not liked by the other ordinands. He discovers that the closest person to Treeves was Margaret Munroe. He also receives her diary from Father Martin. It is impossible for Dalgliesh to delve deeper into the circumstances of Munroe's death, and a brief talk with her doctor reveals that she had a faint heart and died of a stroke. Since there was no evidence to suggest otherwise, no one considered the possibility of foul play.

We might describe this period of Dalgliesh's initial investigation of Ronald Treeves' death, before the arrival and murder of the Archdeacon, as the first solution suggested by the seven step story structure. The Commander learns little apart from the discovery of Margaret Munroe's diary, but this plants the seed of doubt in his mind. The person who found the dead woman, Mrs. Pillbeam, also informs him that not everything about Margaret's body seemed normal to her. The corpse was seated in a chair with a pair of glasses on that would suggest Mrs. Munroe had been watching TV, but the set was off. In addition, the woman was holding her knitting in her lap, but she had no pattern in front to guide her hand, which Mrs. Pillbeam claims was odd, since the pattern was very complicated. Therefore, if Margaret Munroe had in fact been knitting before she died, she would have had a different pair of glasses on, and a pattern in front of her. However, there is no longer any way to gather more evidence about the death, and Dalgliesh simply makes a mental note about it – foul play could not be entirely excluded. The reader, who already knows that the woman was murdered would like the “case” to continue, but before Crampton dies, there is little that Dalgliesh can do to learn more.

The next step in the plot, the complication, is the murder of the visiting Archdeacon, Michael Crampton, who is disliked at the college. Crampton believes that St. Anselm's should be shut down, and that it is unfair that a small group of priests and ordinands live in relative luxury. The founder of the college was rich, and furnished the place with an expensive decor. The church is equipped with an original painting by Rogier Van Der Weyden hanging above the altar. The piece itself is invaluable, but might be sold for millions of pounds. Also in the church is a medieval *Doom* painting, found at the beginning of the 20th century in a local barn, which Father Martin likens to the *Wenhaston Doom*, and suggests that it had been painted by the same monk⁵². The priests use expensive silver Eucharistic elements donated by the college founder. There is a cellar filled with excellent wine, and the staff is more than enough to serve the functioning of St.

⁵² Father Martin also claims the picture was painted around 1480, but the real *Wenhaston Doom*, which is an authentic pre-Reformation work of art is dated to the 16th century. A shared author would thus seem unlikely.

Anselm's. Crampton believes that all this lavishness distracts the ordinands from the teachings of the Gospels, and makes the college an ill-fitted place for training priests who are to go out to the real world and deal with the problems of normal people. In addition, the Church of England is going through financial troubles and the officials are looking for various ways to save money. The Archdeacon would like to sell the expensive artifacts, close the college and move the ordinands to other, bigger institutions around the country.

The fact that Crampton is opposed to the very existence of the college provides a motive for many characters, but his situation is made even worse by the fact that he had persecuted one of the resident priests for molesting children, to the effect that Father John Betterton was sent to jail for three years. The senior ordinand, Raphael Arbuthnott, the only surviving descendant of the line of the college's founder, who was very close to Father John believes that the accusations were false, and that the Archdeacon showed a ruthlessness against a fellow priest that amounted to treachery. The handyman, Eric Surtees, who lives in one of the cottages at St. Anselm's also hates Crampton for his desire to close down the college. For him, living in this remote place offers everything that he needs – he is able to work in the garden and keep pigs. Once every few weeks he is also visited by his half-sister, with whom he shares an incestuous relationship. During a visit to Surtees' cottage, Crampton strongly suggests that Eric's arrangement is temporary, and that he should start looking for another home. Surtees is the only character in the novel who is revealed to hate Crampton without any of the other characters knowing about it: "He knew that what he was feeling for the first time in his life was hatred for another human being" (James 2001: 111). Yet another person who has a history of enmity with Crampton is a police officer who is visiting the college to regain his peace of mind, Inspector Roger Yarwood. Yarwood investigated the suicide of Crampton's wife, who had been mentally unstable. The Inspector found a couple of clues which convinced him that the Archdeacon's spouse did not die of her own will – the bottle holding the wine she had imbibed to swallow a lethal dose of aspirin was wiped clean of any fingerprints with a handkerchief stuck beneath a pillow; during an interrogation Yarwood discovered that the Archdeacon had known about the handkerchief, although he claimed that he had not approached the bed. The persistent Inspector continued to pester Crampton after the case was closed, which led him to being reprimanded. Now, after suffering through a divorce, Yarwood visits St. Anselm's to rest, not knowing that Crampton is also there.

Overall, the reader knows that the Archdeacon will be murdered, being told so in the list of contents. However, the actual killing only takes place around halfway through the novel, and by that time there are only a few characters who could not have a possible motive. The situation is further complicated prior to the murder itself, when Dalgliesh visits the college's solicitor in Norwich. The conversation reveals that according to the founder's will, if St. Anselm's were to be closed, the estate should be divided among the priests who work there. Raphael Arbuthnot, the sole descendant, cannot inherit anything because he is not legitimate by English law, and this is one of the conditions put forth in the document; his mother never married and left her child at the college after he was born, while the identity of the father remains unknown. Considering that the implications of Crampton's murder would almost surely bring about the closing of St. Anselm's, the will is a vital piece of information. Therefore, at the end of Book One, all of the Fathers at the college become suspect, excluding perhaps Martin Petrie who is over 80 years old and would have a great deal of trouble committing the murder in the way it is described. The entirety of this situation is only known to the reader, not the protagonist. What Dalgliesh points out and the reader is likely to miss, is that Margaret Munroe worked at the same hospice where Raphael's mother died of cancer, although she began her job only a month after Clara Arbuthnot passed away.

It is difficult to judge whether Dalgliesh's visit to the solicitor should be classified as the complication in the seven step story structure, largely due to the disproportion in the knowledge possessed by the reader and the protagonist. We know that Crampton will be murdered from the very beginning, while Dalgliesh only knows what has already been described in the plot. For the Commander, the news about the will poses a challenge, however at that point he has little to investigate, and still feels as if he is taking a vacation. For him, the more likely point of complication would be the murder. And certainly what follows after that event is a period of overwhelming gloom.

This is an interesting instance of negativity – we know more than the protagonist and we are interested to learn what he will discover⁵³. This brings us back to the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema, as it was applied to detective fiction in the second chapter. We might draw up two separate schemas, one of which would represent the progression of the investigation undertaken

⁵³ One of the most famous TV detective series, *Columbo*, was also based on this type of negativity. In it, viewers waited not for the solution, as the murders were shown at the beginning of each episode, but for the explanation of the solution provided by Peter Falck's character.

by the protagonist, and the other would be the facts gathered by the reader. The latter schema would be a representation of the conceptualisation taking place in the reader's mind, while the former would simply illustrate the plot. The main difference between the two is the trajector. In the first schema, the trajector is Dalgliesh and his progress towards discovering the truth behind the happenings at St. Anselm's. In the second schema, the trajector is the reader's understanding, on a gradual journey along the path to the solution of the mystery. Therefore, the disproportion in the information possessed by the two parties creates two schemas of the investigation mapped as a journey of a trajector along a path of evidence to the goal of solving the mysteries, ie. the deaths of Ronald Treeves, Margaret Munroe, Archdeacon Michael Crampton and Agatha Betterton (killed later in the novel).

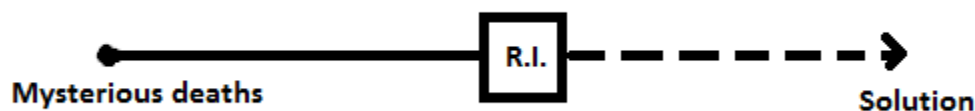


Fig. 1 “R.I.” stands for the reader’s investigation, the totality of the conceptualisation of the events of the plot and how they lead to the solution; the line represents all gathered clues and evidence.

Conceptually, it is important to note that the reader expects the solution to encompass all the mysteries, which in the case of James’ novel are the deaths mentioned above, as well as any smaller events that arouse any questions that might be related to the crimes. It would feel unsatisfying to have no explanation for some aspect of the plot if it seems relevant to the detective’s activity. The hermeneutic specialisation breeds a sense of fulfillment from a thorough explanation of the mysteries – in a detective story readers are motivated to expect a tying of all loose ends. It might be said that this is an effect of the principle of efficiency presented by Dove, whereby a detective novel does not contain much, if any, redundant information. This aspect will be explored in other analyses in addition to this one.

If we look at the schema in figure 1, we might draw up similar visualisations for each mystery contained in the text, e.g. what exactly were the circumstances of Ronald Treeves’ death, why is the visiting researcher Clive Stannard nervous throughout the investigation, what did

Margaret Munroe remember when she got the leeks from Eric Surtees, etc. By virtue of the hermeneutic specialisation of the novel several threads in the plot operate on the same schema as the plot itself, in a type of “fractal” structure. Consequently, we might expect to find few plot elements that do not share this mental model.

The schema for the progression of the plot would look similar except for the trajector, which would be substituted by the protagonist. In addition, the deaths that occur later on, about which Dalgliesh has no idea before they happen, i.e. Archdeacon Crampton and Agatha Betterton, would also change the destination, from understanding how exactly Ronald Treeves died to solving multiple murders. While Treeves’ suicide is a separate case from the three killings, Dalgliesh would not have been able to discover why the young ordinand ended his life without the investigation brought about by the tragic demise of Michael Crampton.

Before the Archdeacon is murdered, he has an argument with Father Sebastian Morrel about the removal of the works of art from the college prior to its closing. Crampton is a trustee of the college and he knows about the will. He wants to clear St. Anselm’s of valuables that might be sold to support the Church. During a sermon at Compline, the Archdeacon presents his opinions about the role of a theological college in modern society to all the priests and ordinands. He makes it plain that St. Anselm’s should be closed. After his sermon Crampton wants to relax before going to bed, but he is unable to do so. There is a fierce storm raging outside preventing walking or jogging, and the shared room with a TV set is occupied by Stannard and Crampton decides against watching the news. He retires to his cottage, where the lack of any stimulating activity reminds him about the death of his first wife. We learn that while the woman did in fact kill herself, Crampton discovered her lying in bed while she was still alive and did nothing to save her. He wanted her to die because her unstable mental condition continued to cause trouble for him and his parishioners. He picked up the bottle of wine and then decided that he should wipe the fingerprints from it, in order to tell the police that he did not approach his wife when he saw her lying in bed. He simply left the house to visit some meeting and came back much later when she was already gone. Crampton later asked a paramedic whether it would have helped if he had called an ambulance knowing that the woman had poisoned herself, but he was assured that the dose was too high for any help to be possible. This did not suffice to fully clear his conscience, and he continued to feel guilty about his lack of action and ill intentions, aggravated

by the suspicions of Inspector Yarwood. Lying in bed, the Archdeacon receives a phone call on his mobile, dresses himself and leaves for the church.

While Crampton wants to close the college, his motivation for doing so is understandable, and even the priests at the college expect this to happen sooner or later. However, in keeping with a convention of detective fiction mentioned by Dove, the murder victim should not be made into an object of pity and regret. The additional background concerning the death of Crampton's wife serves to deepen his character and make him less innocent than he would have been otherwise. We see this also in the case of Margaret Munroe, who is presented as a widow in poor health whose only child died years ago. Her state is such that in the description of her murder she relinquishes life: "She knew that this was death but she felt no fear, only an immense surprise and a tired acceptance. To struggle would have been useless, but she had no wish to struggle, only to go easily and quickly and without pain" (James 2001: 42). Munroe however is unique among the victims in the story in that her life was not tainted by sin, as is the case of Crampton, Treeves and Agatha Betterton. We will return to the issue of sins which lead to greater evil in a discussion of the themes of the novel, but at present it is sufficient to say that her character is simply in such a sorry condition that her murder does not inspire many negative emotions, despite the act itself being a gross transgression. As we shall see, many of the characters in *Death* are tormented by their past, and this might be seen as tying into the structure of the investigation schema – we learn about some problem that a character is suffering from, and by discovering why this is the case we earn a certain sense of satisfaction stemming from explanation.

The Archdeacon's body is discovered by Father Martin Petrie at 5.30 AM. Father Martin is yet another poor soul wrecked by memories of his distant past. Having fought in the Second World War, he was taken prisoner by the Japanese and witnessed the beheading of a man he had loved. The recent events at the college have caused this memory to resurface in vivid nightmares which cause the priest to wake in the night. Seeking comfort in the college church, he makes his way there only to discover the body of Archdeacon Crampton. In addition to the horror of the killing, Father Martin notices that the illuminated *Doom* painting has been vandalised. Someone painted a beard and a set of glasses on one of the devils to make it resemble the Archdeacon. The shocked priest rings the church bell and collapses besides the body. The call is heard by a visiting lecturer of English literature, Dr Emma Lavenham, and Commander Dalgliesh.

Due to the location of the murder, the matter should be administratively overseen by the Suffolk police. However, it swiftly turns out that Inspector Yarwood who would be best suited to take over the case is missing from his cottage, and so it falls onto Dalgliesh to head the investigation. This is the moment in which the convention of the detective on vacation is played in full. While Dalgliesh did visit St. Anselm's to look into a past case, he was able to do so at his leisure, but now the Commander becomes tied up with regular work in the form of a murder investigation. He calls his team from London and in the meantime makes sure that the scene of crime is safe from tampering. No one at the college, apart from the people who found the body, i.e. Father Martin, Emma Lavenham and Dalgliesh himself, is allowed to see the body.

The murder is brutal – the Archdeacon has been mauled to death with a heavy brass candlestick, taking several blows to the head. In combination with the defaced painting the scene of crime is presented as both sinister and sacrilegious. The police manage to discover fingerprints next to the Doom, as well as some disturbed dust in one of the closed pews. The brunt of the evidence, however, is discovered through questioning the residents of St. Anselm's. Dalgliesh's team take fingerprints from all the residents at the college. Inspector Yarwood is found in a ditch, with lacerations caused by thick vegetation. He is unconscious and cold, but still alive. He is taken to a hospital where he will be questioned after making his recovery. In this segment of the plot, we experience the period of gloom. There are several leads to follow before the dawning light appears and slowly but steadily begins to make sense of all the crimes that took place at St. Anselm's.

The first clue is revealed by the second wife of the Archdeacon. Mrs. Crampton wants to see the body of her husband and Dalgliesh takes her to the church. They then talk about Crampton and the Commander is interested in the call which the Archdeacon had received that supposedly led him to visit the church at night. The call was made from a phone in the college, but it is impossible to tell how the caller could have learned Crampton's number. His wife tells Dalgliesh that a few days ago she received a phone call from someone at the diocese asking for her husband's number. After the call is traced the police discover that it too was made from inside the college. Mrs. Crampton leaves and Dalgliesh and his team continue to question the residents of St. Anselm's.

Raphael Arbuthnot admits to not being in his room during the night of Crampton's murder. He was attending to his friend, Peter Buckhurst, in the infirmary. The latter is stricken

with fever and terribly afraid of storms. Raphael kept him company and then slept in the same building. He was not expected to have been at the college at all, since he received leave from Father Sebastian to visit the first mass of a newly ordained acquaintance in a nearby parish the next day. During the questioning, Raphael suggests that he is the only one who might logically have wanted the Archdeacon to die. He makes his hatred for Crampton clear, alluding to the persecution of John Betterton and some information about the Archdeacon's wife that he received from Yarwood on that evening. Dalgliesh however is sceptical, since young Arbuthnot has no recollection of visiting the church or murdering Crampton. The conversation is merely an indication that Raphael is troubled by all the events that have transpired at the college.

The fingerprints taken at the church are identified as belonging to Clive Stannard, the visiting researcher who claims to be interested in the everyday life of tractarians. Stannard is summoned for questioning. He is very nervous, and confronted with the information about the marks he had left at the scene of crime, he admits to being in the church during the argument between Sebastian Morell and Archdeacon Crampton. Stannard is secretly looking for the St. Anselm papyrus, a document gifted to the college's founder by her atheist brother, who was an archeologist. It is said that the papyrus contains an order from Pontius Pilate to remove the body of a political troublemaker from a tomb. It is difficult to say whether the papyrus is a fake because it was never examined using modern methods, and few people are even aware of its existence. Stannard does not know that the papyrus is kept by Father Martin, according to the founder's will, which states that the artifact is to be looked after by the Warden of St. Anselm's and only passed to his successor when the current custodian dies. Stannard was checking for a secret hiding place behind the Doom when Morell and Crampton entered the church. He hid inside the box pew, disturbing the layers of dust within. Dalgliesh suggests that Stannard was able to take a carving knife from the kitchen and kill the Archdeacon. When the researcher vehemently protests, Dalgliesh is led to believe that Stannard is an unlikely suspect, since Crampton was killed with a candlestick. Stannard is yet another character in James' novel who is marked by sin – abusing the goodwill of the Fathers in order to seek a document which might bring him fame and fortune.

The breakthrough in the investigation comes from Dalgliesh's hunch, another staple of detective fiction. When something is troubling the protagonist the reader can expect it to be very important for the solution of the mystery. The Commander forms a vague suspicion that all the

deaths in St. Anselm's are somehow linked. Therefore, he does not abandon his inquiries about Margaret Munroe's past and the event she mentioned in the last entry of her journal. Dalgliesh sends his two officers, Kate Miskin and Sergeant Robinson, to the retirement home at which the deceased woman used to work, and where Raphael's mother, Clara Arbuthnot, died. The pair are given a contact to one of Munroe's coworkers, who also attended to Clara. After some persuading and stating that they are working on solving a murder, they receive the information that is crucial to pushing the investigation forward. Before dying, Clara Arbuthnot summoned Raphael's father and they were wedded in secret. There were only three people who knew about this, apart from Clara and her husband: the priest, who is long dead himself, and two witnesses, one of which was Margaret Munroe. The woman who tended to Clara Arbuthnot was asked to be the first witness, but she had also suggested that Margaret seek a job at the hospice. It was the day of Munroe's interview when the marriage took place, and since Margaret was a friend of the first witness, she obliged to be the second. While the woman interviewed by Miskin and Robertson has no recollection of the husband's name, she does remember that he had a peculiar trait in that the top of his right ring finger was missing. This information points to George Gregory, the Greek teacher at St. Anselm's, as the husband of Clara Arbuthnot and Raphael's father. The importance of the news is that according to English law and an Act that was passed in the 1970s, the young Arbuthnot was now the heir of everything at the college from the moment it ceased to function. It also connects Gregory with Margaret Munroe's death – she was reminded of the wedding by seeing pictures of newlyweds in the newspaper the leeks were wrapped in, and when she had found Ronald Treeves' body and Gregory took his glove off to feel the pulse, she also realised that the Greek teacher was Raphael's father. It was him that she had spoken to on the day that she died. While this is not enough evidence to convict anyone for the death of the Archdeacon, it does open a new line of inquiry.

Thus, the dying message from the beginning of the novel reveals its secret meaning, offering Dalgliesh the clue that he needed to pursue the case further. From this point, the rest of the mysteries begin to fall in place. Before any conclusion is reached, however, a new body is discovered in the wine cellar, that of Agatha Betterton. It is revealed that the old woman took on the habit of stealing wine from the cellar, probably unaware of the fact that her mischief did not go unnoticed by the other residents. The priests, concerned for her safety, installed new lighting along the stairs in order to prevent her from falling down. The position of her body suggests that

she was pushed from the top of the stairs. This is the final death in the novel, and it would feel unnecessary from the point of view of the hermeneutic structure, if not for the fact that it draws the reader's attention away from the main investigation for a brief moment when everything starts falling into place. It might plausibly be argued, however, that instead of serving a specific function – a complication before the solution is reached – Agatha Betterton's murder is intended to underpin the bleak setting. She is not particularly mourned by anyone apart from Raphael Arbuthnot, with whom she shared a passion for theatre. The thematic significance of this death for the motif of transience which pervades the novel will be discussed in more depth further in this chapter. Agatha's past, revealed by Emma who sorts through the dead woman's belongings at the behest of Father John, is a strong accent which adds to the gloom permeating this Adam Dalgliesh mystery.

Dalgliesh and his team decide to confront George Gregory with the information about his wedding. They learn that Raphael had been kept in the dark by his father, who was waiting for a good time to reveal the truth to his son. Both Gregory and Raphael would have been suspects in the murder of the Archdeacon, but Raphael's ignorance, proven when the ordinand is summoned to Gregory's cottage, suggests that greed could not have been his motive. Since Crampton wanted to sell the artifacts belonging to the college including the Van Der Weyden painting and the 15th century *Doom* before closing St. Anselm's we know that a potential heir might be interested in stopping him. It would be far more beneficial for the person inheriting the estate if all the works of art remained part of it. Thus, the evidence points towards Gregory, who might have wanted to kill the Archdeacon in order to ensure that St. Anselm's would be closed, and to prevent the premature moving of the priceless artifacts. While this constitutes a strong motive it does not implicate Gregory in the murder. When combined with Margaret Munroe's final diary entry before her death, the motive becomes an even stronger possibility. But Gregory is able to claim that Margaret had a weak heart, and there is no evidence apart from the journal to suggest foul play.

The subsequent breakthrough in the investigation is the questioning of Roger Yarwood, who awakes at the nearby hospital. The Inspector left his cottage on the night of Crampton's death after a tense confrontation with the Archdeacon concerning the suicide of his wife. Yarwood suffers from claustrophobia and panic attacks, and that evening he ran outside into the storm in a dazed state. In the conversation with Dalgliesh he reveals that during his confused

wandering he saw Eric Surtees entering the building which contained the keys to the church. However Yarwood also claims that if either he or Eric Surtees wanted to kill Crampton they could simply walk into his cottage and dispose of the Archdeacon there. None of the cottages intended for the guests have any locks installed and the Inspector does not believe that Surtees would have gone through all the trouble of luring Crampton into the church to commit the murder.

The next step is interrogating Surtees and his half-sister. The former admits to stealing the keys to the church and entering it with the intention of taking a consecrated wafer for Karen. When he entered the church he saw that it was not empty. There was a figure dressed in a brown cloak of the kind worn by St. Anselm's ordinands standing near the Doom. At that point, Eric heard a voice sounding like the Archdeacon's shouting for the figure to reveal himself. Eric decided to abandon his clandestine quest and left. He buried the keys to the church in his pig pen. Dalgliesh is curious about the attempted theft of a consecrated wafer and summons Karen Surtees for questioning. Since Eric claims that the wafer was another one, Dalgliesh inquires about the circumstances of taking the first one. Karen says that she is a journalist writing an article about the black mass, and that she infiltrated a group who asked her to bring a consecrated wafer. Instead of buying a pack of ordinary wafers, she takes her task seriously. During her last visit to St. Anselm's she talks with Ronald Treeves and manages to convince him to steal a wafer. In return, Karen has sex with the young man, who is still a virgin. Treeves believes that Karen loves him, but he later discovers her in bed with Eric. He dies the next day. Ironically, Karen Surtees loses the consecrated wafer she received from Treeves, and on her next visit she talks Eric into getting another one.

The questioning of Eric and Karen Surtees clarifies the matter of Ronald's death, which was Dalgliesh's original purpose for coming to St. Anselm's. Karen feels no remorse for what she did, but to Dalgliesh the matter is obvious. An adopted son, Treeves could never hope to achieve as much as his father, a billionaire and the owner of a large firearms corporation, with ties in politics and enormous influence. Therefore, Ronald chose the path of priesthood which could grant him privileges that Sir Alred would never have – the power to absolve others from their sins. Ronald was unhappy at the college, unable to fit in with the other ordinands. Inexperienced in love, he was used by Karen Surtees to commit a sacrilege which would forever mar his future career as a priest, a grave offense against his God, and a breach of trust that would

get him expelled from St. Anselm's if he ever confessed it to one of the Fathers. To make matters worse, Ronald could have no certainty that Karen would not use the knowledge to blackmail him in the future. In despair, the young ordinand decided to kill himself. The ideological outlook on this situation presents the reader with Karen's barbaric insensitivity towards something that is sacred to Ronald. Dalgliesh is unable to condemn her entirely, because from her perspective she simply does what she thinks is best. She cannot imagine that young Treeves would kill himself for something so insignificant as a wafer. For her, the wafer is only important because it helps her to obtain good material for an article. From an official perspective, there can be no punishment for Karen Surtees. And since she denies any responsibility for Ronald's death, even seeing herself as having done him a favour by helping him to lose his virginity, we can safely assume that Karen will not end as one of the other tormented characters James pictures in her novel.

Nevertheless, Dalgliesh comes closer to the truth by discovering that the killer had worn a brown ordinands' cloak. Since all the cloaks have name tags and have been accounted for, the only option remaining is the cloak of Ronald Treeves. A call to the Treeves estate confirms that the family did not receive any cloak in the parcel with Ronald's belongings, but they discover that Father John Betterton was responsible for preparing the package. During questioning he reveals that he had seen Ronald have sex with Karen Surtees on the beach, and that the young man's cloak was stained with semen. Father John decided against sending it to Treeves' family and instead washed it and hanged it on its peg after removing the name tag. Hence, it turns out that the cloak is missing. Dalgliesh and his team find the garment inside one of the washing machines. It is not completely washed, since the killer turned the machine on at night and the noise woke up Father Peregrine who switched the device off. This is yet another piece of circumstantial evidence which condemns George Gregory. He always relied on Mrs. Pillbeam to do his laundry and was therefore unaware that Father Peregrine was sensitive to the noise and forbade the ordinands from using the machines at night. The water in the washing machine contains traces of blood and the sample along with the cloak is sent to London for examination. Dalgliesh orders his team to keep watch over Gregory and goes to London to ensure that the crime lab gives this case priority.

Human hairs are found on the cloak, and their DNA matches that of George Gregory. After two days Dalgliesh returns to St. Anselm's in order to participate in the arrest. He does not

want to leave the matter to his team because the last case on which he worked ended with the killer evading justice, and Dalgliesh seeks closure through actually making an arrest. Gregory is found on the beach, and when he sees the police officers he walks to the end of a groyne and jumps into the cold sea. His intention is to swim to his death and avoid prison. Dalgliesh jumps after Gregory and an inflatable boat is brought to the shore to save both men. They are pulled on deck but, in a final twist of suspense, the boat capsizes. Despite this, everyone is saved and the killer is arrested. This event ends the solution section of the plot, which began after the circumstantial evidence pointed towards Gregory's guilt in ways that are hard to deny for a reader of detective fiction. The lab results are still necessary to prevent the murderer from escaping a prison sentence, which is still possible with a good lawyer.

The explanation of the solution is presented in Gregory's words by means of a letter he sends to Dalgliesh from prison. Raphael's father decides to plead guilty in order to avoid eventual problems for his son, who might become suspect if Gregory managed to defend himself in court. The motive for the Archdeacon's murder was closing St. Anselm's college and making sure that Raphael Arbuthnot could inherit the estate. In Gregory's words:

People who, like us, live in a dying civilization have three choices. We can attempt to avert the decline as a child builds a sand-castle on the edge of the advancing tide. We can ignore the death of beauty, of scholarship, of art, of intellectual integrity, finding solace in our own consolations. And that is what for some years I have tried to do. Thirdly, we can join the barbarians and take our share of the spoils. That is the popular choice and in the end it was mine. My son's God was chosen for him. He has been in the power of those priests since he was born. I wanted to give him a choice of a more contemporary deity – money. Now he has money, and will find that he's unable to face giving it away, not all of it. He will remain a rich man; time will show if he remains a priest. (James 2001: 537-38)

Gregory explains the murder of Margaret Munroe and Agatha Betterton. The former had nothing to live for but possessed information which could ruin Gregory's plan. Agatha Betterton saw him on the night of the murder when he went to return the church keys. She later assured him that she had no intention of informing the police about what she had seen because she also hated the Archdeacon, but he decided to kill her anyway in order to prevent the eventuality that

she would change her mind. The brutality of Crampton’s murder is explained by the adrenaline Gregory felt after dealing the first blow. With this letter in his pocket Dalgliesh returns once more to St. Anselm’s in order to meet the remaining college Fathers. The Warden, Sebastian Morell, whom Gregory hoped to destroy with the scandal for some old grudge, is getting ready for a prestigious chair at an unnamed university. Father Peregrine will take up the position of archivist at a library in Rome. John Betterton is moving to Scarborough, while Martin Petrie is settling in Norwich with the Pilbeams to help him. Raphael gives Eric Surtees the cottage which he was occupying. The Van Der Weyden painting will become an altar piece at some other, suitable church. Nothing is said about the vandalised *Doom*. The final piece of the puzzle presented in the novel, the St. Anselm papyrus, is burned by Father Martin in a little fire on the beach. The priest does not care for ascertaining the document’s authenticity, which seems unlikely. He is concerned that the manuscript, fake or real, might become another Shroud of Turin and divide people, driving some away from the Church. Raphael Arbuthnot goes on to become a priest. At Father Martin’s behest, Dalgliesh decides to establish a relationship with Dr. Emma Lavenham.

Thus, according to the principle of efficiency and the prediction we made earlier, all loose ends are tied and the mysteries which drove the plot and the reader’s interest are explained. While lengthy, the presented synopsis focused solely on presenting the hermeneutic elements of James’ novel. We have seen that the plot structure matches the seven step formula customary to the genre:

Step:	Reader:	Dalgliesh:
1. statement of the problem	death of Treeves and Munroe	death of Treeves
2. first solution	Treeves died in an accident	
3. complication	visit to solicitor	Crampton’s murder
4. period of gloom	everybody has a motive, there is no other evidence	
5. the dawning light	Clara Arbuthnot married George Gregory	
6. solution	Gregory killed Crampton, Margaret Munroe and Agatha Betterton; Ronald Treeves committed suicide after stealing the wafer for Karen Surtees	
7. explanation of the solution	Gregory’s letter to Dalgliesh	

In the above comparison we see the disparity between what the reader and Dalgliesh are allowed to know in steps one and three. Both the protagonist and the reader share the same information in all remaining steps, although Dalgliesh only discovers that Margaret Munroe was suffocated via Gregory's letter, while the reader knows this from the description at the beginning of the novel. We can be sure that every structural convention is satisfied as well: Dalgliesh is a detective; the story deals with his investigation; the mystery is very difficult to solve and Gregory's guilt is almost impossible to prove conclusively; every secret is revealed to the reader by the end of the novel and the solution is comprehensive. If we substitute the seven steps of the detective plot with Narayanan's Model of Motor Schemas, Linguistic Aspect and Metaphor, presented in the second chapter, we find an even closer match for the reader's conceptualisation of the events in the book, in chronological order:

1. **Getting into a state of readiness:** we know that the Archdeacon is going to die from the blurb on the back cover and the list of contents; the novel begins with Margaret Munroe's journal which tells us about the death of Roland Treeves; Dalgliesh is summoned to the office of his superior and agrees to investigate Ronald's death for Sir Alred.
2. **The initial state:** after the final entry in Margaret's journal we read a description of her sudden death. Treeves is dead. Dalgliesh is heading to investigate. The Archdeacon will die during Dalgliesh's visit.
3. **The starting process:** Dalgliesh speaks with the Sergeant in Suffolk, arrives at the college and begins to investigate Ronald's supposed accident. He receives Margaret's journal from Father Martin and becomes suspicious about the circumstances of her death.
4. **The main process (instantaneous or prolonged):** Dalgliesh learns about the will of St. Anselm's founder and discovers that several people might be interested in the college being shut down. It is stated several times that the scandal surrounding young Treeves' death puts St. Anselm's in a precarious situation. Thus Dalgliesh begins to uncover the main element of Gregory's scheme before Crampton's death.

5. **Options to stop, resume, iterate, or continue:** the Archdeacon is murdered. Dalgliesh is no longer on vacation – he has to take the case because Yarwood is conveniently absent. The main process is reiterated, but this time with an expanded purpose, finding Crampton’s killer.
6. **A check to see if the goal has been met:** Miskin and Robinson’s visit to the nursing home uncovers the truth about Clara Arbuthnot’s marriage to George Gregory. Surtees confesses to seeing a cloaked figure in the church on the night of the murder. Agatha Betterton is killed, and her death rules out the unlikely possibility that the murderer came from outside the college.
7. **The finishing process:** thanks to Father Betterton, the cloak is found in the half-empty washing machine. Dalgliesh takes it to the laboratory in London and receives confirmation that the hairs found on the garment belong to George Gregory. Dalgliesh returns to the college to participate in his arrest. The struggle on the beach ends in Gregory’s capture.
8. **The final state:** the murderer confesses to his crimes in order to save Raphael from future trouble. His letter to Dalgliesh explains the deaths of Margaret Munroe and Agatha Betterton. He admits to sending the note to Sir Alred in order to raise more trouble for the college with a new investigation. Dalgliesh decides against telling Sir Alred about the real circumstances of Ronald’s death – he believes that if the matter was so painful to the young man, it should remain a secret. The final visit to St. Anselm’s reveals the future of the college’s residents and artifacts after the institution closes. The papyrus is burned and Dalgliesh begins a relationship with Emma Lavenham, allowing himself to finally put the matter of his wife’s death to rest.

Narayanan’s model presents a more accurate image of the conceptualisation of the novel than the seven-step plot structure outlined above because it accounts for the reader’s expectations by means of introducing the “getting into a state of readiness” point. As a matter of course, not everything about the way we interact with a novel can be contained by the plot, but in the case of *Death in Holy Orders* P.D. James telegraphs the information about the Archdeacon’s death, which takes place two hundred pages in the text, before we even read the first chapter. This has

an added hermeneutical value of encouraging the reader to look for clues prior to the murder itself.

The relation between Narayanan's model and the structure of the novel is interesting because it is not uncommon in detective fiction to include such information in the blurb to convince the reader to pick up the book. The practice is equivalent to trailers in cinema and can be found in all popular media, but in detective fiction it serves an additional function, prompting us to look at the presented events in a different light. For example, we have seen earlier that many characters might have a motive to kill Crampton before he arrives at the college. Later on the situation worsens – he gets into an argument with Father Sebastian and Inspector Yarwood. This might alert the reader to pay closer attention to these characters, but a seasoned fan of detective fiction will go the opposite way and look for suspects who are less likely. Thus, the game, or transformed play we discussed in chapter 2 begins as soon as we begin reading.

Several regulative conventions that reflect the investigation schema are present in the novel: Dalgliesh's vacation, which soon turns to work when Crampton is murdered; the dying message of Margaret Munroe, incredibly cryptic and central to the discovery of the killer's identity; the death warrant, disclosed openly in Gregory's final letter: "The first, the suffocation of Margaret Munroe, was a necessity. It required little planning and her death was easy, almost natural. She was an unhappy woman who probably had little time left, but in that time she could have done damage. It didn't matter to her whether her life was shorter by a day, a month or a year. It did matter to me" (James 2001: 538).

In addition, *Death In Holy Orders* features numerous other motifs characteristic of the genre which are not "mini-investigations" but which help to reinforce constitutive conventions. The first example which comes to mind is that the antagonist is extremely clever, arrogant, and has a complex plan, which is reminiscent of other "evil genius" types, such as Professor Moriarty from Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories. George Gregory's persona offers a worthy adversary for Dalgliesh, ensuring that the latter will not have an easy time figuring out the case. Thus, a Commander from New Scotland Yard who heads an elite team dedicated to solving complicated murders faces a teacher at an elite theological college. Both are intelligent and both are well-acquainted with the realities of St. Anselm's. Dalgliesh has to work hard to put Gregory to justice during the investigation and the arrest, when they are both at risk of dying in the cold sea. The killer's intelligence allows him to play psychological games with the protagonist,

arousing the detective's pride. The culmination of their novel-long duel at the beach encapsulates the ego-driven nature of their rivalry. Gregory is at the edge of the groyne intending to jump, and Dalgliesh contemplates the anger which swells inside him at the thought, stemming not from the murders themselves, but from the fact that he is being played:

This overpowering emotion had an additional and more primitive, more ignoble cause. Gregory had planned the murder and carried it out when he, Dalgliesh, was sleeping within fifty yards. And now he planned to complete his victory. He would swim out to sea content in the element he loved, to a merciful death by cold and exhaustion. And he planned more than that. Dalgliesh could read Gregory's mind as clearly as he knew Gregory was reading his. He planned to take his adversary with him. If Gregory went into the water, so would he. He had no choice. He could not live with the memory that he had stood and watched while a man swam to his death. And he would be risking his life not out of compassion and humanity, but out of obstinacy and pride. (James 2001: 527)

In his letter from prison Gregory admits openly to being entertained by the opportunity to pit his wits against Dalgliesh: "I could hardly have imagined that [Gregory's note to Sir Alred Treeves] would bring to the college the most esteemed of Scotland Yard's detectives, but your presence, so far from deterring me, added challenge to expediency" (James 2001: 538) In so far as murder can be considered an intellectual challenge, which in detective fiction it invariably is, the two opposing sides in *Death In Holy Orders* are given equal resources.

Another aspect of James' novel that is not based on the investigation schema but instead underpins the constitutive conventions is generic self-referentiality. We have seen this in the discussion of Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue", when Dupin commented on the work of the Parisian Police. In *Death*, the reference is made to Dame Agatha Christie, at least twice. The first is while Dalgliesh's squad are discussing the murder of Crampton, and Kate suggests that the "leeks" in Margaret's diary could be a play on words, meaning "leaks". Piers Tarrant vigorously opposes the idea: "For God's sake, Kate, that's pure Agatha Christie!" (James 2001: 298). The second instance of referentiality to Christie occurs during a telephone conversation Dalgliesh has with Gregory, when he summons the teacher for questioning. Gregory claims that he has no intention of running away because he is excited at the prospect of participating in a murder

investigation. Dalgliesh informs him that Emma Lavenham is not as enthusiastic, to which Gregory responds by suggesting that the difference in their attitudes comes from her actually seeing Crampton's body: "Without that visual impact of horror murder is surely an atavistic frisson, more Agatha Christie than real" (James 2001: 364)

The significance of these references, apart from being a traditional part of the detective genre is at least twofold. Firstly, it reminds the reader that they are reading a book and playing a game. Kate's comment might reflect the speculation of an intrigued reader, and Tarrant's criticism pinpoints the origins of such ideas. "This is not Christie's book, look elsewhere!" he might be saying. The irony, of course, is that the actual clue from the journal, while not as contrived, is still unfathomable without the correct key. Dalgliesh visits the headquarters of the newspaper in which the leeks were wrapped in order to obtain a copy from the previous week, hoping to find something that might relate to the investigation. However, it is only after Miskin and Robbins learn about the secret marriage of Clara Arbuthnot and George Gregory that the squad realise the connection was with pictures of newlyweds. That type of clue would not feel out of place in a Poirot mystery.

The second layer of the reference, which is more likely to appear to an untrained reader who has little experience in reading detective fiction is the emphasis on realism. It might be summarised in the following way: perhaps detective fiction is fun, but murder is horrifying, and the killing that took place in this novel is a grim experience for everyone who actually saw the body. The purpose of this reference is to reinforce the reader's engagement by provoking a psychological reflection on what it must be like to witness the body of a murdered human being. Hence, there exists a paradoxical duality in the self-referentiality that is so characteristic of the genre. In cognitive terms, we might fall back on the idea of cognitive models - the reference calls upon two different contextual frames. One consists of the readers' experience with detective fiction and their enjoyment of the hermeneutical mode which drives such stories. The other is our understanding of murder in real life. For the majority of people, this latter cognitive model was built almost entirely out of fictional knowledge as well, although the information would be taken from various media. Even among fans of detective stories persons who have been somehow involved in a murder investigation must be extremely rare.

Perhaps it is this dual nature of intra-generic referentiality that makes this a popular element in detective stories. The purpose it serves for strengthening the constitutive conventions

of this kind of fiction is underlining the primary focus of the text. On the one hand, it reminds us that we are dealing with a literary imagining of a crime, and that there is a game going on between the text and the reader. On the other hand, it reminds us why we should care by recalling the poignant nature of the investigated crime. In that regard, it might be said that self-referentiality functions in a unique way in the detective genre, and that the manner in which the reference is made is not without meaning. In the examples from *Death*, Piers's comment is decidedly more playful than Gregory's. James's choice is telling if we consider the role of the two characters.

So far we have seen that the elements of cognitive methodology outlined in the third chapter work well together with the reader response approach suggested by Dove. The analysis of *Death in Holy Orders* has provided us with several possibilities of exploring the structure of the game of detection, along with opportunities to investigate some aspects of what happens at the conceptual level when we read detective stories. This has provided us with a basic example of the genre that is close to the prototype of Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue", and now we will be better equipped to discuss alterations to the formula in other novels, and the reasons for which they are made. Before moving on to other titles, let us first consider James's text in a more traditional fashion by examining its themes and motifs. It should now be easy to spot the concessions that the author needed to make to satisfy the requirements of the genre. However, by analysing the contents of the novel rather than the underlying structure we will also be able to take advantage of the second portion of the methodology discussed in this dissertation, introducing elements of Baudrillard's philosophical outlook.

5.2 A Baudrillardian Reading of Themes

The primary motif which seems to construct the atmosphere of *Death* is transience. In the title of this chapter I have quoted from the book of Ecclesiastes, because of its emphasis on temporality which seems to be the main subject explored in the novel. Beginning with the setting itself, we are introduced to a college built on a receding coast, facing the inevitable prospect of being washed away by the cold sea. Indeed, the site of St. Anselm's used to be located next to a village called Ballard's Mere which has since been swallowed by the unyielding waves. Margaret Munroe's diary mentions the bleak ambience of the windswept coast:

The sea is eating away the sandy cliffs year by year and sometimes I stand on the edge looking out to sea and can imagine a great tidal wave rearing up, white and glistening, racing towards the shore to crash over the turrets and towers, the church and the cottages, and wash us all away. The old village of Ballard's Mere has been under the sea for centuries and sometimes on windy nights folks say it's possible to hear the faint ringing of church bells from the buried towers. (James 2001: 7)

We can remember Dove's observation about the unusual temporality present in detective fiction, but James's novel surpasses the mere distinction between a murder in the past and an investigation in the present. It sets the events of the book within a much larger scope of not only the passage of time but also the inevitability of the changes that will take place because of it. The unreal sound of church bells ringing from the depths of the sea echo the swan song of a legacy embodied by St. Anselm's college. Archdeacon Crampton is not the only person who knows that the institution will have to be shut down. Perceived as a fancy of a rich woman, the converted Victorian estate and adapted church contain luxuries that are at odds with the onslaught of efficiency brought about by a modern world. Indeed, the ordinands do not need the Rogier Van Der Weyden painting of the Holy Family, nor the 15th century *Doom* to make good priests in the future. However, the claim that these artifacts distract them from matters of faith, and that the priceless collection should be sold off to a museum, is depicted as crass. In the eyes of the Church of England, the opportunity to appreciate beauty seems not to be a factor in the shaping of young minds, or, at the very least, it is seen as superfluous, too good to be true. But what will

remain of a Church that barter its heritage for continued survival? In the end, James does not deny a future for the ordinands and priests of St. Anselm's, but the closing of the college marks the disappearance of an age in which the Church could afford to foster values outside of the common sphere of everyday life.

We might venture to claim that the change in perception necessitated by economic conditions reflects the overall decline of symbolic meaning. The simulated importance of money overcomes the remnants of the age of representations, in which the metaphysical gave a secret life to the image. We might quote Baudrillard: "In this passage to a space whose curvature is no longer that of the real, nor of truth, the age of simulation thus begins with a liquidation of all referentials - worse: by their artificial resurrection in systems of signs" (Poster: 167)

But there is another layer of this shift in attitudes which is markedly ideological. The Church of the past was governed by conventions which no longer fit a modern society. In his conversation with Sir Alred Treeves, Dalglish is asked about the Nicene Creed. Treeves does not understand why people in today's time should follow rules created many centuries ago. His argument questions the possibility of a divine inspiration that might have guided the bishops at the Nicean Council: "It was a council of men, wasn't it? Powerful men. They brought to it their private agendas, their prejudices, their rivalries. Essentially it was about power, who gets it, who yields it. You've sat on enough committees, you know how they work. Ever known one that was divinely inspired?" (James 2001: 28) Treeves's point is thoroughly utilitarian. In a Baudrillardian view, the very idea that the Council might have been inspired by God is proof of an added level of meaning, going beyond what is visible, reaching towards the symbolic and its search for truth. In *Death*, the characters who understand and appreciate this hidden significance are contrasted with those who do not. Ironically, the killer purports to belong to the former group, but representatives of the latter are not without fault – Karen and Eric Surtees cannot seem to grasp the ephemeral sacral quality of their surrounding reality and it leads to tragedy. Thus, we see a marked juxtaposition of worldviews and sensibilities that reflect the successive recession of symbolic exchange value described by Baudrillard in his *Towards a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*.

Gregory's decision to murder Crampton is motivated entirely by economic calculation – he perceives the Western civilisation as decadent, losing its ability to appreciate beauty and art and decides that if the order of values has to change it is better to join the winning side and

partake in the gains. Since he himself is old, he wants to give his son a privileged position in the new world by providing the young ordinand with the fortune of his ancestors. This is somewhat at odds with the likely intention of Clara Arbuthnot in marrying Gregory, which looks as if it was a last moment attempt to redeem herself for abandoning Raphael as an infant. We never learn what she really thought, we are only told about her likely motivation by Gregory during the questioning concerning the marriage. Clara mentioned to him that she wanted to take the largely spurious vow for her son and the marriage only makes sense in the context of the legal change that permits Raphael to inherit the St. Anselm estate by making him legitimate. The other reason is her purported discovery of God. Perhaps then she was buying peace of mind in the face of death, whereas Gregory, motivated by arrogance wanted to make a profound impact on his son's life despite utterly failing him as a father. In both cases, however, the contrast is clear – use value, money, is used to replace symbolic exchange value i.e. parenthood, with its inevitable upsides and pitfalls, the unconditional sharing of one's life. The further effect of this substitution is the objectification of the son, reduced to a category which is operated upon in the system of signs. In the eyes of his biological parents Raphael is not really a person but rather a guilty conscience, which Clara seeks to appease and Gregory wants to control. The boy is raised by the priests of the college, which further reinforces the materialistic vs symbolic distinction present in the novel.

An interesting aspect of the impure intentions guiding the actions of Raphael's parents is that they are the underlying cause of the murders at St. Anselm's. It would not be out of place to call Clara's doomed attempt at redeeming herself by offering her son the possibility of inheriting the family fortune the original sin at the heart of *Death in Holy Orders*. This is particularly interesting because it must be deliberate on James's behalf – we could hardly imagine the author crafting such a complex mystery without considering the central plot element with exceptional care. Therefore, the decline of symbolic exchange value which is a fundamental process in Baudrillard's oeuvre also finds itself occupying a prominent position in James's novel. Since this is a story of detection, we would be hard pressed to find a more deserving place for a guiding motif than the origin of the murders. The death of symbolic exchange value takes on a quite literal form in the novel – because Raphael can be reduced to use value, the victims can be deprived of their lives in order to enable Gregory's plan to work. The killings are calculated, not borne out of affect, which would be more likely in real life. This brings about the detective mode

which makes no effort to refer to anything outside of the scope of the investigation. Thus we are faced with a literary representation of the process of the suppression of the real described by Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation*, although exploring this particular poststructuralist theme was probably not the intention of P.D. James.

On the surface, there seems to be no harsh judgement of the general shift in priorities brought about by modernity, which is reflected by Dalgliesh's thoughts after learning about Karen Surtees's role in the death of Roland Treeves:

He felt a profound pity and an anger which seemed directed against something deeper and less identifiable than Karen Surtees and her insensitivities. But what right had he to feel anger? She could claim her own kind of morality. If you promised a consecrated wafer you didn't cheat. If you were an investigative journalist you took the job seriously, conscientious even in deceit. There had been no meeting of minds, there never could be. It was for her inconceivable that anyone would kill himself for a small disc of flour and water. For her the sex had been little more than a relief from boredom, the satisfying power of initiation, a new experience, the lightly taken exchange of pleasure. To take it more seriously led at best to jealousy, demands, recriminations and mess; at worst to a mouth choked with sand. (James 2001: 477)

But these are only the thoughts of the protagonist. The tone of James's novel is dispassionate, detached and non-judgemental. The presentation of Karen and Eric Surtees is not unlike the descriptions of the setting and other characters. It is only the totality of the picture which stirs emotions in the reader – perhaps Karen could be thought of as honest in her own way, but what does her behaviour really lead to? She is not only responsible for manipulating Ronald into stealing the wafer, she is also the person who initiates the incestuous, sexual relationship with her half-brother. We are only given one longer glimpse into the mind of the young man when he describes how he met Karen after their father died, how they decided to redecorate the flat they inherited in London and offer it for rent. It was then that Karen seduced him and Eric felt that he loved her. However, their arrangement at St. Anselm's can hardly be described as amorous – she visits her half-brother once every two weeks and they have sex over the weekend. We know nothing more about her, and in the context of the role she plays in the novel it is quite

possible to speculate that this is all that we really need to know. On the scale of the events which play out during the story, she may be said to personify the banal, everyday aspect of evil, which nevertheless holds the potential for greater harm. Insensitive to the realities of other people's values, she focuses mainly on the financial side of the death of her father, willingly decides to investigate a topic as foreboding as the black mass and takes her responsibilities in that regard seriously. Her seduction of young men such as Eric and Ronald seems almost recreational in that she does not care for their feelings, at least not to the point of feeling guilty about the latter's death. On the contrary, she blames Treeves for his feeling of betrayal, which she makes clear during the investigation:

He [Ronald] came barging upstairs, and if you must know, found Eric and me in bed. He just stood in the doorway and stared. He looked crazy, absolutely crazy. And then he started spitting out ridiculous accusations. I can't really remember what he said. I suppose it could have been funny, but actually it was rather frightening ... God, it was weird. D'you know, he'd actually thought I was going to marry him. Me, a parson's wife! He was mad. He looked crazy and he was crazy ...

Dalgliesh said quietly, 'I think you know very well what drove Ronald Treeves to his death.'

'Even if I do that doesn't make me responsible. And what the hell did he think he was doing, barging in like that and rushing upstairs as if he owned the place. And now I suppose you'll tell Father Sebastian and get Eric thrown out of the cottage.' (James 2001: 466-7)

Rather unexpectedly, Karen's concern shifts towards her half-brother's arrangement with the college Fathers, as if she were a child that was expecting to get punished for doing something she enjoyed, rather than a grown woman being questioned by the police in relation to two tragic deaths. Instead of offering information that can help Dalgliesh and his team, she is afraid that they will take something away from her. It seems as though she is capable of caring only for the most pedestrian concerns, but in fact her aggressive refusal of taking any blame for Ronald's suicide can be perceived as a rejection of conscience. She has the power to decide what is wrong and what is right and she will dismiss any outside appeal to feel remorse. Her attitude probably

reflects the consequences of the shift from a strict system of morals to a more relaxed approach based on doing what one enjoys as long as they are not hurting anybody else. In *Death*, Karen is unfortunately placed under circumstances in which such an attitude leads to tragedy. She intrudes upon a world rich in symbolic meaning which she chooses not to explore. Her reality of exchange value—sex for a consecrated wafer—and use value—the consecrated wafer will allow her to write a good story—is dangerous in a place where objects are more than they appear to be. Yet she is not dull, and it is perhaps the very possibility of choosing to be insensitive to the people who provide her brother with everything that he desires that provokes Dalgliesh’s barely concealed anger, even if the protagonist is unable to pinpoint the precise cause of his outrage and feels the emotion lacks justification⁵⁴.

Thus, we see that the temporality which underpins James’s novel is deeply connected with social changes that are personified by the characters and their actions. The fact that we can see parallels with the processes described by Baudrillard is also of note. From a less poststructuralist perspective, transience is accented by the struggle with the past that most characters in *Death* undergo. The opening of the novel presents us with the unfortunate Margaret Munroe, but later on we discover that most of the people at St. Anselm’s have some dark event in their lives which somehow influences their future. Of course, the murder victims are not given the opportunity of redemption. Other characters, however, learn to let go of the past. The most prominent example is Dalgliesh himself, who, through Father Martin’s encouragement begins a relationship with Emma Lavenham at the end of the novel⁵⁵. After his wife’s death Dalgliesh had decided against ever becoming emotionally engaged with a woman because of his egotism, to which he admits before the old priest. Earlier in the novel, Emma herself also decides to end her engagement with her fiancé at Cambridge after a conversation with Raphael Arbuthnot, who courts her. He does not expect to be reciprocated but instead explains that “if life is a muddle people look for love to make it all come right” (James 2001: 315). For Emma, who is extraordinarily attractive, her relationship with her fiancé, Giles, is simply an attempt to stem the constant attempts at courtship from her colleagues, which in turn enables her to focus on her true passion – academic work. Therefore the situations of Dalgliesh and Emma are parallel, although

⁵⁴ It might be added that P.D. James makes an investigative journalist the victim of a murder in her last Adam Dalgliesh mystery, *The Private Patient* (2008), but claiming that this is a case of metatextual justice would probably be unreasonable.

⁵⁵ P.D. James decided to make their relationship a lasting one, and the pair marry at the very end of *The Private Patient*.

inverted. Emma decides that her engagement was “more than a mistake, it was wrong” (James 2001: 314). Dalglish explains to Father Martin that it was not grief that motivated him remaining single: “Nothing as simple, natural and admirable. It’s egotism. Love of my privacy, reluctance to be hurt or to be responsible again for another’s happiness” (James 2001: 545). Their ability to admit to their shortcomings is rewarded by a chance to begin a new life.

Conversely, several other characters are doomed to remain forever scarred by their past. Father Martin, whose war experiences continue to haunt him in nightmares; Father John, labelled a pedophile will always be branded as one within the Church structures; Agatha Betterton, who before her death lived a life of regret for the death of a man she loved. We are not told about the way Raphael Arbuthnot might one day perceive the events of the novel, but the ending for him at least is optimistic – he decides to become a priest and inherits the Arbuthnot fortune, he is still young and attractive.

In conclusion, the analysis of P.D. James’s *Death in Holy Orders* has proven the usefulness of both the cognitive methodology for approaching detective fiction that is based on reader response theory, as well as a Baudrillardian reading of the main themes of the novel. The former expanded the seven-step plot formula and allowed a deeper look at the interaction between the conventions of genre and the reader. The latter perspective remains valid as a way of looking at social changes, although it does provoke the question of whether the technological progress which shapes the way society functions did not foster the same negative perception in past generations. In other words, this “discourse of doom” seems to be an integral reaction to social change, and while the forms it takes on may shift, the idea of things never being the same again does not really need extended elaboration. In the following chapter we will take a closer look at a novel that pushes the boundaries of the detective genre further and is far more engaged with the fractured reality of contemporariness.

Chapter 6:

An Appeal to Mass Sensibilities – *When Will There Be Good News?*

by Kate Atkinson

Kate Atkinson is a popular British writer of crime stories who is best known for her novels involving Jackson Brodie, an ex-military, ex-policeman, sometimes-private-detective who has many problems with women. Brodie's adventures and misadventures have been adapted for television by the BBC under the shared title *Case Histories*. The series of Jackson Brodie novels is comprised of four entries: *Case Histories* (2004), *One Good Turn* (2006), *When Will There Be Good News?* (2008) and *Started Early, Took My Dog* (2010). The analysis in this chapter will focus on *Where Will There Be Good News?*, which will also be referred to as *News*.

Kate Atkinson's novel was chosen for the second analysis because it remains within the detective genre but at the same time is entirely unlike the work of P.D. James. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, Atkinson and James were born thirty years apart and represent two very different generations – Atkinson was born in 1951, P.D. James in 1920. It is easy to see why the latter's style might be more conservative. Secondly, while both authors have built their reputation on detective fiction, their styles and utilisation of the genre could not be more different. James expanded on the traditional formula of fiendishly complicated plots with a layer of literary themes that brought the genre closer to literary realism, Atkinson engages her readers in postmodern adventures where the characters' lives are as messy as the mysteries that they are forced to solve, and the patchwork nature of their reality is reflected by the narrative style of the novels. Thirdly, P.D. James wanted to write serious novels and the themes she chose were purposefully heavy⁵⁶, whereas Atkinson's prose includes a great deal of humour which helps to alleviate the grim nature of the events she describes. The playful nature of Atkinson's style will also be visible in her chapter names.

⁵⁶ “[P.D. James] told an interviewer that the only legitimate comparisons between her and Christie are that they are both female, British and middle class. The principal difference between them, she has pointed out, is that Christie is more “psychologically reassuring,” and she suggests that a potential reader might think, ‘Perhaps I won’t read another P.D. James-I need something lighter. By lighter, they may mean something like a Christie, not so involved in the actual pain of people.’” (Bargainnier 1981: 110)

Turning once again to the constitutive and regulative conventions of detective fiction, we should see whether *News* is able to satisfy all of them. As in the case of *Death in Holy Orders*, this will be achieved by presenting an overview of the plot and analysing the structure of the text using the cognitive method described in the third chapter. In the latter section of the analysis we will focus on the thematic and ideological layer of the novel with a Baudrillardian perspective. What the reader knows from the information on the front cover is that the novel is a part of a series about Jackson Brodie. Similarly to *Death*, all the events are narrated by the characters themselves. The difference is that the reader does not achieve a complete picture of the situation presented in a given chapter until later on, when the same events are also narrated by someone else. In P.D. James's novel, the information provided by a character was usually complete and did not require additional explanation. Much of the hermeneutic tension in *News* is created through this lack of information – also called negativity in reader-response theories⁵⁷. Neither one of Atkinson's characters is fully aware of the entirety of the plot. The effect this creates is a feeling of “if only they knew”, and relates to the “patchwork” structure of the mystery, in which there is no main detective, and murder is not at the centre of the plot.

6.1 The Plot

In this section I will present a short overview of the events as well as a description of the main characters. A lengthier synopsis will also be provided for the purposes of outlining the structure of the mysteries. Due to the frequent shifts in focalisation this synopsis is harder to follow than the outline for *Death in Holy Orders* – sometimes a character will narrate a given event in one chapter, only for a different character to provide their own description of the same situation at a further point in the text. Thus, the synopsis should be used as a reference during the analysis rather than a stand-alone section. I consider its addition necessary because many readers will be unfamiliar with Atkinson's novel; the genre is so vast that even staunch fans cannot possibly be familiar with every mystery⁵⁸. An overview of the events also provides the reader with the

⁵⁷ See, e.g. Dove 1997: 145.

⁵⁸ I am also assuming that despite their objective popularity the works discussed in this dissertation are not widely known in academic circles – unlike texts that belong to the literary canon. The exception might be Thomas Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge*, but at the time of this writing that novel is still fairly new, and is probably yet to receive its greater share of critical attention.

sequence in which the plot is presented which is crucial for discussing the mystery structure employed by Atkinson.

The novel follows three protagonists: **Jackson Brodie**, a retired private detective from London who inherited a fortune in one of Atkinson's previous novels, **Louise Monroe**, a police officer from Edinburgh, where the action takes place, and **Reggie Chase**, a young babysitter whose parents are dead and whose employer goes missing. Jackson arrives in Edinburgh accidentally. The crime they all become involved in is the kidnapping of **Joanna Hunter**—for whom Reggie works—and her baby boy. Joanna is taken by mobsters from Glasgow for the purposes of blackmailing her husband into signing over his businesses. She manages to escape with the help of Jackson and Reggie, who discover her whereabouts during the novel's central investigation. In order to escape Joanna kills her captors. Jackson helps her to avoid a court trial and media attention by burning down the house in which she has been held along with the bodies of the kidnappers. Louise never learns what really happened, as the other protagonists must withhold the truth from the police – they have essentially committed a crime to cover up another crime. In the end Joanna divorces her husband, who has proven unable to help her in her ordeal, and invites Reggie to live with her. Jackson returns home to London only to discover that his new wife was really a con artist who stole his money and ran away with his acquaintance.

News does not include a very complicated mystery, but it manages to satisfy the generic demand for complexity by means of scattering the clues among several protagonists. As readers we know which characters are important (they all appear as focalisers for the narration in various chapters), but for Louise and Jackson it is not obvious that they will have to cooperate with Reggie, a teenage girl, to arrive at the truth, or even that there was a kidnapping they need to solve. For the better part of the story the policewoman Louise is unaware of the fact that Joanna is missing, and the supposed chief protagonist, Jackson, drifts in and out of a coma caused by a train crash.

Several false leads combined with Louise's police duties serve to obscure Joanna's predicament. The main problem is that Joanna's husband is hiding the fact that she was abducted because he is afraid that the kidnappers will kill her if he notifies the police. Therefore, he makes up a story about Joanna going to visit a sick aunt in Hawes, many miles away from Edinburgh. The other issue that prevents the protagonists from solving the crime is a grim event from Joanna's childhood – the murder of her family described at the beginning of the novel. The killer

is released from prison at the time the story takes place and it seems plausible that Joanna would want to leave town for a while to avoid media attention. Louise knows about this but Reggie does not. Hence, the latter is more suspicious of Joanna's absence than the former. In fact, for the better part of the novel the reader also does not know whether Joanna has really been kidnapped. The killer's release from prison remains a valid lead until about two thirds of the story. Some smaller mysteries need to be explained before the characters learn that Joanna was kidnapped, and, crucially, the protagonists must first find an opportunity to share what they know. Only then are they able to evaluate which clues are pertinent to Joanna's case and that there is a case to solve. This meeting also allows for clearing up many misunderstandings. Once all this is done finding the kidnappers is not very hard – Jackson simply trails their car to arrive at their hiding place.

In short, it might be said that *News* does not include one traditionally elaborate mystery, but instead it obfuscates the central issue by presenting numerous smaller, unrelated puzzles which must be resolved before the main case can be addressed. This is what makes the novel different from P.D. James's *Death In Holy Orders*, and also lends it a distinctive note of contemporariness. In the age of information, we are often confronted with the problem of finding the *pertinent* piece of data that is *relevant* to our pursuits. We must sift through a vast array of irrelevant material, and make sense of a small subset of information that interests us. This is the problem of the protagonists in Atkinson's novel – preoccupied with other concerns, they must first learn that a crime was committed, and then discover which clues are relevant to finding the perpetrators. For example, it is Reggie who notices that Joanna's absence is indicative of a crime, and she has to convince Louise that the police should look into it. Louise is not willing to believe the girl because she knows a dark secret from Joanna's past which fully justifies Dr. Hunter's sudden disappearance. Overall, everyone knows that Joanna is missing, but only Reggie is worried about the circumstances of her absence. A similar device – making sense of a number of clues which seem unrelated – is employed by Thomas Pynchon in *Bleeding Edge*, which will be the subject of the third analysis. I would argue that while this construction strays from the traditional formula of detection we discussed in the previous chapters it can be considered a natural development in our time⁵⁹. Faced with an over-abundance of information from the

⁵⁹ A different take on the contemporary detective story consists in focusing on the scientific analysis of minute details using modern forensic technologies. This approach is best exemplified by the TV show *CSI* (which is an acronym for Crime Scene Investigation), in which the protagonists are not detectives but analysts, who solve

network of media which permeate our lives, the contemporary detective will increasingly have to focus on separating the wheat from the chaff and ordering what they consider relevant. If the protagonists in *News* were rolled into one main character there could hardly be a mystery. But because the knowledge they possess is divided among three unrelated persons solving the crime becomes exceedingly hard.

6.2 Synopsis

The synopsis is broken down into sections containing one or more chapters. The names of the chapters described are shown in quotation marks in boldface, followed by the page numbers. During the analysis, the relevant chapter names will be referred, and the reader will be able to consult the synopsis. I believe that a presentation of all the facts in the order they appear in the novel is important from the point of view of the reader's understanding of the mysteries as they unfold. In detective fiction the reader usually follows the story, at the same time trying to solve the crime before the protagonist explains it (the seven-step story structure implies that the protagonist solves a crime before disclosing his findings to the audience). At the same time, once a mystery is solved, it tends to be remembered as a “gestalt” – we know the solution and we always take it into account when thinking about the text later. The very crux of the genre, the course of the game played by the reader, is easily forgotten once all the answers become known. Hence, to understand the structure employed by the author we must follow the events as they unfold, taking into account the pacing and the negativity. From this point of view, a synopsis might prove useful even to a reader who has read the novel.

“Harvest” (17-28)

When Will Be There Good News? begins with the introduction of one of the main characters, Joanna Hunter, and a traumatic event that took place 30 years ago when she was only 6 years old. Joanna, along with her mother, Gabrielle Mason, older sister Jessica and baby brother Joseph are walking home from a shopping trip. They live in a secluded house in the

each case with the help of advanced technologies such as DNA or ballistics tests. The show is referenced in Atkinson's novel. The *CSI* version of the modern detective story is firmly rooted in the rationalist traditions of the genre, especially Conan-Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories (we remember that Holmes was an accomplished chemist who used his rare knowledge to solve hard cases, effectively demystifying the unknown with the rigours of the scientific method).

Devon countryside. Joanna's father, Howard Mason, is a writer who wanted to move away from London, while Gabrielle is an artist. The explosive relationship ends with the father leaving his family in the country home to move in with his Scandinavian lover, Martina. Due to her husband's bad reputation, Joanna's mother is legally cut off from her wealthy family after marrying at age 17. Now she is alone with three children and dreads the arduous trips to the nearest town which she needs to undertake in order to buy basic necessities. After getting off the bus, the family and their dog walk along a field of wheat in the afternoon sunshine. It is then that they are suddenly attacked by a man armed with a knife. Gabrielle screams at Joanna to run away and the girl disappears into the field of wheat. Her mother, sister, baby brother and dog are all brutally murdered. Joanna is discovered by a search party later in the evening of that same day. The introduction ends with a curious problem: "It was funny but now, thirty years later, the thing that drove her to distraction was that she couldn't remember what the dog was called. And there was no one left to ask" (Atkinson 2008: 28).

It would seem tempting to claim that the introduction presents the main problem, but this is not the case in *News*. The main thread of the plot focuses on Joanna, and the person of the killer serves to create suspense later in the text, but the mystery is yet to come. After this 30-year-old flashback, the plot unfolds in real time over the course of several days before Christmas.

"Flesh and Blood" (31-38)

What follows next is the a brief presentation of the protagonist, Jackson Brodie, who is in the Yorkshire Dales in an attempt to obtain DNA samples from a boy which he believes is his son. Brodie is convinced that his previous girlfriend lied to him about him not being the boy's father and tracks down the child to a local school. He manages to ruffle the boy's hair without arousing too much suspicion, thus getting the samples he needs and goes back to his rented car in order to return to London via a train connection.

This is a set up for an explanation of how Jackson becomes involved in an investigation in Edinburgh despite being retired as a detective and living in London.

“The Life and Adventures of Reggie Chase...”⁶⁰ (38-75)

Meanwhile, in Edinburgh, a sixteen year old girl, Reggie Chase, who is an orphan living alone in her mother’s apartment takes on a job as house help for Dr. Joanna Hunter. Joanna, a GP at the local hospital is married to Neil Hunter, a local businessman who is going through hard times. They have a one year old baby. Everything about Joanna’s life is described as perfect from Reggie’s perspective, and indeed the problems Neil has seem to be separated from Joanna’s world. The baby is the centre of Joanna’s life. For her part, Reggie has suffered through several misfortunes. Her mother died during a holiday in Spain and she left her two children, Reggie and Billy, to fend for themselves. Billy is older than Reggie and is involved in some criminal activities that are left undescribed. He offers his sister a forged ID, but she does not want it because she fears no one will believe it due to her young looks. Reggie studies for the A levels under the tutelage of Miss MacDonald, a terminally ill middle-aged Classics teacher and a spinster. Reggie does not go to school anymore, having forged a letter from her mother saying they had moved to Australia. The young girl, being poor, felt entirely out of place at the posh school for children from rich families which she attended – her fees were paid by a scholarship she received for good grades and by the Army, because her father died in the Gulf War. Outside of the fees, however, nothing was paid for and Reggie could not afford the uniform and books. Reggie lives alone in the flat left by their mother while Billy rents an apartment somewhere else. For the young girl, the job she takes at the Hunter’s house is a dream come true. She is let into a world which, unlike her life, is normal, with a loving couple, a baby and a big dog, Sadie. Reggie becomes attached to Joanna, the baby and Sadie, and she does not admit that her mother died, that she avoids school or that she has a brother who is a criminal. Gradually, she begins to stay longer at the Hunter’s home. One day Joanna is visited by Detective Chief Inspector Louise Monroe from Edinburgh Police, but Reggie does not participate in their conversation. Joanna takes Reggie to celebrate the baby’s first birthday without Neil.

The lengthy chapter introduces all the main characters in the story, apart from Jackson who was presented earlier. Reggie is the chief protagonist who will play the role of a private eye with a personal motivation, Joanna is the victim, Louise is a police officer who will become involved in the investigation, but, in accordance with detective traditions, will not be able to

⁶⁰ It is worth noting the self-awareness and intertextuality present in some chapter names, suggesting a playful postmodern mood.

solve the crime. We also learn what became of Joanna, the only person who survived the attack described in “Harvest”.

“Ad Augusta per Angusta”, “She Would Get the Flowers Herself” (76-107)

For a brief moment, the story returns to Jackson Brodie who gets lost in the countryside on his route back to London, before finding the A1 again. Subsequently, we are introduced to Louise Monroe, who is getting ready to host her husband Patrick’s family for the weekend. Monroe is constantly engrossed by her work which has lately been centred around finding David Needler, who shot his wife’s mother and sister during a children’s birthday party. Prior to the incident, Needler received a court injunction prohibiting him from seeing his family. He threatened to burn himself alive on their front yard but was arrested, fined and released. Alison, his wife, lives in constant terror that he will return to kill her and their children, which is why Louise drives by her house when she can and sometimes follows the woman when she takes the children to school. Louise is established as a full-blooded woman and a vengeful officer who would be happiest if the criminals responsible for other people’s harm were executed: “she was beginning to notice that she was more bloodthirsty than she used to be (and that was saying something)” (Atkinson 89). She is also very worried that she does not make a good wife for Patrick, a seemingly model husband, and a well-organised surgeon. Louise had been single for a long time, raising her only son Archie, and feels guilty about the disproportionate attention she lavishes on her work instead of Patrick.

The description of Louise's circumstances provides a reason for her to be interested in Joanna Hunter. In the Neelder case, Louise and her team are attempting to prevent a tragedy similar to that experienced by Joanna three decades earlier. Jackson is in the process of getting lost, which will eventually result in his arrival in Edinburgh.

“Sanctuary”, “To Brig O' Dread Thou Com'st At Last”, “Satis House”, “Rapture Ready” (108-156)

Jackson Brodie boards a train to King’s Cross and contemplates the passengers sitting next to him, which include a middle-aged man in a suit typing on a laptop, a young overweight woman and an older lady. After several hours he discovers that he is going to Edinburgh, not London – he has taken a train in the opposite direction. While he is on his way, Reggie Chase

leaves the Hunters and goes to visit Ms MacDonald. The woman leaves Reggie with her dog, Banjo, to attend a meeting of a religious group she discovered after becoming ill with brain cancer. Like his mistress, Banjo is also in very poor health and on the verge of dying. Reggie watches television instead of studying, and we learn more about her brother, Billy, as well as Miss MacDonald's messy flat and life. The flat is full of books, including a set of the Loeb Classical Library, which Reggie is forbidden to touch because it includes translations of texts that constitute the girl's assignments. Miss MacDonald's apartment is very near the railway, and Reggie is able to hear and feel all the trains coming past. While Miss MacDonald is gone, Reggie hears a powerful rumbling sound and leaves the flat in order to witness the aftermath of a terrible train crash. In a cunning if slightly contrived maneuver to bring the protagonist to Edinburgh where the plot takes place, the train is the same one that Jackson Brodie was hoping would take him to London. Jackson manages to climb out of the wreck and falls into a ditch; badly bleeding he loses consciousness.

Although the reader has no way of knowing it at this point, the Loeb classics will play an important role connected with Billy. The man sitting next to Jackson is Andrew Decker, the murderer of Joanna's family who was recently released from prison.

“The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie” (157-180)

Instead of buying flowers and preparing a meal for the coming guests, which she planned to do earlier, Louise Monroe goes to Alison Needler's house to check whether David has returned. She thinks about her visit to Joanna Hunter, during which she informed the Doctor about the release of Andrew Decker, who served a thirty year sentence for murdering Joanna's family. Louise wants to warn her that one of Decker's inmates tipped off the press about his release, and that she should be wary about sensationalist journalists disturbing her at home. Andrew Decker is moving to Doncaster to live with his mother, and will be monitored by the police. Monroe is curious about Joanna's life – she appears to be a model wife, mother and survivor, who only managed to grow stronger in spite of the childhood tragedy. In contrast, Louise feels inadequate in all these roles. She does not mention that the police are also investigating Neil Hunter's businesses – one of the arcades he owned was set on fire, and there is the suspicion that this was done purposefully in order to wangle insurance money. Joanna does not seem to lose composure at the news of the killer being set free, but she tells Louise that she

might disappear for a while in order to avoid media attention. The fragmented narration which skips across several characters and describes past events is one of the ways in which Atkinson creates tension and suspense. The scene in which Louise tells Joanna about Andrew Decker leaving prison foreshadows the main mystery of the novel – Joanna’s actual disappearance.

Up to this point in the novel, there is little to suggest that there might really be a crime in the present, apart from the blurb on the back cover. Unlike P.D. James, Atkinson chose not to include a list of contents in the book, relying instead on the suspense created by surprise. Until the investigation begins, *News* can be perceived as a thriller or a psychological novel⁶¹. And yet, just as Dalgliesh suspected the possible motive of discrediting St. Anselm's college before the murder of the Archdeacon actually took place, the reader of *News* is provided the explanation of Joanna's disappearance in this chapter – Neil Hunter's problems with gangsters from Glasgow.

When Louise finally returns home, Patrick’s elder sister Bridget and her husband Tim are already there, having takeaway Chinese food for dinner. Louise does not like her in-laws, and their presence reinforces her belief that she is a bad wife – Patrick’s first wife, Samantha, died in an automobile accident. Samantha was a good housekeeper, and Louise imagines that Bridget and Tim would compare her own disorderliness with Patrick’s first wife. As Louise’s discomfort rises, the evening is interrupted by Patrick being called to the scene of the train crash. Luckily for Louise, she has an excuse to leave the house, Tim and Bridget.

“Funny Old World”, “The Celestial City”, “The Dogs They Left Behind” (181-207)

Meanwhile, Reggie Chase discovers the heavily injured Jackson Brodie and resuscitates him, saving his life before the paramedics arrive to take the wounded but still unconscious detective to the hospital. Reggie’s skill at first aid was acquired from Joanna Hunter, who taught the girl using a CPR dummy from work. For Reggie, the experience of saving Jackson is particularly profound because of her mother’s drowning in a hotel pool in Spain: Jackie Chase went swimming early in the morning and got her hair caught up in the drain when there was no one watching. Reggie returns to Miss MacDonald’s house after visiting the crash site. After changing clothes she receives two police officers who have come to inform her that Ms MacDonald was dead. It turns out that she had driven her car off a bridge and onto the train track, thus directly causing the catastrophe. Reggie explains that she was simply a “rubbish

⁶¹ The subtitle on the front cover of *When Will There Be Good News* is “the new Jackson Brodie novel”, not “the new Jackson Brodie mystery”.

driver”. Because of Banjo the dog, Reggie stays the night at Ms MacDonald’s house, but the old animal dies in its sleep. The following Reggie is awoken at 6.30 am by a call from Neil Hunter who informs her that Joanna had gone to visit an ill aunt in Hawes. Banjo is buried besides a flower patch in the back yard. Reggie immediately becomes suspicious, as well as annoyed because she does not want to believe that she will have no one to talk to about the train crash.

It might be said that this is the point at which the plot becomes more focused on detection, at least in Reggie’s case. Joanna’s disappearance introduces at least four possibilities: firstly, she did in fact go to visit her aunt, leaving in such a hurry that she ignored things she otherwise pays attention to; secondly, that Neil is covering for his wife, who decided to proceed with her intention of disappearing for some time; thirdly, that her absence is connected with Andrew Decker’s release, i.e. that they met somewhere; the fourth option is the criminal connection related to Neil’s businesses. The last possibility is reinforced by the fact that Neil has been seen contacting some shady characters from Glasgow.

“Adam Lay Ybounden”, “Outlaw” (208-223)

While Jackson Brodie remains in limbo at a local hospital, Louise wakes up to find her husband, Bridget and Tim having breakfast together. She is mortified at the thought of sharing another meal with them and departs for work. On her way there, she decides to visit the Hunters to talk with Neil about the burned down arcade. She asks him questions about potential enemies but at the same time learns about Joanna Hunter’s departure to her aunt. While they talk, Neil receives a phone call and Louise is left to peek at the board hanging in the kitchen which Joanna used to pin important souvenirs. There are pictures of the baby and photos of Joanna from her college days. We learn that the woman excelled at running and was a member of the shooting club. When Neil returns, he looks shaken. Louise leaves him, turning down an offer of a morning shot of whiskey.

Thus, we receive hints that Neil's situation is desperate, which, in the eyes of a detective fiction fan places him under suspicion. However, we also discover that Joanna learned how to defend herself in college, and this aspect of her character will come into play at the end of the novel.

“The Famous Reggie” (224-233)

After these events, the focalisation shifts back to Reggie Chase. We learn more details about the sick aunt, whose name is Agnes according to Neil. Reggie goes to her mother’s flat, stopping on her way to visit a neighbourhood convenience store run by Mr. Hussain, which everyone calls the “Paki shop”. Reggie has been spending some time with Mr. Hussain and his family, including last year’s Christmas. She then goes up to her flat and discovers that the door has been broken. The apartment has been vandalised – books and clothes are lying on the floor, including the homework that Reggie did for Ms MacDonald. There is a threatening note addressed to Reggie and excrement on the carpet. In the bathroom Reggie is accosted by two thugs, called Blondie and Ginger in the girl’s narration. They threaten her in order to learn the location of her brother, who they believe is called Reggie. The girl does not tell them anything, and they depart, threatening to kill her if she notifies the police about the incident. They also throw a Loeb classic at her, from the collection of Ms MacDonald. Reggie discovers that the interior of the pages has been cut out to make a small compartment for something. The girl is shaken, not only because of the attack – the flat contains all the souvenirs which remind her of her dead mother. Reggie has kept them undisturbed in their original places, but now everything is ransacked and disorganised. She remembers that during her phone conversation with Neil Hunter she heard Sadie bark, which makes her curious. Joanna had told her previously that the dog is the person in her life which she has known for longest, and she never leaves her behind. It occurs to Reggie that she would be safer having Sadie around.

The appearance of the thugs suggests a second criminal plot thread, unconnected with Joanna’s absence. Structurally, however, the two ruffians push Reggie into the main investigation by making her feel unsafe at her own flat. Since she cannot stay at home without fearing for her safety, Reggie is propelled to find Joanna – the only person who offers her a sense of stability and normalcy. Therefore, we might say that this second mystery—Billy’s drug-dealing—is a subordinate plot thread that serves to explain why a young girl would become involved in an amateur investigation with such zeal. From the novel’s three protagonists, she is the one who has no other choice.

“Missing in Action”, “Reggie Chase, Girl Detective”, “Pilgrim's Progress” (234-256)

We are taken for a brief moment to Jackson Brodie, who becomes half lucid for short periods of time but cannot remember his name or what he was doing. Then we return to Reggie, who visits a reluctant Neil Hunter in order to take the dog for a walk. This is the first moment in the novel in which an actual investigation begins, even if the protagonist seems the least likely character to pursue it. Reggie reminds Neil that it is Thursday, and Joanna used to pay her on that day. He gives her some money without counting, and agrees for her to take Sadie out for a walk. Reggie has the keys to the house, so she is not dissuaded when Neil tells her he will have to leave soon. She takes the dog and goes into the garage to fetch a ball for Sadie. Squeezing past Joanna's Toyota Prius she remembers that during the phone conversation, Neil told her that his wife drove to Hawes. She goes out for a walk and when she returns, there is a note addressed to her which asks her to take the dog to her place until Joanna comes back. Reggie notices that there is no money left for her, and that Neil gave her half of what she usually receives from Dr Hunter. Since she has the keys to the house and she left a bag inside with clothes that she had bought for coupons at Top Shop after seeing her flat vandalised, she lets herself in and starts looking for clues. Upstairs, in the Hunters' bedroom, she discovers that one of the three black suits which Joanna wears to work is missing. It seems unlikely to Reggie that Joanna would not change back to her regular clothes before leaving. She decides to call her employer once more, and hears the signal of her mobile phone ringing somewhere within the house. At the same time Neil returns so she rushes downstairs. He is surprised to see her still at the house, but she makes an excuse and calls Sadie. The dog comes to her when she is at the front gate, and in its mouth is a small piece of green fabric, which Reggie immediately recognises as the baby's comforter. She knows that the baby never goes anywhere without the torn blanket and she becomes terrified, feeling that something bad has happened to Dr Hunter. Also on the comforter is a stain which looks like blood.

Reggie goes to the surgery at which Joanna works in order to learn more. She cannot get information from the receptionist but manages to run into one of Dr Hunter's friends, a woman called Sheila. Sheila further reinforces Reggie's suspicions – Joanna did not inform anyone about her departure and missed a Christmas shopping trip they had arranged for the previous evening. At that point the narration shifts to Jackson, who awakes at the hospital, this time remembering his name. He is still confused and asks whether his wife is on the ward as well.

These three chapters establish the pattern whereby Reggie is the person who gathers all the important clues pertaining to Joanna's disappearance. Jackson will help her later with problems she would be unable to solve on her own (such as driving a car), while Louise will be limited to checking the facts, which will ultimately vindicate Reggie's predictions.

“An Elderly Aunt”, “Nada y Pues Nada”, “Fiat Lux” (257-289)

Meanwhile, at the police station, Louise Monroe reads all the reported sightings of David Needler, but none of them seem to lead anywhere. She concludes that Needler had gone into hiding and there is no telling when he might come back. Louise's team hand her more information about attacks on Neil Hunter's businesses. One of the owners of his amusement arcades was assaulted, a cab driver was beaten up, and another private taxi belonging to Hunter had its window smashed. An additional piece of news which alarms Louise is that Andrew Decker has disappeared. He was supposed to remain with his mother in Doncaster, but had left the house on the previous afternoon and has not returned since. Louise then receives a phone call from an agitated Reggie Chase, who keeps talking about Dr Hunter's disappearance, claiming that something bad happened to the woman.

Deciding to meet the girl, Louise drives to see Reggie and they go to Starbucks where they talk about Reggie's news. Louise is very sceptical, perceiving the girl as a teenager with a vivid imagination who sees herself as a young heroine. She notices the bruise on Reggie's face, caused by the thugs, but the girl claims that she simply did not look where she was going. Finally, Louise offers to drive her home and they go to Ms MacDonald's house in Musselburgh. On the way there, Reggie tells Louise about Jackson Brodie, whom she had saved the previous evening. She has a picture taken from the ill-fated detective's pocket. It was sent to him by his daughter, Marlene. It has his address written on it. Louise had met Brodie before and ever since then has felt attracted to him. After leaving Reggie at Miss MacDonald's house, she drives straight to the hospital instead of her home, where Patrick and her inlaws are waiting for her. Reggie goes to sleep alongside Sadie. At the hospital, Jackson awakes for a brief moment, sees Louise but is unsure whether she is a dream or not, and falls unconscious again. He is also attracted to her, but now that both of them are married, it seems they will never be together.

When the focalisation switches to Louise, we discover that she found Andrew Decker's licence at the hospital but left it there, thinking only about Jackson. She stops by the police

station to initiate a local search for the fugitive killer and then returns home. Patrick, Bridget and Tim are at the theatre, so she opens a bottle of wine and turns on the TV to watch *CSI*, then falls asleep.

Because of the established story about Joanna and Andrew Decker, his escape seems to be the main lead in the investigation. But if we remember the detective genre's convention of the most likely suspect we might expect a different solution. In addition, Reggie's meeting with Louise establishes a conventional relationship between a "private eye" protagonist and a police officer, in which the former is treated with suspicion by the professional detective.

"Grave Danger" (290-293)

In the brief section that follows, the narration focuses on Joanna Hunter's past for the first time since the introduction at the beginning of the novel. She recollects the events which took place after she was found in the field of wheat – the aftermath of the tragedy. She went on to live with her father in London, and his new wife, the poet Martina who was born to a Swedish mother. Joanna recalls how Andrew Decker was caught and brought to court. She was spared from attending the trial because he had pleaded guilty. Consigned to a life sentence and ordered to serve the entirety of it, he left Joanna with the feeling that it was good that she did not have to face him again. Only later did she realise that she was cheated out of a cathartic experience, of pointing at him blame him for what had happened. Now Decker is free and in his fifties, after serving only 30 years. In the final few paragraphs of the chapter we learn that Joanna has the baby with her and then the next day begins.

Apart from telling the reader more about Joanna's past, this chapter suggests that *News* is a mixture of a detective story and a thriller. It is a staple device in thrillers to show the reader that a potential victim is still alive, but that something bad might happen to her at any moment. However, because of the strong detective elements, these shifts of focalisation to Joanna will be stretched out across several chapters so that the investigation is not spoiled for the reader.

"Jackson Risen", "Dr Foster Went to Gloucester" (297-323)

Jackson Brodie is still lying in a hospital bed, this time thinking about his new wife, Tessa. He remembers how he had met her through a friend from the military who worked in security. Tessa is a custodian at the Royal Museum, taking care of the Assyrian section. She is

twenty years younger than him, a fact to which his previous girlfriend, Julia, reacts with disgust. To Jackson, Tessa seems like a perfect match, because she is practical and “regular”, a quality which he missed in his previous relationships. They married after knowing each other for only three months. Now, Tessa is at a museum conference in New York, and Jackson is anxious to return home to meet her when she flies back on Monday. When he wakes up, however, he meets Reggie Chase, his saviour. The girl claims he is now “in her thrall”, and owes her a debt of reciprocation – he should save her life as well. Reggie leaves Jackson ten pounds since he has no wallet. It is important to note that Jackson inherited a great deal of money from an old woman at some point in the past and is rich during the events of *News*. Therefore, unlike the previous two novels, he does not need to work and has holds no job. He promises to pay Reggie back when he returns home but the girl does not believe him. When she gets out of the hospital she decides that since Jackson had been a private detective in the past, he should help her find Joanna.

Whereas Jackson was introduced as an independent character at the beginning of the novel, his freedom has now been taken away – he has no money and owes an immense debt of gratitude to a stranger.

“A Good Man is Hard to Find” (324-339)

In the early morning of that same day, Louise Monroe wakes up in bed next to Patrick, who is still asleep. It is 5.55 am, and Louise decides it is time to leave. She pays a very early visit to Neil Hunter, because she is alarmed by the circumstances of Joanna’s absence after talking to Reggie and learning about Decker’s disappearance. During a conversation with Neil, she asks him to give her the address and the phone number of aunt Agnes Barker. When he goes to another room to get the information, she hears a phone ringing in the kitchen table drawer. She opens the drawer and decides to answer it. The voice asks for Joanna, she says it is not her and hangs up. When Neil returns she decides to press the matter of the mobile phone. He claims to have spoken to his wife the previous day, and Louise claims that she had called the woman several times to no avail, which is a lie. She then calls Joanna’s number in front of him, and when the phone rings in the drawer again she takes it with her. Checking with her team at the station, she discovers that the number she received from Neil has been dead for a week. She goes through the list of calls on Joanna’s phone and finds that there were no calls to or from Barker’s alleged number, or in fact any calls from Hawes. Then the battery dies, and she is forced to leave

any further analysis of the phone to the team at the station. Meanwhile, Louise decides to go to the clinic at which Joanna works and talk with the receptionist who took the call which informed the staff that Dr Hunter would be absent. Louise learns that the phone call was not made by Joanna herself, but by her husband, Neil. The receptionist is certain it was him since he had a Glaswegian accent. Neil Hunter claimed that Joanna left her car at home because it was malfunctioning and rented an automobile instead. Louise orders her team to check whether that is true. She also recalls that she had checked the Prius in front of Neil and that it worked.

Initially sceptical about Reggie's claims that Joanna was kidnapped, Louise now finds that the girl's suggestion might actually be true. For a moment it will seem that Louise will take over the investigation and become the main detective in the story. However, Reggie's resourcefulness will remain the source of the reader's most important clues.

“Abide with Me” (340-345)

The next narrative segment is again focused on Joanna Hunter's memories, this time dealing with the death of Martina, Howard's second wife, who committed suicide upon learning that he had had a lover throughout their relationship. Martina wanted to care for Joanna but she could not bear the burden of Howard's lack of loyalty. The writer's third wife, a Chinese artist, decided to put Joanna in a boarding school, which proved a fruitful decision that changed her life – it was the first time after the murders that Joanna could live in a stable environment, and she became immersed in it. Howard Mason eventually split up with his Chinese wife and went to Los Angeles. He had no luck with his work there, and subsequently moved to Brazil with another woman. He died and was cremated in Rio de Janeiro without Joanna knowing. At the end of the short chapter we learn that Joanna is being held somewhere against her will.

Developing the thriller aspect from the chapter “Grave Danger”, this fragment of Joanna's narrative still focuses on the woman's past and withholds the most important piece of evidence – the identity of the kidnappers.

“Reggie Chase, Warrior Virgin”, “Jackson Leaves the Building” (346-361)

The readers rejoin Reggie Hunter who takes Sadie to the Hunter's residence and decides to enter the house and look for Joanna's phone while Neil is absent. She does not know that Louise already took it. Unfortunately for Reggie, Neil returns soon afterwards, and he is not

alone. Reggie hides with Sadie in Joanna's bedroom closet upstairs and listens in on a conversation between Neil and some burly men who also sound Glaswegian. They threaten the man that he is running out of time to pay Anderson, and that if he wants to see his wife and baby again, he should hurry and find the money. Once they all leave, Reggie manages to peek through a window at the black Nissan Pathfinder in which the men came and writes down the car's registration number. In the bedroom, Reggie also finds Joanna's handbag, which contains her driving glasses, filofax and other everyday items. The girl decides to go home to her flat, only to discover that it has been burned down. The ashes of her papers fall down on the street, and Reggie decides to leave as quickly as possible. She is stopped by the same two thugs who attacked her earlier. It is clear that the men are looking for Billy. They threaten Reggie again, but this time she is accompanied by Sadie who begins acting dangerously and scares them away. During their retreat they manage to hit Reggie in the face with another Loeb classic from Ms MacDonald's collection which had been carved up inside.

Reggie heads to the hospital to enlist Jackson's help. The battered man is in no position to refuse the girl – it is established during the description of the train crash that he is incapable of leaving others to fend for themselves when they need help. To make matters worse for him, he is without his wallet and cell phone, has no ID and is penniless. He leaves the hospital with Reggie, who poses as his daughter.

“Reggie Chase, Warrior Virgin” gives away the identity of the kidnappers, in addition to their motivation. While we know the answer to the mystery, several loose ends must still be explained – most notably the sick aunt in Hawes, and Andrew Decker's whereabouts.

“The Prodigal Wife”, “Arma Virumque Cano”, “Road Trip” (365-416)

The following day, Louise Monroe drives to Hawes with her Sergeant, Marcus. She wants to have an argument with Patrick about it, but the husband remains stoic, pointing out that Louise is angry with herself more than she is with him. This is true, and she feels furious. The drive is some three hours from Edinburgh and Louise has no good excuse to go there herself instead of asking the local police to do it. Aunt Agnes Barker's house is being occupied by a man who rents it from a solicitor. Upon calling the firm, the detectives discover that Agnes is in a nursing home not far away. When they arrive there, however, it turns out that Agnes has been dead for over two weeks. The solicitor has been granted the legal power to rent her estate. On the

return trip from Hawes, Louise learns more important information through phone calls to and from the police station in Edinburgh. It turns out that a man using Andrew Decker's driver's licence rented a car there, but there are no records that Joanna Hunter did. Louise decides to call Reggie but the phone is answered by Jackson and the conversation is cut off for mysterious reasons. Later during the journey, a police officer calls to report that Decker has been involved in a car accident. An additional piece of information that Louise receives is that Joanna Hunter had visited Decker in prison a month before he was released. This is something she failed to mention when Louise came to tell her about Decker leaving prison.

The report on Andrew Decker renting a car and crashing it in Edinburgh is soon explained when we rejoin Jackson and Reggie. The girl wants them to go to Hawes to check whether Joanna is in fact with her aunt, and they rent a car using Decker's driver's licence which Reggie snatches from the hospital. The premise for their trip seems rather weakly supported, considering that Reggie knows Joanna was kidnapped, but this is the only lead they have concerning a possible location. Jackson is still disoriented after the train crash, and during a hazy moment manages to crash the vehicle. After the police arrive they mistake him for Decker because of the licence and take him to hospital under custody. Very soon, Louise Monroe arrives and frees Jackson and Reggie.

In the Chief Inspector's BMW the misfit group exchange information about Joanna Hunter's disappearance. It appears that Andrew Decker has taken Jackson Brodie's belongings in the aftermath of the train crash. Because he and Reggie do not know who Decker is, Louise tells them about the murders that took place 30 years earlier. Joanna kept this information from Reggie because she did not want to be perceived as a survivor. Jackson remembers that at that time he was in the army his squad was on maneuvers in Devon. They participated in the search for the young Joanna. The explanation for Dr Hunter's disappearance is stated. The aunt was a red herring, the woman and her baby were kidnapped by Anderson's men to extort money from Neil Hunter. Jackson and Reggie are dropped off at Ms MacDonald's house and Louise decides to investigate Joanna's kidnapping, making it clear that Jackson is to stay out of the affair. In a detective-thriller crossover the reader might reasonably expect that Louise's recommendation will be ignored.

“Tribulation”, “High Noon”, “La Règle du Jeu” (417-435)

At the Musselburgh house, Jackson, Reggie and Sadie are ambushed by Billy, who is armed with a knife. He first holds it to Jackson’s neck but then decides to let him go and grabs Reggie instead. After a tense moment, a loud growl is heard from the corridor and Sadie jumps at Billy, knocking him down to the floor. As the dog begins to tear at Reggie’s brother, Jackson decides to kick it in the head. He then swiftly disarms and incapacitates Billy. After some deliberation, Jackson and Reggie decide to let him go without calling the police. They then go to sleep, but Jackson is kept awake by the noise of the passing trains and because he keeps thinking about Joanna. He decides to get up and quietly leave the flat, but is spotted by Reggie and Sadie. He has no choice but to take them with him.

They go to the Hunters’ residence, where they encounter the black Nissan Pathfinder. As the car leaves, they decide to follow it in Joanna’s Prius. The keys are hidden in the garage behind a can of paint. They manage to trail Anderson’s men without being spotted and arrive at a field with a house. The thugs go inside the house but quickly leave, get in their car and drive away, without noticing the Prius. Jackson begs Reggie to stay inside the car and goes out to investigate with a heavy torch that can serve as a weapon. Outside the house, he hears a rustling and out of the darkness emerges Joanna Hunter with her baby Gabriel. She is covered in blood and holds a knife in her hand.

The narration swiftly shifts to Joanna’s situation while she was still held prisoner. We learn that Anderson’s men entered her house and took her away with the baby. They administered some type of sedative drug to her and kept her in the house in the field for a few days. She was asked to write notes to Neil, urging him to sign over his businesses to Anderson, explaining that his men were threatening to kill her and the baby. They did not articulate this threat, but she understood her position. Joanna tried to establish some sort of connection with her kidnappers until she hatched a plan. When she was asked by one of the men to write another note to Neil, she jammed a pen into his eyeball, killing him on the spot. When the second kidnapper came into the room, she managed to lure him closer, punch him in the throat and grab a knife from a holster he wore above the ankle. She then killed him and escaped with her son.

The reader now knows the full explanation of the main mystery, but Joanna, her son and two of the protagonists are still in a precarious situation. The circumstances of Joanna's escape

are extreme, and it remains to be seen whether she, Jackson or Reggie will suffer any legal consequences of their involvement in a double murder.

“A Clean Well-lighted Place” (436-442)

In the meantime, Louise begins her investigation by questioning Neil Hunter and telling him that she knows the aunt is dead. Neil breaks down and admits that he was being threatened by Anderson’s men to sign over his businesses to the Glaswegian, or pay a large sum of money if he wanted to see his wife and son again. Louise is shocked that he did not sign over the businesses immediately, as according to her, the documents would never be accepted in court. Neil claims that this would not have helped because Anderson was a dangerous man and would come after his family again if he did not get what he wanted. The questioning is interrupted by two pieces of news. The first is that Joanna and the baby are in the house. The second is that Louise’s sergeant, Marcus, was shot by David Needler.

Needler attacked his family in their house the previous night and kept them at gunpoint until the morning. Alison managed to press the panic button on her remote and the police arrived, but they did not take the call too seriously because of numerous previous false alarms. Since Marcus was nearby, he decided to knock on the door first to check what had happened. David opened the door and shot him in the chest. Seeing the police outside he then shot himself in the head. For Marcus, the wound also proved to be fatal. Louise accompanies Marcus’s fiancée and his mother at the hospital when he dies.

Needler's dramatic return at this point in the story serves to distract Louise from Joanna. In fact, it casts Marcus as a supporting character whose appearance and relationship with Louise was necessary for a happy ending for Joanna. We might return to Dove's observation about the functional nature of characters in detective fiction – Marcus seems to exist in *News* only to die at the end.

“Sweet Little Wife, Pretty Little Baby” (443-446)

It is later explained that Jackson went inside the house and saw the crime scene but decided to help Joanna. She convinced him that even if she could claim self defence in court, she and her baby would forever be marred by this event. Jackson decides to burn down the house. He takes the knife and the pen and disposes of them by throwing them into the rubbish in Edinburgh.

He meets up with Louise to support her while she grieves Marcus's death. He is unable to tell her the truth about Joanna's predicament – having been a police officer himself, he understands that the case would be taken to court if he did.

As in the case of Reggie's first meeting with Louise, the private detective and the police officer are irreconcilable in their roles. Telling Louise the truth would be an indirect plea for her to withhold that information from her superiors and to disobey her duties. It is common within the genre that if the protagonist is a private-eye, he or she will triumph at the cost of the police, unless we are dealing with a *noir* story. Despite their mutual attraction, Jackson and Louise serve different functions in the text, and these generic roles and conventions take precedence over any character development that took place over the course of the story. Hence, they cannot be honest with each other.

“Great Expectations” (447-456)

Jackson returns to London, this time taking a coach. He goes straight to Heathrow airport to await Tessa's return. He is disappointed to discover that she does not appear. Jackson checks with the airline information and discovers that Tessa was never scheduled to be on the inbound flight from New York. He decides to go home, suspecting that perhaps his wife is already waiting for him there. Since lost his phone, he has no way of contacting her. The doors to their flat, however, are locked. Jackson finds the hidden spare key and enters the flat. While Tessa is not there, on the floor there lies the body of Andrew Decker, who apparently shot himself in the head. He is revealed to have been the man sitting next to Jackson on the train – looking tired, dressed in a suit and typing on his laptop. For a moment Jackson considers calling Louise, but he decides against it and calls the London police instead. He is barred from his apartment until the crime scene is cleared and books in a cheap hotel. Still wanting to find his wife, he goes to the National Art Gallery and asks about her there. He learns that Tessa Webb does not work there, and never has. There was also no big conference in New York recently. It is only when Jackson decides to go to the bank to withdraw some money that he discovers he has been swindled. Tessa emptied his accounts and investments. He had been set up by his acquaintance from the security industry, who purposefully invited him to go to his party and meet the woman.

While the conclusion of Jackson's relationship with Tessa seems unexpected, if we look at the demands of the genre it appears almost inevitable. For Atkinson to be able to write another

Jackson Brodie novel (which she did, with *Started Early, Took My Dog*), it would be inconvenient for the middle-aged protagonist to have a loving wife and a small fortune in London. Already in *News* Jackson had to become a victim of a train crash in order to participate in the investigation. He is an ex-private detective, whose circumstances allow him to lead a calm, stress-free life alongside a young, attractive partner. His feelings for Louise, which received much attention in the novel, would have been left unresolved. *News* sets up Tessa's betrayal, and later Louise's divorce with Patrick.

“A Puppy Is Just for Christmas”, “The Rising of the Sun, the Running of the Deer”, “God Bless Us, Every One”, “Safely Gathered In”, “And Scout” (459-480)

In the next chapter of the novel it is Christmas. Patrick finds a present for Louise outside their front door – it is a puppy dog, signed as a gift from an old friend. Louise thinks about the recent events and decides that she will break up with Patrick when New Year comes. She does not want to do this at Christmas because his first wife died in a car crash during the Holiday season. She thinks about a conversation she had with Joanna Hunter about Andrew Decker's death. Louise is convinced that Joanna somehow managed to talk Decker into committing suicide, probably using his newfound faith as a Roman Catholic and despite it at the same time, since the Church perceives taking one's own life as a mortal sin. She tells Patrick that they will call the dog Jackson.

Reggie Chase is now reunited with Joanna Hunter, who invites her to stay at her house. After the cremation and burial of Ms MacDonald it turns out that half of her estate was signed over to her apocalyptic cult, and half was signed to Reggie. Her college fund is thus secured. The girl used the occasion of Ms MacDonald's cremation to dump all the small bags of heroin she had found in the carved-out Loeb's into the coffin. Her brother was stealing from his employers and hiding the drugs in the collection which he knew her sister was not allowed to read. Reggie is puzzled when Joanna asks about Billy's plans for Christmas, since she has never told her about having a brother. The police did not manage to get any information out of either Reggie or Joanna. Neil Hunter recanted his previous statement about being blackmailed by Anderson. He was charged with burning his own arcade and moved away to a bed and breakfast. Since the house is signed to Joanna, she decides to leave Neil to his own fate.

The first and only time Billy becomes the focaliser for the narration is one of the closing chapters, during which we discover that he had sold a Russian handgun, a Makarov which his father brought home as a souvenir from the Gulf War before he was killed by friendly fire, to Joanna Hunter. The reader is left to presume that it is the same gun found in Andrew Decker's hand in Jackson Brodie's flat. The main protagonist continues the narrative, standing at Westminster Bridge at dawn. He thinks about Nathan's hair which he obtained for DNA samples at the beginning of the story, and decides that throwing it into the Thames would be the right thing to do. But he is unable to do so, and keeps the sample. The detective's closing thoughts bring him back to the search party organised for Joanna Hunter 30 years ago. He remembers finding the sleeping girl in the field of wheat and realising with tremendous relief that she was safe. In the final chapter, Joanna finally manages to remember the name of her childhood dog – Scout.

These final pages explain every small mystery in the story, giving the reader a sense of closure. However, the way Atkinson resolves these minor puzzles is one aspect of the novel that seems to go against the conventions of detective fiction. I will attempt to prove my point in the following analysis.

6.3 Crimes and Thriller-Inspired Structure

As the synopsis illustrates, Kate Atkinson's novel seems to be far from the prototypical detective story. The principal reason for this is that the investigation does not seem to be at the centre of the text. There are three detectives – Jackson, Reggie and Louise; while Joanna Hunter's disappearance is the central plot element, each of the characters is preoccupied with their own problems. A great deal of attention is devoted to relationships, e.g. Louise and Patrick ("She Would Get the Flowers Herself", "The Prodigal Wife"), Louise and Jackson ("Fiat Lux"), Reggie and Joanna ("The Life and Adventures...", all chapters written from Reggie's point of view), Reggie and Billy, Reggie and Ms MacDonald ("Satis House", "Rapture Ready"). Under these circumstances, the investigation becomes fragmented – the seven step plot formula does not apply. And yet, the majority of the events are centred around crime, and many of the seemingly unimportant details are directly tied with the main case. In addition, the reader is allowed to discover the solution to several mysteries, with only a few unknowns left in the end – the most

prominent being how exactly did Joanna Hunter manage to persuade Andrew Decker to kill himself after he left the prison. As we will see, some of these irregularities in the structure of detection can be explained by the fact that *News* contains thriller elements. On the other hand, it will also be argued that the humour present in the novel undermines the tension we would expect from a pure thriller.

In order to learn more about the “patchwork” structure of *News*, let us take stock of all the mysteries presented in the text:

1. David Needler is missing, and there is the threat that he will return to kill his wife and children.
2. Neil Hunter’s businesses are being harassed.
3. Joanna and Gabriel Hunter disappear without warning.
4. Two thugs are looking for Billy Chase, and his sister Reggie is forced to deal with them.
5. Andrew Decker leaves his mother’s home in Doncaster, avoiding police surveillance.
6. Jackson Brodie wants to know whether Nathan is his son.
7. For some unexplained reason Tessa Webb, Jackson’s wife, does not come back from New York on the day she said she would.

These are also the main plot elements of the novel. Barring Louise Monroe’s doubts about her marriage with Patrick, which is strictly a psychological or romantic thread, all of these mysteries are somehow related to crime. However, the main difference between *News* and the more prototypical detective story, *Death in Holy Orders*, is that these mysteries are not strongly connected to each other. The following is a list of solutions to the mysteries:

1. David returns on his own and holds his family at gunpoint until the police arrive. He shoots Marcus and himself. He is not found by Louise’s team, but then again, her only participation in the case is visiting Alison when she gets the chance. It might also be argued that Louise’s presence near the Needler’s house is motivated by her reluctance to spend time with Patrick’s sister and her husband.
2. Anderson is actively trying to take over Neil’s businesses using criminal methods. The culmination of this underhanded mode of persuasion is Joanna’s kidnapping. Neil does

nothing to inform the police or blame Anderson on his own accord. The situation is discovered by Louise only because of Reggie, who is only interested in finding Joanna. However, in order to cover for his wife, Neil recants his accusations and is instead blamed for setting fire to his own amusement arcade, which leads him to bankruptcy.

3. The main investigation takes place because of this disappearance. Almost all of the important clues are gathered by Reggie Chase: the baby's comforter, Joanna's handbag, and most importantly, the threats of Anderson's men, as well as the make and registration number of their car. Despite the additional element of confusion introduced by the person of aunt Agnes Barker, we know that Joanna was kidnapped already when Reggie overhears Neil's conversation with the thugs. The solution of the mystery is thus less important than Joanna's fate. She manages to kill her captors and escape on her own, but without Jackson setting fire to the crime scene she would probably be forced to face criminal charges. Louise also plays an important role in putting together all the clues that the reader needs – she is the one who finds Joanna's mobile phone and actually goes to Hawes and discovers that Agnes Barker is dead. However, because this is a story about a private detective and Louise represents the authorities, she is not allowed to discover the entire truth, although she has valid suspicions.
4. Billy sells drugs, but he also steals from his supplier by carving out the insides of Ms MacDonald's Loeb classics and hiding small bags of heroin inside the books. It becomes apparent that his superiors are not aware of his true identity – they think he is called Reggie; and that they do not know where he really lives – they invade the Chase flat, while Billy rents a place somewhere else. Both Billy's plans and the intentions of his suppliers to find the stolen drugs are foiled by Reggie. She discovers the bags, hides them, and destroys the heroin during Ms MacDonald's funeral. This is one bit of information that is withheld from the readers – Reggie is always vague when talking about her brother's activities and does not mention finding the drugs until the very end of the novel when she describes how she destroyed them.
5. Decker is a passenger on the same train as Jackson Brodie. His disappearance is explained by the train crash, from which he somehow managed to escape, at the same time stealing Jackson's wallet and phone. He calls Joanna from Jackson's number but she does not pick up – the call takes place already after the woman is kidnapped. It is not

clear when and how he received the Makarov handgun sold to Joanna by Billy, but he takes it with him to London and shoots himself in Jackson's flat. It is apparent that he must have developed some sort of conscience during his imprisonment and that his religious conversion was not simply a ruse to avoid more jail time. Otherwise it would be impossible for Joanna to guilt him into committing suicide. However, we never learn anything more about the exchange that took place between them.

6. While the original purpose of Jackson's sojourn to the North was to learn whether Nathan was his son, by the time the events of the novel have lapsed he still does not know if this is true or not. He decides to keep the lock of Nathan's hair for future testing.
7. After Billy's drug dealing and Joanna's kidnapping, Tessa's swindle is the most criminal plot thread in the entire novel. However Jackson does not suspect anything and a post-factual explanation can hardly count as an investigation. The protagonist becomes the victim, although he is not left with empty pockets. We learn that he had recently sold his house in France and the payment for it was delayed so that he receives the money already after Tessa steals everything else.

Not only do these plot elements fail to follow the seven step formula, they run contrary to the mode of investigation which the reader comes to expect from a detective story. With the exception of Joanna's disappearance, we are not allowed to see the development of any investigation regarding the solution of the crimes. Instead, the mysteries solve themselves, with the readers learning about the circumstances after the fact, despite having prior knowledge about important pieces of evidence, as is often the case in thrillers. For example, we know that Reggie's father brought home a souvenir from his stay in the Middle East in the form of a Soviet handgun. We know that Billy is a notorious troublemaker-turned-criminal, who would probably be interested in doing something with the Makarov ("The Life and Adventures of Reggie Chase..."). We know that Joanna visited Andrew Decker in prison a month before his release ("Road Trip"). But it is only at the end of the novel that we discover the following: Joanna Hunter knows Reggie has a brother and manages to contact him ("The Rising of the Sun, The Running of the Deer"); Billy sells the pistol to Joanna ("God Bless Us, Every One"); somehow, the Makarov ends up in the hands of Andrew Decker who takes it to London and uses it to shoot himself in the head ("Great Expectations").

There is nothing to indicate that these events are connected, particularly because the train accident which allows Decker to steal Jackson's wallet and keys could not have been a part of Decker's plan. There is also no explanation regarding his presence in Edinburgh – did he come there specifically to take the gun, or was he also planning to meet Joanna and apologise for his past crimes? Why did he decide to steal from the unconscious Jackson, much less go all the way to London to shoot himself there? Regarding the Makarov, how did Joanna manage to learn that Billy had it in the first place, and why did she think it would be a good idea to buy a gun from an unreliable and somewhat dangerous 19-year-old delinquent? Since there is no explanation, such as the convenient letter that Dalglish receives from Gregory at the end of *Death in Holy Orders*, the mystery of Andrew Decker's disappearance and suicide cannot be seen as following the investigation schema discussed in the previous chapter. From all the protagonists only Louise, a police officer, is interested in the circumstances of Decker's demise. Her curiosity is equally professional and personal – on the one hand, she would be remiss not to ask Joanna about Decker's death; on the other, she is interested in Joanna as a person, especially after her mysterious return. The other characters make no move to discover any additional information about the suicide – Reggie was only a “detective” in the novel because she wanted to find her employer, and Jackson became involved in the case due to a coincidence.

Also worthy of note in regards to Decker's situation is the way in which his untold encounter with Joanna functions to build her character into a rather sinister persona. In addition, this is a clue pertaining to Atkinson's inspirations which affected the structure of *News*. Joanna Hunter seems to have been at least partially modelled after Hannibal Lecter from Thomas Harris's famous detective thriller *The Silence of the Lambs*. While the premise of each character is almost diametrically opposite to the other – Lecter is a killer, male and thoroughly evil; Joanna is a victim, female and a mother, which absolves her of guilt by virtue of her desire to protect Gabriel – there seems to be no doubt that Atkinson was inspired by Harris. Both their characters are medical doctors, highly intelligent, with impeccable taste, capable of managing their emotions in extreme situations, always remaining in control.

Lecter talks a prisoner from a neighbouring cell into committing suicide after the latter throws semen at Clarice Starling, Harris's protagonist. Joanna visits Decker in prison to speak to him about his past, and as a result Decker kills himself after being released. In both novels, the conversations between the characters are presented indirectly: “Swallowed his tongue sometime

before daylight. Lecter suggested it to him, Chilton thinks. The overnight orderly heard Lecter talking softly to Miggs. Lecter knew a lot about Miggs. He talked to him for a little while, but the overnight couldn't hear what Lecter said. Miggs was crying for a while, and then he stopped.” (Harris 35) “I went to see him because I wanted him to understand what he had done,' Joanna Hunter said ... 'To know that he had robbed people of their lives for no reason. Maybe seeing me, grown up, and with the baby, brought it home to him, made him think how Jessica and Joseph would have been.' Good explanation, Louise thought. Very rational. Worthy of a doctor. But who was to say what else she had murmured to him across the visitors' table” (Atkinson 2008: 464-65).

In addition, both Lecter and Hunter escape captivity using a pen, killing their guards in the process. Joanna jams a pen into her kidnapper's brain through the eyeball, and kills his partner with his own knife. Lecter fashions a handcuff key from a ballpoint pen and a paper clip, frees his hands and kills his guards with their own weapons. The similarities are inescapable, although the underlying motives are decidedly different – Joanna's behaviour exemplifies a ruthless brand of pragmatism geared towards protecting herself and her child. Hannibal Lecter is simply evil, finding perverse pleasure in tormenting other people, both physically and psychologically. At the same time, the two characters are also too sophisticated for the reader to believe that their actions are wholly primal or instinctual. In order to defeat enemies with obvious advantages, both Lecter and Joanna use a significant amount of planning, which requires absolute control under tremendous pressure. Atkinson's character knows where to stab to kill with a pen, and is capable of faking concern and lying to the other guard immediately after slaying the first one. She also uses the knife she takes with lethal intent, without second thoughts: she expects the other guard to be worried about his partner, and exploits his concern as a weakness. This is the same chain of thought which spawns Lecter's escape plan in *The Silence of the Lambs* – he cuts off the faces of the corrections officers he kills, and disguises himself as one of them, using the bloody bits to suggest that he is a horrifically wounded warden. As a result, he is taken away in an ambulance long before the police have had a chance to search the building and discover the ruse.

It is reasonable to say that both Atkinson and Harris wanted to use their respective escape scenes to portray their characters as psychopaths, capable of calculated action under duress and exploiting altruism to their own benefit – preying upon the response of helping a wounded

colleague. In Lecter's case, the characterisation is fully consistent of a predator. In the case of Joanna Hunter, however, it is the reverse: a perfect Mum, a highly successful medical professional who has many friends, who is capable of doing anything to survive and protect her child. To be the best survivor she comes so close to being a predator that the lines become blurred.

As for broader structural similarities between the two novels, both doctors have chosen young, female protégés whom they mentor and help in achieving a higher position in life: Joanna has Reggie (and she is aware of the girl's difficult situation to a far greater extent than she lets on), Lecter has Starling. At the end of each novel the relationships prove highly beneficial for Reggie and Clarice: the former gains a new home and family, the latter finds and defeats a notorious serial killer before he murders his next victim⁶². Joanna and Hannibal each trust in the abilities and determination of the people they selected: Reggie finds her employer and brings Jackson along to help (which allows Joanna to avoid a trial), while Starling manages to solve the case of Buffalo Bill with Lecter's help, despite her disadvantageous position as a mere student at the FBI academy. This proves that each mentor's judgement is correct, reaffirming their wisdom: Hannibal can “read” Starling, accurately guessing everything about her; Joanna secretly learns about Reggie's life and can see through the game the girl is playing with her. In both cases, the young characters are gifted underdogs, fighting to overcome the bad lot they have been dealt in life and their older mentors seem to find pleasure in seeing their accomplishments.

An additional aspect that reinforces the structural similarities between *News* and *Silence of the Lambs* is the character of Jackson Brodie, who plays a similar function to Jack Crawford, Starling's superior from the FBI. In each novel they help the young female protagonists in practical, necessary ways (e.g. Jackson is able to drive a car for Reggie, Crawford gives Starling his own money for travel expenses that she must incur to solve the case before any reimbursement from the Bureau can be arranged officially). Both are middle-aged men who have lost their wives. Jackson does not know that Tessa left him until the end of *News* but he misses her, Crawford takes care of his comatose wife throughout *Silence of the Lambs*, but she eventually dies.

⁶² Lecter escapes, but this is not her fault, as she has no say in the circumstances of his imprisonment. Her responsibility is to catch Buffalo Bill, and she is the only agent in the FBI who manages to successfully broker Lecter's help and understand the clues he gives her. This is an important note, because Lecter manages to kill five people during his escape, which is a more tragic outcome than the potential death of Buffalo Bill's next victim.

On the other hand, a differentiating structural factor between the two novels is the character of Louise in *News*, as she has no equivalent in Harris's text. In *The Silence of the Lambs*, the narration follows Clarice Starling, Jack Crawford, Hannibal Lecter and the serial killer Jame Gumb, known to the FBI as Buffalo Bill, in addition to his victim. In *News*, the focalisation switches back and forth between Reggie, Jackson, Louise and finally the kidnapped Joanna. Joanna's narrative segments are equivalent to the parts describing Gumb and his victim in Harris's novel, because they serve the same function. It is a common device in thrillers to shift the focalisation to a kidnapped victim (who might be in danger of dying), to let the reader know they are alive and to add a sense of urgency to the actions of the protagonists⁶³. Thus, despite the similarity between Lecter and Joanna, the narrative segments belonging to the infamous psychiatrist from *Silence of the Lambs* are actually replaced with Louise Monroe in *News*. This change is enough to make Atkinson's novel feel profoundly different from Harris's best-seller despite the apparent structural inspirations in the former. Atkinson evidently flirts with the famous thriller on a structural level, despite dressing it in fundamentally different content: her message is positive, focussed on overcoming adversity.

The haphazard, thriller-like way of presenting the crimes and their solutions is present throughout the majority of Atkinson's text. In the case of David Needler, there are some efforts on behalf of the Edinburgh police to find the man, but if we assume that Louise is the officer most involved then it would be too much to claim that the Needlers are a priority. In fact, it is mentioned that the case is growing cold and that there is a real possibility that the fugitive husband has already moved somewhere else and started a new life under a false name. One of the reasons that Marcus ends up dead is that the officers who received Alison's alarm expected it to be false: "Local uniforms were there already, I think it was all a bit casual, you know, the woman who cried wolf too many times" (Atkinson 2008: 440).

⁶³ For example, we observe this in Patterson's *Kiss the Girls*, which will be mentioned later. We also see a variation of the device in John Grisham's *Sycamore Row*, a legal thriller about the mysterious will of a rich man who dispossesses his family, leaves everything he has to a black servant he has only known for a few years, and then commits suicide. The lawyer entrusted to defend the will against the family must learn about the old man's motivations in order to convince the jury in court. We learn that the dead man had a brother, and his importance is apparent when the narration suddenly switches to him. The remainder of the novel is spent in anticipation of whether the protagonist's side will learn the secret from the brother's past in time to win the trial, which is going badly. There is a risk that the brother might die, and that we will not discover the real motivations of the dead magnate.

Perhaps the randomness of this act of violence can be seen as a statement about the unpredictability of such crimes. David Needler, similarly to Andrew Decker 30 years before, appears to be an ordinary person, calm and composed, but because this outward appearance is simply a façade of normalcy, we cannot predict his actions. He does nothing to manifest his intentions. Decker attacks Gabrielle Mason and her children in a field, out of nowhere. Needler appears at night, coming out of some hiding place in the city or beyond. He does not kill his family, as everyone expected him to, but stays the night at their home and takes out his aggression on the first officer who shows up at the door. In order to maintain some degree of control over his destiny, which seems completely ruined, he shoots himself immediately afterwards, preventing the law enforcement from claiming even a small degree of justice by means of retaliation.

As a plot thread, Needler echoes the case of Andrew Decker, and both of them represent the theme of senseless violence which holds the power to ruin the lives of others. However, neither Decker's nor Needler's case match the mode of investigation which we would expect from a detective story. There is no detection that readers can participate in, and the outcomes are presented after the events have taken place: in Joanna's memories when it comes to Decker, and as a report from an officer to Louise for Needler. Thus, the transformed play of detection does not take place, and the reader is a recipient rather than a participant of the events. When it comes to David Needler's reappearance and subsequent suicide, we might even interpret it as a means of diverting Louise's attention from Joanna's return. As a plot device it might be likened to the train crash that brings Jackson Brodie to Edinburgh and allows Reggie Chase to enlist his help in finding Joanna Hunter – a contrived yet entertaining instance of storytelling.

The second crime investigated in *News*, which is the hostile attempt to take over Neil Hunter's business by Anderson from Glasgow is investigated alongside Joanna's kidnapping. The misdeeds are connected, and solved in parallel, but the outcome is decidedly unlike a standard conclusion in a detective story, where we expect the guilty party to be unmasked and brought to justice⁶⁴. Anderson makes no appearance during the novel, and it is Neil Hunter himself who is presented as the guilty party because he recants his previous statements about his

⁶⁴ Unless the story includes the justice thwarted convention mentioned by Dove, in which the criminal is able to escape punishment, e.g. *A Certain Justice* by P.D. James (1997). In *Death in Holy Orders* Dalglish reminisces about being unable to arrest the perpetrator in his previous investigation, despite knowing that he was guilty. This convention does not appear in *When Will There Be Good News*.

wife being kidnapped. Furthermore, Joanna breaks up with Neil after her return, because he failed to sign over his businesses to Anderson in order to save her and Gabriel:

He had been charged with burning down one of his arcades and was on bail, staying in a roopy-looking B and B in Polwarth while Dr Hunter ‘made up her mind’ about whether she wanted him back in her life but you could tell that she’d already made it up “He did try, I suppose,” Reggie said, surprised to hear herself standing up for Mr Hunter who’d never done her any favours, after all, but Dr Hunter said, ‘But not hard enough.’ She said that if Mr Hunter had been in her place, she would have done anything to get him back, ‘And I mean anything’. (Atkinson 2008: 471)

Neil Hunter’s situation poses the question of who is really guilty, or even what is one’s true nature – Joanna’s decision implies that we can learn about a person’s real character only under extreme circumstances. The interesting aspect of this undesirable position is that we do not really know whether it was Neil himself who burned down the arcade or Anderson’s thugs. In the latter case, Joanna’s husband comes across as a worse character than in the former: we could understand that he was attempting to raise ransom money by means of insurance fraud, thus demonstrating that he was capable and willing to sacrifice his small business to save his wife and baby.

In a conversation with Neil, Louise is shocked that he hesitated to sign over his property to Anderson in order to get Joanna and Gabriel back. She claims that such documentation would never have stood up in court, and that as a result Neil would have lost nothing. He counters weakly by saying that with a man like Anderson, that would not have been the end – the Glaswegian criminal would seek vengeance if he did not get what he wanted (“A Clean Well-lighted Place”). Perhaps then, Neil did not want to sign over the business precisely because the procedure could be questioned, and he would have no guarantee that Anderson would be pleased. In fact, in the context of the senseless and seemingly unfathomable violence presented elsewhere in the novel via the characters of Needler and Decker, there is no reason for the reader to believe that a crime lord such as Anderson would relent in his persecution of Hunter after getting the businesses – Joanna has seen the kidnapers who made no attempt to hide their faces, the thugs who are later arrested refuse to confess anything and Anderson is protected by some of the best

lawyers in the area. In a novel about crime, we can surmise that had Joanna been unable to escape on her own, she would have been killed along with her baby regardless of Neil's actions.

The end result, however, is that Neil fails as a husband and the bandits play only a token role of run-of-the-mill criminals who help Joanna to make up her mind about the important people in her life. Much as in an action movie where the hero shoots and kills several stand-ins who are simply there to die and prove his skills, the kidnapers are not described in detail and die easily at the hands of their captive. Considering Joanna's past and the events presented in the story, such as the train crash and the risks Jackson takes to help complete strangers, one would expect Neil Hunter to do something far more spectacular to win his wife's favour and respect.

The third and main mystery in the novel, Joanna's disappearance is the one which most closely resembles the detection as a journey schema we have associated with traditional detective fiction. Firstly, the reader is presented with the Hunter's situation as it is described by Reggie, thus unknowingly acquiring several important clues about Joanna's character and habits, which make Neil's explanation about the sick aunt Agnes seem highly unlikely. The most plausible explanation, which is that Joanna had gone somewhere to hide from media attention after Decker's release from prison, is also undermined by the same clues. The complication for Louise, who does not want to believe Reggie's claims about Joanna's disappearance, comes when she discovers Dr Hunter's cell phone in the kitchen drawer ("A Good Man Is Hard to Find"). It makes little sense for someone to plan on going away and leaving such an important item behind, especially when coupled with the car which also stayed in the garage. Having little else to go on, Louise makes the trip to Hawes and discovers that Agnes Baker has been dead for two weeks, which gives her the reason she needs to declare Joanna missing and officially question Neil about the situation ("The Prodigal Wife", "A Clean Well-lighted Place"). The period of gloom arrives upon Louise's learning about the kidnapping, but the solution comes abruptly and without her involvement. For the reader, who possesses information concerning the other characters' actions, the events that lead to Dr Hunter's return are clear – the dawning light is the combination of Reggie's eavesdropping at the Hunters' house ("Reggie Chase, Warrior Virgin") and the short fragments of narration belonging to Joanna ("Abide with Me").

At this point in the novel we already know what happened to Reggie's employer. We have no reason to distrust the girl's narrative, and while the identity of the kidnapers is not disclosed in Joanna's chapter, we learn that they are working for a shady businessman from Glasgow

(ultimately, his identity proves insignificant, since Atkinson does not devote any time to characterise him; he is an excuse for the plot to unfold rather than a real villain). We also know the motive, which is financial. This makes the remainder of the story, as it relates to Joanna, read more like a thriller than a detective story⁶⁵. The final explanation is the murder of the kidnappers, the burning of the crime scene, and Joanna's and Neil's refusal to confess anything to the police. Thus, the kidnapping plays out in the same manner as a classic tale of detection, broken up into smaller narrative fragments devoted to the point of view of each of the protagonists: Jackson, Reggie and Louise, plus Joanna's description of her escape. Therefore, instead of one detective knowing all the information necessary to solve the crime, it falls onto the reader to put all the pieces together and form a complete picture of the mystery. If we compare this situation with *Death in Holy Orders*, we will see that in terms of the detection schema, the main difference is that neither of the protagonists ever learns everything that we know. A schema for Louise's solution of Joanna's disappearance would be incomplete, as would be the one for Jackson and Reggie. However, as we have discussed earlier, it is the reader who takes part in the game of detection, not the characters, therefore the adherence of *When Will There Be Good News* to the story structure reminiscent of classic detective fiction should be judged by it being experienced *by the readers*. In the case of this main mystery we might easily match the necessary plot elements to Narayanan's cognitive model, as we did with P.D. James's novel:

1. Getting into a state of readiness: Joanna's disappearance is stated on the back cover as the main plot element, and the shocking opening of the novel raises the stakes of the woman's possible death – she was the sole survivor 30 years ago, will she still be alive when the mystery is solved?

2. The initial state: The presentation of the main protagonists: Jackson and his trip to the North, Reggie who is employed by Dr Hunter, and Louise, the only police officer who will narrate large parts of the story. The goals and motivations of the characters are also made clear, leaving readers to wonder how Jackson might get involved in a mystery in Edinburgh. Louise is informed about Neil Hunter's involvement with

⁶⁵ We might compare it to thriller writer James Patterson's *Kiss the Girls*, in which the detective's niece, along with several other women, is held captive by a serial killer. At several points in that story the narration switches to the imprisoned women, as it does with Joanna in *News*. The tension in both novels arises from the question of whether the protagonists will be able to find the missing people in time – before they are killed.

Anderson and the arcade fire. Reggie visits Miss MacDonald to stay the evening at her Mussleburgh house.

3. The starting process: The train crash takes place, putting Jackson in Edinburgh and offering Reggie a chance to save his life and discover his identity. During that same night, as we will discover later, Joanna and Gabriel are kidnapped.

4. The main process (instantaneous or prolonged): Reggie is called by Neil who tells her that Joanna has gone to visit her sick aunt, and that Reggie's help will not be needed until his wife returns. We learn immediately that Neil's explanation is highly unlikely, and when Reggie visits the Hunters' house she finds more clues, including the Prius in the garage and the baby's soiled comforter. This convinces her that Joanna has gone missing, and that Neil knows more than he admits. Reggie calls Joanna and hears the ringtone coming from the kitchen. She tells Louise about the situation, and manages to raise her curiosity.

5. Options to stop, resume, iterate, or continue: This step is divided into two separate plot threads – one which concerns Louise, and the second which deals with Jackson awakening in the hospital and becoming lucid. For Louise, the option arises to investigate Joanna's disappearance despite having no procedural reason to do so. Jackson can refuse to help Reggie, but instead he chooses to help her. The main process is iterated by Louise, continued by Reggie and resumed by Jackson (in the sense that he wants to deal with Reggie as soon as possible to return home, but cannot find the willpower to outright refuse her). During this stage Reggie learns what happened to Joanna, Louise becomes more suspicious after finding Dr Hunter's phone and drives to Hawes, and a dazed Jackson crashes an illegally rented car. The protagonists meet and exchange information. Reggie and Jackson are dropped off at Miss MacDonald's house and Louise decides to open an investigation.

6. A check to see if the goal has been met: After deciding to visit the Hunters' house Reggie and Jackson come across the kidnappers' car and decide to follow it in the Prius. The reader learns that Joanna has killed her captors and escaped with the baby. Louise will begin the investigation on the morning of the following day, too late to have any impact on anything.

7. The finishing process: When Jackson and Reggie arrive at the house in which Joanna was held, they meet her and the baby outside. Jackson agrees to help Joanna by burning down the crime scene. He removes the weapons used to kill the criminals – the knife and the pen. Joanna and Reggie return home, confusing Louise and the police officers. Before Louise is able to pursue the matter further, she is informed about Marcus's death at the hands of Andrew Needler.

8. The final state: Neil is charged with burning down his arcade after recanting his statement about Anderson kidnapping his wife. He moves out of the house, while Reggie is invited to move in with Joanna. The Hunters, Brodie and Reggie withhold the truth from Louise. Jackson returns to London. Only the reader knows the full truth: Joanna could not take part in the investigation that led to her being found, Reggie did not see the bodies of the kidnapers, Louise does not know what happened on the night of Joanna's escape and Jackson does not care as long as everyone is safe.

Thus, we see that the main story line matches the conventions of detective fiction. It is the other mysteries which make *News* un-prototypical in relation to the genre, since they fail to follow the detection schema, and rely on surprise and withholding information from the reader to create a sense of puzzlement.

We see this particularly well in the case of the latter mysteries, especially Billy's drug-dealing, Decker's disappearance and Tessa's betrayal of Jackson. In the case of the thugs looking for Billy and the heroin he stole, we are given a clue in the form of the carved-out Loeb's and Reggie's mentioning of her brother selling drugs to teenagers at her school. We can guess why the two ruffians are looking for Billy, but it is never mentioned that Reggie actually found the hidden drugs and hid them elsewhere. Indeed, apart from being shocked and saddened by the vandalising and subsequent destruction of her mother's flat, Reggie does not seem to be interested in the matter at all. Only at the very end of the novel do we learn about the bags of heroin, that they weighed around one kilogram and that Reggie decided to burn them during Ms MacDonald's funeral ("The Rising of the Sun, the Running of the Deer"). This is an example of a mystery which cannot be solved by the reader due to the key information being withheld by the narrator. It echoes Jackson Brodie's conviction that "a coincidence is an explanation waiting to happen" (*News*: 402).

Thus, Atkinson hides the explanations until the end. Readers experience the described events as coincidental because they lack the knowledge required to see the motivation behind them. But for the wildly improbable plot turns, this mode of storytelling might be perceived as a statement regarding realism in fiction, reflecting a broader epistemological stance: if we knew enough, we could make sense of things which seem random. However, Atkinson does not allow us to peek into the minds of the two most prominent killers in the novel: Decker and Needler. While we might guess that Needler's crime was motivated by his break up with Alison, and that he simply refused to let his family go, Decker remains inscrutable, although not in any mysterious way which would stimulate further curiosity. He might simply be seen as a disturbed individual, who confesses during his trial that he does not know what drove him to kill Gabrielle Mason and her children. In light of his suicide, undoubtedly motivated by Joanna's visit to him in prison, he might be considered an insensitive and unimaginative person. The religion which he found in prison could have developed his empathy, and Joanna's choice of bringing Gabriel with her when she went to see Decker might have served as a visual cue which allowed him to comprehend the enormity of his crime. After a thirty year sentence, however, and because Atkinson leaves the story untold, it seems strange for Decker to turn empathetic enough to become suicidal⁶⁶. We know that Jackson sees him type on a laptop on the train to Edinburgh, perceiving him as just another passenger. The protagonist does not want to look at what the man is typing, in order not to learn facts that might be too personal. This might be the author's message about one mystery in *News* that will not be solved – what could have motivated a man to commit such a horrific and senseless crime as killing a mother and her two children. The presence of an unpredictable and life-changing threat which can also be lethal is a notion to which we will return later in this chapter when we discuss the theme of fear in the context of a Baudrillardian reading. The idea is deeply rooted in the genre of detection, which may be perceived as a means of taming crime through rationalisation⁶⁷.

⁶⁶ There are several more questions regarding Decker's motivation for killing himself: did he go to Edinburgh to get the gun which Joanna bought, and how did surviving the train crash influence him – did seeing himself as a lucky survivor underscore his sense of feeling unworthy? Sadly, the novel does not present Decker as a full character – he is more of a figure from Joanna's past and serves to further characterise her.

⁶⁷ This ideological facet of crime fiction is explored in Scaggs: "In Christie's fiction, this impulse to recover and reinstate the sort of order that existed in the past is a direct response to the disruption in the present caused by the crime of murder. For this reason, it is significant that Poirot's method consists of the observing and ordering of facts, because order, as Knight observes, is 'the overt method and the covert purpose of the analysis' (Knight 1988: 110). That is, it is Poirot's aim (and purpose) to restore order after it has been disrupted by crime, and this notion is given a twenty-first-century reinterpretation when Catherine Willows, in the pilot episode of *C.S.I.*,

However, if we return to the other mysteries in *When Will There Be Good News*, we see that readers are not allowed to gain the knowledge necessary for participating in the solution in most cases. Reggie withholds information regarding her finding of the heroin hidden in the Loeb classics, there is nothing to indicate that Decker had a gun or that he acquired it through Joanna. One very unlikely possibility that could put the reader in the solution of Decker's disappearance is that the gun he took was actually carried by a squaddie who died in the train crash – Jackson falls out of the carriage alongside a mortally wounded soldier, and since Decker took the detective's phone and wallet, he might have taken a pistol as well. But in that case the explanation concerning Joanna's purchase of the gun – the only time that Billy becomes the focaliser in the entire novel – would be unnecessary. In addition, it is hard to imagine that a soldier in 2008 would carry a trophy gun similar to the one acquired by Reggie's father in the 1990s.

The other mystery for which the reader has no way of learning the solution by means of gradually presented clues is Jackson's new wife being a con artist. The novel is focussed on other events and Jackson has no reason to suspect Tessa of any ill intentions. The explanation is post-factual and comes as a surprise, but the same may be said about the money which Jackson still has. For a few pages, the readers are left to believe that the detective is completely broke, but because the payment for selling the house in France arrives late, the protagonist does not end up in a dire situation. It might be said that there is no real mystery, since we learn about the crime and at the same time we discover the explanation. Rather, the narrative function that Tessa Webb's character plays is satisfying the principle of efficiency. Jackson mentions her several times during the novel, along with a lengthy description of how they met. If there was no crime attached to this plot thread, it would seem superfluous.

The same claims can be made in relation to the presentation of Reggie's family and her situation, all seemingly unrelated to the story until the events play out in full. This is when we learn that her apparently unimportant past explains her motivations and a great deal of other things:

1) She wants to save Jackson because her mother died in a pool accident when there was no one nearby to help.

notes that 'We [crime scene analysts] solve. We restore peace of mind, and when you're a victim, that's everything.' (Scaggs: 47)

- 2) She is able to offer first aid because Joanna taught her the requisite skills.
- 3) We discover that she has dropped out of school and studies for exams with Ms MacDonald, who is crucial to tying Jackson into the story.
- 4) The detailed description of MacDonald's book collection is justified by Billy carving out the Loeb's to hide drugs inside them.
- 5) Billy's manual skills and possible future as a carpenter predicted by one of his teachers explain how he came upon the idea of carving out the books in the first place.
- 6) A brief description of the posh school which Reggie attended shows the reader that Billy sells drugs.
- 7) Reggie taking care of Sadie saves her from injury or death twice: when she is accosted by the two thugs looking for Billy, and when she is attacked by her brother in Ms MacDonald's house with Jackson.
- 8) The mention of Reggie's dead father and his service in the military brings up the Makarov which becomes important when Joanna buys it from Billy and somehow gives it to Decker⁶⁸, etc.

As we can see, the majority of the descriptions in *News* are not unrelated to a crime, thus tying in with one of the most important regulative conventions of detective fiction. In addition, all of the "secondary" mysteries serve to explain the actions of the characters during the main investigation (e.g. if Reggie could just peacefully return to her flat she would probably not devote all her time to searching for Joanna; the Needler case makes Louise especially concerned about the fate of mothers in danger, and in the end prevents her from pursuing the subject of Joanna's unlikely return; Decker serves as a red herring, and without Tessa being gone, he would be unable to shoot himself in Jackson's apartment). The principle of efficiency is satisfied, to a degree unnecessary in a thriller but required in a detective novel. It is simply the mode of storytelling adopted by Atkinson which does not allow us to discover how everything is connected until the end of the text, and this makes it unlike other detective stories where we are able to trace the development of the investigation.

Since only the main mystery follows the investigation schema presented previously, it seems prudent to ask what type of image schema can be used to represent the other enigmas that

⁶⁸ The principle of efficiency gives special cause to make a mental note whenever a gun is mentioned in a detective story.

the reader encounters in Atkinson’s novel. I would argue that due to the rather binary states that we experience in the context of the text – we either know everything, i.e. we have all the necessary information to understand what actually happened; or we can guess that there is a problem, but we are unable to solve it because some information is withheld from us – the model that can represent these mysteries is the container schema, also outlined by Lakoff and Johnson in *Philosophy in the Flesh*. Similarly to the source-path-goal schema, the container is very simple: there is an area delineated by a boundary, and the space outside of it. The trajector can be either inside or outside of the container. Of course, in our case, the schema is used to represent a *conceptual* boundary – we do not have the necessary knowledge to understand what is really happening. Therefore, we are either “in” on the secret or we are “out” – it is impossible to grasp the full picture of the situation without possessing the required information (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 32). The following is an illustration of the container schema:

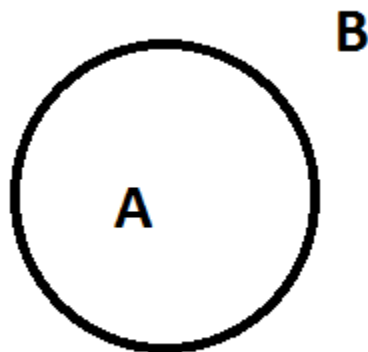


Fig.1 A is inside the container; B is outside the container

We can project the reader’s knowledge onto the schema, as we did in the case of the source-path-goal schema and the “detection is a journey” metaphor. We will then perceive the moment in which we gain the information necessary to understand the situation as entering or leaving the boundaries of the container. It is unimportant which mode we choose – it may plausibly be argued that entering the container should result in gaining more knowledge, as in the informal expression “to be *in* the know” and the notion of a person being an “insider”, both of

which are ways of saying that a person knows something that others do not; or that the boundaries obscure our view of the situation and only by leaving the container can we see the full picture. Either way, the state is binary, as we have seen in the cognitive critique of container-like categories in chapter 3. The schema stands in contrast with the gradual gathering of clues associated with more standard mysteries, such as Joanna's kidnapping. The difference between the two modes of presenting a mystery can be likened to two sets of jigsaw puzzles. In one, which is represented by the container schema, there are several pieces, but the absence of one piece makes it impossible to understand what the puzzle is illustrating. In the other set, there are numerous pieces, and adding them together gradually reveals picture – even without all the pieces, we can guess what the illustration is. In the case of *News*, we receive several clues about Joanna's kidnapping, and we can claim with a large dose of probability that she was abducted when Reggie overhears the bandits' conversation with Neil. In *Death in Holy Orders*, Gregory becomes the main suspect when we learn about his marriage to Clara Arbuthnot. In contrast, in the case of the stolen heroin, it is impossible to fathom why the thugs keep harassing Reggie to the point of burning down her flat, without knowing that she removed the drugs from the carved-out books. The bandits are in possession of two damaged Loeb's, they know that Billy's has been hiding heroin in them. Billy attacks Reggie in Ms MacDonald's house. But we cannot know that Reggie has found all the drugs and removed them from the books. We cannot even know that it was heroin, considering that Reggie mentioned Billy's drug-dealing in the context of teenagers at her school. Without the final piece of the puzzle we can only guess, but we do not have a comparable level of certainty that we had in the case of Joanna's kidnapping or the Archdeacon's murder in P.D. James's novel.

Hence, if we associate the detective genre with the mode of transformed play described by Dove, we cannot claim that *When Will There Be Good News* is a prototypical example of such a story. The manner in which it departs from the formula is clear only when we take the elements presented in this analysis into account. On the surface, the four constitutive conventions are satisfied: the novel is about detection, the main characters are detectives⁶⁹, the case is difficult

⁶⁹ As a teenage girl involved in solving a crime, Reggie Chase is not that unusual for a protagonist in a detective story – the obvious inspiration would be Nancy Drew, the 16-year-old girl detective created by Edward Stratemeyer in the 1930s (over the course of the 20th century the character became tremendously successful in America, and stories about her have been ghostwritten by many authors, under the pen-name Carolyn Keene). More closely related to the novels described in this thesis, the theme of an unlikely, inexperienced woman becoming involved in an investigation has been explored by P.D. James in *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*

(because of the false leads in the form of Decker's release and disappearance, as well as Neil's fabricated story about the sick aunt), and the crime is solved by the end. In fact, it might be said that *News* over-emphasizes that last element, by presenting solutions we are unaware of until the end. Yet it is because of the container mode of presenting the mysteries, which allows Atkinson to keep secrets until the very last chapters, that the novel does not feel like a classic detective story until we finish reading it. Before we discover that most of the information presented in the opening chapters is actually relevant, the text seems unnecessarily focussed on decidedly "un-detective" story lines – studying for examinations, relationships – especially in the case of Louise and Jackson, etc. This is in addition to the reader of the detective story expecting to participate in a game, and instead being treated to puzzles which solve themselves.

The best way of describing Atkinson's method of storytelling is to say that *When Will There Be Good News* straddles two genres: detection and thriller, but that it also chooses not to fully belong to either. The "container mysteries" are characteristic of the latter genre, but the atmosphere and literary conventions belong to the former. *News* seems too frivolous to be considered a good thriller, as Atkinson has fun with crafting amusing coincidences and employing generic self-awareness. By comparison, best-selling thriller writer James Patterson never acknowledges the ridiculousness of his plots so as not to break up the tension. And yet the tall-tale content of his novels matches Atkinson's humour in terms of improbability, which is arguably more entertaining because it appears to be the unintentional by-product of the tense action, rather than a calculated joke. A good example from Patterson's *Kiss the Girls*⁷⁰, a novel mentioned earlier, might be one of the protagonists: a young woman named Kate gets abducted from her home by a serial killer and manages to escape his lair in the wilderness. Drugged and barely conscious, she stands in front of a cliff with the killer in pursuit. She chooses to jump and crashes into a shallow river below. Miraculously, she survives and is brought back to full health. She becomes involved in the investigation and develops a relationship with the main detective. While her tormentor remains free, she chooses to stay the night alone in her home, re-assuring the main protagonist that if the killer comes again, *she will be prepared and use her karate skills to defend herself*. Somehow, the police do not have anyone near her home to keep vigil and

(1972), in which the protagonist inherits a detective agency from a deceased partner and decides to keep it in honour of his memory.

⁷⁰ The novel is classified as a psychological thriller and was adapted into a successful film that starred Morgan Freeman.

potentially catch the murderer. The protagonist, along with his powerfully built colleague, leaves Kate and goes to spend the night at a hotel. She is attacked again, puts up a fight, but this time the killer is accompanied by his accomplice, another serial murderer. She is overpowered, and beaten almost to death (there is no explanation why the two men leave her without making sure she died). Once more, she barely survives, and manages to regain her health (adamantly refusing to undergo plastic surgery to remove the facial scars left after her ordeal). Kate is then attacked a third and final time, but the main character is there to help her and together they manage to kill the psychopath. Kate's stubbornness in light of the circumstances is unfathomable and wholly unrealistic.

Despite the unbelievable nature of Kate's misadventures, Patterson never strays from a serious tone. By the second time she is attacked, Kate knows that the killer is armed and uses a paralysing agent, but still decides to take him on *in hand-to-hand combat* (she has no weapon at all, despite everything that happened, and despite mentally preparing herself to face the killer again). She also knows that the killer is working with a partner, and that both men are exceptionally strong. The police force and the FBI know that the two men are at large and that they are probably cooperating, yet not one officer is posted near Kate's house (she is the only victim to have escaped and an invaluable witness in a potential trial). The main protagonist, who is in love with her and warns her to stay at a hotel finally gives up on convincing Kate and drives off. It is perhaps ironic that by the end of *Kiss the Girls* both of the killers are actually shot to death by the main character, an outcome that should have occurred much earlier had the characters acted more rationally – if Kate had the time to get out of bed and land a kick on her assailant during the second attack, she could easily have shot both the killers that night, provided she had a weapon. Patterson's only explanation is that Kate is stubborn. If one reads *Kiss the Girls* and *News* one after the other, Atkinson's text is superior in terms of character motivations and behaviour. It also seems more intelligent because she invariably presents unlikely situations with a dose of humour, thus acknowledging that her readers want to enjoy the novel despite its dark storyline. Yet, precisely because of this palpable detachment *News* is not as good a thriller as *Kiss the Girls* is. Paradoxically, ignoring the obvious improbabilities works in favour of the latter novel while in *News*, the thriller elements are weakened by the humour.

In Atkinson's text, the departure from a traditional mode employed in detective fiction is also seen in the fragmented narration which resembles a film or television series. The novel

begins with a description of events that took place thirty years earlier, and includes several sudden shifts in focalisation and scene. There are many instances of a character recollecting a situation which happened earlier in order to frame an ongoing scene, which creates a postmodern, patchwork impression, quite unlike the orderly narrative of P.D. James. On the other hand, Atkinson's novel could not be adapted to film without modification because the majority of the shifts in focalisation and narration originate from within the characters' minds. The narrative technique used throughout the text is interior monologue (characteristic of hard-boiled detective stories), with many impressions and moments in which characters remember very brief associations, or are lost in their thoughts and relay the ongoing conversation only in small interjections, e.g. in parentheses. On the screen, the events would appear too chaotic and disconnected, which is confirmed by the BBC adaptation of the Jackson Brodie novels, *Case Histories*. The show takes liberties with the presentation of the story in order to make viewing easier. It might be said that this is a testament to Atkinson's skill as a writer, as she manages to evoke the atmosphere of a film in a novel without appearing to write for a different medium. The ties with television and cinema are also made clear by the inherent self-referentiality of detective fiction that is also present in *News*. When Louise goes to Hawes and finds out that Agnes Barker has been dead for two weeks, she is called by one of her officers in Edinburgh, Sandy Mathieson. Without looking at the phone, Louise assumes the call is from Jackson, and answers it angrily: "‘Whoa,’ Sandy Mathieson said. ‘Down, Shep. ‘Wee jaunt’ not going so well?’ ‘No it’s fine. Sorry. There is no aunt.’ ‘Interesting. It’s like something out of Agatha Christie.’ ‘Well, not really.’" (Atkinson 2008: 383-384)

Louise dismisses the similarity of the situation to the works of the most famous crime writer, in a similar way in which Piers Tarrant seems annoyed at Kate Miskin for suggesting a Christie-like twist in *Death in Holy Orders*. Louise is right – *News* is far from Golden Age detective stories in most aspects, but it takes several cues from other sources. This is acknowledged in an earlier chapter in which Louise watches TV at home while Patrick, his sister and her husband are out: "Instead, she opened a bottle of Bordeaux that was sitting on the kitchen counter and carried it through to the living room where she poured it into one of Patrick and Samantha's crystal goblets, put her feet up on the sofa, and caught a rerun of an old *CSI* on Living TV. She could feel the day beginning to seep out of her bones. It was like being single again. It felt good." (Atkinson 2008: 287)

She then proceeds to think about the possibility of Neil Hunter having killed his wife for insurance money while the show plays in the background. Louise watches the main character in the series and starts talking to him, exploring various possibilities in Neil's case: "She liked the way Grissom walked, like a bear with a nappy on" (Atkinson 2008: 289). As Louise contemplates the details that a shaken Reggie tried to tell her earlier about Joanna's disappearance, the show ends: "The suspect that Grissom was talking to suddenly blew himself up. CSI was a two parter and ended on a cliffhanger, Stokes still buried alive and running out of air." (Atkinson 2008: 289).

As we have mentioned before, in Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue", the reference to Vidocq and the Parisian police was patronising, and we find this tone in *News* as well. People being buried alive or blowing themselves up appear to be jabs at the ways in which detective fiction writers attempt to shock or engage their audiences. However, it seems impossible to escape the conclusion that Atkinson subscribes to the formula of unlikely contrivances in the same way the writers of *CSI* do. The sudden action – a suspect blowing himself up, Reggie encountering two thugs that throw a copy of Homer's *Odyssey* Book One at her face, or Dr Hunter killing one of the kidnappers by driving a pen through his eyeball. As a plot device, the cliffhanger in *CSI* is also reminiscent of the container schema that makes it impossible for the reader to know what really happened until the end of the novel. In Atkinson's story, the train crash, caused by a terminally sick woman who had problems driving but needed to go to a meeting of a strange religious group, seems more far-fetched and outlandish than anything that Louise watches on the show. Atkinson's protagonist feels good watching *CSI*, and it is difficult not to see the parallels between the style of the show and the novel⁷¹.

Taken out of context, this type of storytelling seems outrageous and contrived to the point of being funny, but once the reader or viewer immerses herself in the unfolding events, the cognitive mechanisms driving the hermeneutical need to discover more come into play and all the elements fall into their proper place. We are once again reminded of Dove's comment concerning the artificiality of detective fiction – after all, are Atkinson's coincidences that outlandish when compared to a plot such as Christie's *The Murder on the Orient Express*, where

⁷¹ Although thematically, as was mentioned before, *CSI* as a show about crime lab analysts is more focussed on the technical side of crime-solving, espousing a faith in science and rationality. By comparison, Atkinson is primarily interested in relationships and people. Throughout *News* there is not even one instance of a mystery being explained by the application of technology (the promise of the DNA analysis of Nathan's hair is never fulfilled).

everyone turns out to be the killer, or the escaped orangutan who kills the women in Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue"? If these works are some of the most iconic stories of detection, then the train crash in *News* or a suspect blowing himself up in *CSI* are completely justified by being relevant to the plot in each story. *When Will There Be Good News* is a postmodern instance of detective fiction that strays from the prototype by means of appearing too detached from the main mystery throughout the majority of the text, but it still remains a tale of detection. The apparent randomness which permeates the plot underscores its contemporariness, and lends more human qualities to the characters as they struggle to deal with the circumstances imposed upon them.

6.4 Themes

In the remainder of this analysis we will focus on the themes and ideological layer of the novel in a Baudrillardian reading. We have seen the mechanisms that make *News* a story of detection, but we are yet to discuss the elements that make it postmodern. In *Death in Holy Orders*, the themes which corresponded with Baudrillard's theories were embedded in a text that could hardly be called hyperreal or simulationist in itself. P.D. James's narrative style is more reminiscent of writers from the past, by whom she was inspired⁷². Atkinson's novel is different in many respects, and we will explore this difference here.

There are several important themes which form the character of *News*, and the fact that the novel does not have a clear focus on one aspect, as was the case in *Death in Holy Orders*, is caused in part by there being three main characters through which the events are narrated, each of them presenting a different outlook. On the other hand, there are also common threads which link the protagonists. The most prominent of these is the desire for love, which is expressed in familial ties – Reggie lost her mother and father, and her brother does not seem to care about her, which draws her towards Joanna and the woman's "normal" life; Jackson wants a wife, and thinks that he has found one in Tessa, who turns out to be a con artist; Louise cannot seem to adapt to her life with Patrick and falls in love with Jackson, all the time feeling that she is a bad wife; Joanna fights to maintain a family thus healing the damage caused by Andrew Decker.

⁷² See Bargainnier: "Evelyn Waugh, Hardy and Trollope are among her favourite British writers, but the novelist she most admires is Jane Austen, and she has reported that among Austen novels she considers *Emma* the best." (Bargainnier et al. 1981: 110-111)

However, a more important theme in the context of detection is a fear of the unknown and of the randomness and senselessness of violence. As we have mentioned previously, detective fiction offers the promise of rationalising and taming the disruption caused by crime, but in *News*, the characters are left to deal with the aftermath of transgression and they become afraid that it might happen again. This manifests itself at several moments in the text, and is strengthened by the fact that each of the protagonists has experienced death and the way it can disrupt one's life. Louise fears that David Needler will return to kill his family and that she will not be there to prevent it (which is what happens, only instead of killing Alison or her children Needler shoots Marcus, who is even closer to Louise as a co-worker). In general, Louise is also angry about the fact that women are weak and susceptible to the violence perpetrated by men. At several points in the novel, Louise underlines the particular kind of bravery that women need to muster in their everyday lives. Specifically, she implies that as mothers, women are unable to protect their children from the harm that might befall them, but when they try, the situation turns both against the child and the parent. Inescapably, mothers are never alone, dealing with danger one-on-one, as they feel the need to protect their children even when their attempts are doomed to fail:

Hide or run? Louise hoped she would stand and fight. If you were on your own you could fight, if you were on your own you could run. You couldn't do either when you were with children. You could try. Gabrielle Mason had tried, her hands and arms were covered in defensive wounds where she had tried to stave off Andrew Decker's knife. She had fought to the death protecting her young. Give a medal to Gabrielle Mason. Louise had been there, been there with Archie when he was little, at the empty play parks and deserted duck ponds, suddenly aware of the nutter's sloping walk, his shifting gaze. Don't make eye contact. Walk past briskly, don't draw attention to yourself. Somewhere, in some Utopian nowhere, women walked without fear. Louise would sure like to see that place. (Atkinson 2008: 162)

In *News*, a trait which can be ascribed to all the main characters is this fragility, the fear of the unpredictable menace which has the power to shatter one's sense of security if things go too far. And that sense of terror is associated with harm that might befall other people, not the

protagonists – they are described as feeling that one more death might push them over the edge, plunge them into depths of despair from which they will not be able to escape. This is the reason for which Jackson fears that he will not be able to help someone in need. Ignoring his own discomfort seems the natural solution to him, and as a result he finds himself unable to refuse a plea for help from anyone that asks for it. This compulsory selflessness is connected with Jackson's childhood, and described in greater detail when he remembers finding the six-year old Joanna lying alone in the field of wheat thirty years prior to the events of the novel:

He thought she was dead. Within the course of one year of his life when he was twelve, he had watched his mother die in hospital, he had seen his sister's body dredged unceremoniously out of a canal, he had found his brother hanging. He was only nineteen and he knew that he couldn't bear it if the girl was dead, that it would snap what was left of his heart from its moorings and he would cease to be Lance Corporal Brodie of the Prince of Wales's Own Regiment of Yorkshire and become himself a small child alone forever in the dark. (Atkinson 2008: 478)

Reggie fears that death will take all her loved ones away from her – this is the reason for which she goes out to help the victims of the train crash and why she is desperate to find Joanna. Fear also becomes a motivation at two crucial moments in the novel. The first is when Louise visits Joanna to warn her about Decker's release and suggests that she should be on her guard against potential visits from the attention-seeking media. The second is when Joanna convinces Jackson to help her by destroying the scene of crime where she murdered the two kidnappers, in order to prevent her baby, Gabriel, from having to deal with the same problems she had when she was a child:

She said she killed the two guys who were holding her in the house because they were intending to kill her and the baby but he didn't know that for sure. She would have got off on self-defence, he was pretty sure, but the house was a bloodbath, she would never have escaped the notoriety. For the rest of her life she would have been the woman who killed her kidnappers, and the baby would have been the son of that woman. He could see her

point. She'd spent thirty years running from one nightmare only to crash headlong into another. (Atkinson 2008: 452)

This theme creates a sense of importance and urgency that drives the character's actions, making them more believable. It could be argued that this aspect combined with the highly personalised styles in the narration lends the novel an air of realism, which in traditional detective fiction is either not prominent or completely absent. The type of characterisation and themes found in *News* are more commonly associated with the hard-boiled detective story, originating from the novels of Raymond Chandler as well as film *noir*. One of the innovations to the genre discussed by Dove is the introduction of first-person narration in hard-boiled stories, which was previously unacceptable due to the mental acuity of protagonists modelled after Poe's Dupin. The hard-boiled detective is much closer to a "real" person, with his ability to solve crimes being the result of experience, luck and perseverance rather than talent, which is displayed by characters such as Sherlock Holmes or Hercules Poirot. Jackson Brodie is firmly set in this down-to-earth tradition – his past career as a soldier, policeman and private eye, combined with the trauma of encountering death as a child make him a grizzled professional, well-equipped to handle the difficult situations he encounters. On the other hand, the astonishing coincidences and contrived plot twists pull *News* away from hard-boiled stories and back towards "classic" tales of detection, by distancing the readers from the events. In a sense, Atkinson enjoys playing with the absurd, perhaps drawing upon a "British" sense of humour associated with acts such as Monty Python or the television series *Blackadder*⁷³, infusing it with the tropes of detective fiction. The result is a decidedly postmodern detective story, including numerous references to various literary works⁷⁴, pushing the boundaries of the genre into thriller territory—by means of structuring the mysteries in a bimodal fashion discussed previously—and presenting a mix of humour and seriousness in order to keep the reader engaged.

Thus, on the one hand, Atkinson does not let her audience forget that they are reading a fictional story – by including several references to other texts and establishing the tone of the

⁷³ In the series, the titular *Blackadder*, played by Rowan Atkinson finds himself trying to survive in various periods of British history, and while the show is decidedly comedic, one cannot escape the grim undertone stemming from the absurdity of the violence that *Blackadder* tries to avoid, e.g. in the trenches of the Great War, or in the court of a murderous Queen Elizabeth.

⁷⁴ This is particularly true of Joanna Hunter, Reggie and Jackson, who for some reason keeps remembering prayers he learned as a child. Both Joanna and Reggie are presented as being well-read.

novel by means of such references, e.g. Louise watching *CSI*, and by making the plot events themselves improbable. On the other hand, the themes presented are rather solemn and dark – the fear of despair arising from the loss of loved ones, and the terror created by senseless violence. This combination of opposing intentions might seem paradoxical, but it points us towards an ideological underpinning which can be explored with a Baudrillardian outlook. Unlike *Death in Holy Orders*, where we analysed motifs at face value, in the case of a more ideological approach to *News* we will inquire why the discussed themes are used, and how this relates to the subject of popular fiction.

One possible explanation for the apparent duality in thematic intentions is that the darkness of the character motivations intensifies the readers' emotional investment. Since the plot itself is far-fetched due to its randomness and humour, the counterbalance must be strong enough to maintain our connection with the plight of the protagonists. The gloom and horror in the main characters' pasts serve to compensate for the lightness and absurdity of the ongoing events. The ratio of these two opposing elements determines the overall tone of the novel. Atkinson balances them in order to make Joanna's kidnapping engaging even after we become aware of the fact she was taken – which shifts the mode of the story from detection to suspense. Likewise, Jackson's return to London is marred by Tessa's betrayal and escape – but Reggie and Joanna receive a happy ending. Louise's decision of leaving her husband appears more neutral in tone, considering her mixed feelings throughout the story. Without the appalling experience of losing her father and mother as well as having a delinquent older brother, "Reggie Chase, Girl Detective" (Atkinson 2008: 239) would seem far too flippant to feature as a protagonist in a story that begins with the brutal murder of a mother and two children. It would be possible to suggest numerous additional examples of the ways in which Atkinson balances the mood of the novel between gloom and light-heartedness. The method, however, consists in building a whole using contrasting parts, with little neutral material in between. It seems that the natural tone for Atkinson is lightheartedness and humour, but she wants to blend her voice with the chosen genre. Thus, at-a-distance, *News* seems balanced, especially after reading the entirety of the novel. If we look closer, though, the contrast sometimes proves jarring⁷⁵.

⁷⁵ Notably, this type of stark counterbalance is indirectly chastised by P.D. James in *Death in Holy Orders*, when Dalglish shows the Archdeacon's body to his newly arrived underlings: "He could be sure that none of his officers would attempt to anaesthetize horror by facetiousness or crude graveyard humour; any who did so wouldn't serve under him for long." (James 2001: 290) Thus, we see a fundamental difference in approaches to the genre, which boils down to the types of mysteries James and Atkinson wanted to write: serious vs.

The end result is a story structure that is characteristic of contemporary mass entertainment – an unlikely premise with contrived plot development that is justified by the reader’s emotional engagement created via dark events in the protagonist’s past. This is a schema whereby a writer’s fantasy cannot conceivably rely on suspension of disbelief to carry the plot, but must be supported by strong, hyperrealistic clichés that draw our attention away from the contrived events. In this respect, Atkinson follows the larger trend in popular fiction. Extraordinary characters whose presence enables incredible stories appear in best-selling novels from various genres, in the works of authors who have made the New York Times' Best-Seller lists for fiction almost annually since 2000, such as James Patterson or Dean Koontz⁷⁶. Patterson's most famous character, Alex Cross, starts as a police officer in Washington who holds a PhD in psychology, but lives in the poor, Black part of town. He plays the blues on the piano and is also exceptionally strong and fit, which makes him a dangerous opponent in combat (e.g. in *Kiss the Girls* he always wins one-on-one confrontations). Cross possesses highly sought-after talents in criminal profiling and becomes engaged in important investigations. As is often the case with such protagonists, Cross lost his first wife in a tragic event. Overall, considering the character's array of talents, his underprivileged position as a Black person appears to be a gimmick designed to raise sympathy. In the case of Dean Koontz, his most popular protagonist in the 2000s is Odd Thomas, who possesses supernatural talents – he can communicate with the spirits of the dead, and this ability is explained by events from his difficult past. This trope is a staple of popular stories. It should also be mentioned that a flawed genius has been the protagonist of detective fiction since its inception in the form of Poe’s Dupin stories, and the orangutan killer from “Murders in the Rue Morgue” is an exceptionally unlikely culprit. After all, the DNA of the genre, inscribed in its constitutive conventions, requires the crime to be hard to solve and must provide us with a character capable of deciphering all the secrets.

Whether this is an inherent human predilection or an acquired taste pushed by publishing houses and marketers, readers seem to favour this hyperrealistic schema of story and character. On the example of *When Will There Be Good News*, it is possible to posit that the two elements

entertaining.

⁷⁶ It is interesting to note that in some years Patterson has managed to write two novels that made the list. This means that not only is he extremely prolific, but also that almost every single book he publishes reaches the number one position on the New York Times Best-Seller list. This suggests that when an author finally crosses the vaunted threshold of popularity and sells enough books, they are more than likely to maintain their success with subsequent releases.

are so dependent upon each other that they could not function on their own. Why would Jackson Brodie be a rich ex-soldier, ex-policeman and ex-private detective if the plot of the novel were limited to his discovering whether Nathan was his son? How could Joanna Hunter possibly escape her captors if she did not prepare herself for future catastrophes after the childhood tragedy that had befallen her family? There is simply no need to create an improbable character if no unlikely sequence of events will test his or her wits. To use a well-known example from Thomas Harris's novels, readers are not interested in the mundane, everyday life of Hannibal Lecter – they want to see his true identity exposed through horrific acts of cold-blooded violence. Conversely, if a character modelled after a regular person were thrown into a convoluted plot that is often found in thrillers, they would be unlikely to survive by the end of the chapter in which they appeared. Cases of mismatch between the demands of the plot and the prowess of the protagonist are often exploited for comedic effect in genre parodies. For example, in Adam Douglas's *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, the famous science-fiction comedy novel, the entire story revolves around characters who are incapable of solving the cosmic problems they encounter. Almost everyone seems incompetent to some degree, particularly the protagonists. Arthur Dent avoids the destruction of the Earth by pure luck, and as a human stranded in space who has no inkling of the cultures and phenomena of the interstellar community, is unable to help his friends. Zaphod Beeblebrox, the Galactic President, is revealed to have sealed off parts of his two brains that contain crucial information, and does many things to advance the plot without really knowing why. The vehicle used by the party of space adventurers is propelled by an infinite improbability drive, which further underscores the fact that nothing the protagonists do should be even remotely possible. When Douglas introduces the greater forces of the galaxy, they too prove woefully incapable of achieving their grand purposes⁷⁷.

Authors want to create interesting characters and adding darker elements to their biographies is an admittedly clichéd but undeniably useful tactic. Perhaps the ambitions of popular fiction writers are best expressed by one of the most famed representatives of the profession, Stephen King. In a guide for aspiring authors entitled *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* (2000), he argues:

⁷⁷ It turns out that the planet Earth was in fact a giant supercomputer designed to produce the Ultimate Question of life, the universe and everything, by beings who waited millions of years for an Ultimate Answer, only to discover that it was incomprehensible without a good question. The Earth becomes destroyed shortly before producing the answer, due to unnecessary galactic bureaucracy.

Book-buyers aren't attracted, by and large, by the literary merits of a novel; book-buyers want a good story to take with them on the airplane, something that will first fascinate them, then pull them in and keep them turning the pages. This happens, I think, when readers recognize the people in a book, their behaviors, their surroundings, and their talk. When the reader hears strong echoes of his or her own life and beliefs, he or she is apt to become more invested in the story. I'd argue that it's impossible to make this sort of connection in a premeditated way, gauging the market like a racetrack tout with a hot tip. (King 2000: 126)

In crime fiction, the goal described by King is complicated because the protagonist also has to possess the necessary traits required for advancing the plot. Due to the disturbing necessity of dealing with death on the job, the detective must be, at least to some degree, an extraordinary individual – capable of witnessing first-hand something that the average reader would find horrifying, perhaps even traumatic. In traditional detective fiction, the crime scenes and victims were sanitised, in order to allow the reader to focus on solving the mystery. Contemporary authors write for a different audience – one which expects to find horror and brutality in descriptions of murder victims, having seen TV shows and films that routinely portray mutilated bodies. Today's readers seem to be attracted to the naturalistic presentation of murder, and even traditional authors such as P.D. James do not shy away from describing the killer's handiwork in detail. Hence, a detective who is routinely called upon to visit scenes of crime that are designed to inspire terror in the imagination of the audience, should also appeal to the same audience.

This is why we find a great deal of seemingly mundane details about the characters in *News*. On the other hand, since it is a detective story, many of these details are to some extent relevant to the plot. The results often seem contrived, e.g. Reggie mentions being taught first aid by Joanna, because she will need the skill later on to prevent Jackson from dying in the train crash; she also mentions her father's trophy handgun, so that Joanna can buy it from Billy and somehow pass it on to Decker because the latter needs a weapon to commit suicide. In terms of characterisation, Reggie is presented as a regular girl who has had a streak of bad luck. The reader can sympathise with her easily: she lost both of her parents, her brother is an unpredictable delinquent, she was unable to afford the clothes and trinkets that would allow her

to feel accepted by her peers at the posh school, she helps the terminally-ill Ms MacDonald and she is driven by the hope of finding a loving family in the person of Joanna Hunter. Her story is tragic to the point that it can actually make the reader feel better for him– or herself. Reggie feels insecure about being found out and rejected, two fears that are almost universal. And yet, Reggie Chase also hides and destroys more than one kilogram of heroin, expertly prevents Jackson from bleeding to death, eavesdrops on two kidnappers threatening Neil Hunter and notes down the registration number of their vehicle, and then assists the injured ex-private eye in discovering the bandits' hideout. Behind the mask of a traumatised teenager, Reggie is a hard-boiled detective, or at the very least, a more-than-capable sidekick, arguably lacking only in physical brawn and driving skills. Indeed, at times Atkinson gives us the impression that Jackson is the real sidekick, especially in his injured state after the train crash. Borne of the constraints of the genre and the popular writer's obligation to craft relatable characters, Reggie Chase is a hyperrealistic protagonist.

Dove warns us that characters in detective stories are figures who play pre-assigned roles – their depth is limited by the game in which they appear. Hyperrealism begins with the desire to create figures who appear deeper than they are, to simulate the signs of a reality recognisable by King's book-buyers. This feels uncanny because the writer is attempting to graft the aspects of mundane life onto a framework which is designed to be appealing for different reasons, i.e. solving a complex, extraordinary puzzle⁷⁸. And yet best-selling authors, such as Atkinson, feel the need to engage their audience by hyperrealistic characterisation, and their success justifies their efforts. Perhaps this is because in best-selling fiction the story takes precedence over depth – such novels are often described as “page-turners”, and leading the reader along can be a chain of moments in which they recognise aspects of themselves in the characters' lives. Acting in tandem with the detection formula, these specks of recognition amplify the genre's hermeneutical drive. Once the reader is done with the story, they will rarely pause to reflect on the sum of the parts which kept them engaged, especially after they receive a full answer to all the mysteries. Few people wonder how Indiana Jones is able to be both an acclaimed archaeologist and possess the skills and conditioning of an elite soldier, fewer still ask whether it makes sense. As Stephen King notes, in a novel characters are secondary to the story:

⁷⁸ The police procedural is a sub-genre which combines these two elements in the most natural way, but even in its case recognising a convention such as the seven-step story structure can easily remind the experienced reader that the story they are following is not real.

I think the best stories always end up being about the people rather than the event, which is to say character-driven. Once you get beyond the short story, though (two to four thousand words, let's say), I'm not much of a believer in the so-called character study; I think that in the end, the story should always be the boss. Hey, if you want a character study, buy a biography or get season tickets to your local college's theater-lab productions. (King 2000: 152)

Another aspect of hyperreal characterisation which is tied with the type of readerly engagement described by King is inequality. The plot of a story might require above-average skills of the protagonist, but if he or she has no problems with which the audience can empathise, then that character will not become popular. Asking readers to invest themselves in the story of a person who appears superior to them in every relevant way is a hard proposition. Hence, fiction in the ever-popular pulp tradition always presents protagonists who possess some flaw or problem that is universal, or at least easily relatable⁷⁹, which is consistent with the commonly shared idea that no one is perfect. In *News*, the most striking example of such compensation for success is Joanna Hunter, whose idyllic life has been "paid for" in blood. We accept Reggie's saccharine description of the Hunters' situation because we know that it did not come for free. Likewise, it is inconceivable that Neil's problems might take away Joanna's happiness in the long run since running a shady business cannot rank on the same scale as losing one's family to a mass murderer. The popular novel must satisfy its readers' desire for fairness (although it may also do this by presenting an injustice that goes unpunished⁸⁰), which in turn is reminiscent of a magical mode of thinking present in folk tales, whereby a sacrifice should be rewarded with some sort of boon, or an unfair advantage should have some hidden stipulations which make it both a blessing and a curse⁸¹.

⁷⁹ The loneliness of Superman as an alien on Earth, Conan's quest to find his destiny, or Sherlock Holmes' opium habit are just a few examples. A tremendously popular trope is a grumpy character whose brilliance or peculiarity makes them misunderstood by the world – Poe's Dupin represents this on the small scale of a handful of short stories, while the successful TV series *House* explores the same idea in tens of hours of film.

⁸⁰ In detective fiction this is represented by the justice thwarted convention described by Dove. The perpetrator avoids punishment but the mystery is still solved. An additional function served by this convention is adding an air of realism through grittiness, and thus it is often used in fiction in the *noir* tradition.

⁸¹ If we consider popular culture as the purveyor of contemporary folk tales, then the character of Batman would probably be the best-known Western example of a protagonist who has numerous perks all because his parents were shot. In fact, looking at the resolution of the kidnapping arc in *News*, we can see that Joanna Hunter is a

The above points based on Stephen King's insight are strongly related to the predictions made in the first chapter of this thesis, in the discussion of anticipating differences between “real” literature and “lowbrow” fiction. Using Stern's criteria for characterising the “highbrow”, we assumed that authors of popular works would tend to prioritise communication over innovation and craft stories which put a premium on engaging readers. We saw that this goal can be achieved by means of the hermeneutic structure in detective stories, which invite audiences to play a heavily conventionalised game. Classical representatives of the genre, such as Agatha Christie, or the darker-minded P.D. James became very successful pursuing the formula first presented by Edgar Allan Poe. On the other hand, in *When Will There Be Good News* Kate Atkinson created several mysteries which cannot be solved in the traditional manner because some of the characters hide facts from the readers. To compensate for this, she made her protagonists both extraordinary and mundane, thus ensuring that our attention will be held through our recognition of the problems we face in real life. They are capable of resolving the complicated situations which they face but their fears and aspirations, on which much of the novel is focussed, align with those of the audience.

Overall, on the basis of the above analysis we may risk a general claim that popular fiction possesses a certain code. There exist certain prerequisites that condition the appeal of fiction on the level that might be considered popular, which due to the general ease of transmitting information available to us, is very high. If we agree with William Pawlett that Baudrillard's vision of the simulation “hyper-realises the real by generating its effect from abstract models and codes (fashion, consumerism, sexuality)”, then there can be no doubt that Atkinson's novel belongs to this category. It is less clear whether the detection genre as a whole is also hyper-real. It might be said that it possesses a model, which we discussed in detail on the basis of Dove's work. On the other hand, its nature as transformed play also places it in a different realm. Whether virtual or printed, games do not readily qualify for Baudrillard's criteria of simulation (although in the common sense of the word, they do contain simulationist elements), because of the implicit exchange between the participant and the rules. Play is voluntary and involves a person willingly submitting themselves to a set limitations in order to derive pleasure from meeting a certain challenge within these circumstances. Unlike the simulation, there exists a reference point outside of the game – the player. The Gadamerian

character whose construction is very similar to that of Batman.

understanding of play, which was outlined in the 3rd chapter presupposes freedom of stress, or pleasure, as a constituent element of a game. Since this exchange has no implicit value and is difficult to quantify, we might consider it an example of Baudrillard's symbolic exchange. Instead of exchange value or use value which condition economic exchange, symbolic exchange in an anthropological understanding functions on the basis of gifts and counter-gifts. When a gift is returned, the debt is settled, and the process can begin anew. In Gadamer's play, repetition is also a key factor – a game is played not once and for all, but with the implicit understanding that the players will meet again, and utilise the same rules to create a new experience. Such an exchange reaches beyond use value to which pleasure and carelessness might be reduced in the economical order of things. It is instead a basic form of human interaction.

Thus, the detective genre can be understood from the viewpoint of the marketplace, and one can perceive books as a commodity with an affixed monetary value which constitutes the price of entertainment and escapism. But it also holds a different value, one which arises during the interaction between readers and texts, and which belongs to the order of symbolic exchange – transformed play. Only when such fiction attempts to simulate the signs of the real in order to appeal to a universal model of a reader does it become hyper-real in the Baudrillardian sense. This drive towards universality divorces a given work from the intentions implicit in the mode of transformed play and push it into the void of meaningless, self-serving communication.

Chapter 7:

Breaking Generic Boundaries – *Bleeding Edge* by Thomas Pynchon

In the preceding analyses we have seen two ways in which the methodology presented in the first part of this dissertation can be used. The structure of the detective genre as transformed play was discussed on the example of *Death in Holy Orders*, a novel which implements the conventions described by George N. Dove to craft a classical mystery belonging to the sub-genre of the police procedural. We have seen that Dove's reader-response approach overlaps with the findings of embodied cognitive science in the form presented by Lakoff and Johnson. In addition, the thematic aspect of the novel was read with the use of Jean Baudrillard's terminology. The second novel analysed, *When Will There Be Good News*, departed from the generic conventions first set out by Poe towards the realm of the thriller, and also included minor mysteries which could not be solved by the reader at all. The cognitive aspect of this generic shift was discussed. The application of Baudrillard's outlook to Atkinson's text revealed that the mechanisms of simulation and hyper-reality are able to affect the very construction of a popular novel by dictating the type of characterisation required to capture the attention of a “model” reader⁸². Thus, in popular fiction the desire for mass appeal can become a drive towards totality.

In this analysis I will discuss the novel of an author who almost explicitly focuses on the mechanisms of Baudrillardian simulation, hyperreality and the “death of reality” within a political and technological context. It is impossible to omit Pynchon's thematic allusions to the French sociologist in *Bleeding Edge* (2013), particularly since it is set around the events of 9/11 on which Baudrillard commented in newspaper articles and books⁸³. The novel presents the story of a detective who wants to solve a mystery, but the crime she becomes involved in proves to be only a small part of a larger puzzle that has profound implications for the entire city of New York and the United States of America in general. There is no hope of a systemic serving of justice, since the transgressions are being perpetrated by the system itself. And yet, the scattered nature of a postmodern society seems too unwieldy to be controlled by any single organisation, however

⁸² As we discussed on the basis of Stephen King's ideas.

⁸³ In English, his comments on the subject were published as *The Spirit of Terrorism and Requiem for the Two Towers*, trans. C. Turner, London: Verso 2003.

long its reach; the very multiplicity of vectors holds a promise of retribution, at least in the case of the main antagonist. In *Bleeding Edge*, paranoia is a force which can harm or protect, conspiracy theories blend with reality, answers are suggested but never explicitly given, and the Deep Web holds an escapist promise of transcending time and touching the infinite. An ambitious novel addressed to the early 21st century, Pynchon's work blends realism with science fiction, providing enough variegated content to capture the attention of an audience that spends its spare moments in cyberspace, surfing news outlets where political critique is presented alongside crypto-zoology and advertisements for weight-loss blogs.

Thomas Pynchon is a famously reclusive individual who, at the same time, can be very forthcoming about his past and motivations, offering an in-depth critique of his early short stories in the foreword to the collection *Slow Learner* (1984). In contrast to the pervasive, uninterrupted non-communication which characterises modern media according to Jean Baudrillard⁸⁴, Pynchon shares information about himself on his own terms. This fact rather surprisingly matches the construction of the plot in *Bleeding Edge*, where Maxine Tarnow, a de-Certified Fraud Examiner, is introduced to a suspicious case by a paranoid documentary film maker, and then receives much of the pertinent evidence from other extraordinary individuals who only contact her when it suits them. Clues come in Maxine's direction via a one-way street. Since the novel is set at the turn of the century and includes elements of science fiction, conspiracy theories and the paranormal, this method for acquiring evidence from mysterious sources brings to mind one of the most popular detective series of the 1990s, *The X Files*. *Bleeding Edge* references a great deal of television material, including reruns of older cinema releases, and also makes use of the conventionalised comparison to other fictional detectives, though not to the same extent as the novels we discussed in the previous analyses⁸⁵. In fact, while

⁸⁴ Despite the fact that we now have more means of communicating than ever before, Baudrillard believed that this did nothing to make our communication more meaningful. On the contrary, becoming absorbed in the tools offered by technology, we have become prone to using them for their own sake, thus engaging in gratuitous “non-communication”:

The mainstream's misapprehension of the essence of communication and its subsequent fetishisation of transmission and artefacts of transmission leads to an unwarranted glorification of the empowering and enabling qualities of new communicational technologies: 'As if owning a TV set or a camera inaugurated a new possibility of relationship and exchange. Strictly speaking, such cases are no more significant than the possession of a refrigerator or a toaster' (CPS, 171) (Smith et al. 2010: 37).

Pynchon seems to take a similar stance by refusing to communicate with the media.

⁸⁵ For example, Maxine chastises herself for being eager to explore the secrets of the Deep Web with Eric Outfield by making a derogatory comparison to the famous teenage girl detective Nancy Drew: “She isn't quite ready to admit it, but she's already entertaining the first draft of a fantasy in which Eric, sherpa of the Deep Web, faithful

the text does contain many of the regulative conventions mentioned by Dove, it also goes far beyond the detection formula, enough to warrant a different approach in this analysis.

Due to the sheer amount of content in the novel it would be impractical to include a thorough synopsis of the entire plot simply for the sake of dissecting the structure of the mystery. In the two other texts discussed in this thesis the principle of efficiency, while somewhat strained by thematic content in *When Will There Be Good News*, nevertheless held true. It made sense to describe the events in order to present a conceptual outline of the game of detection being played by the reader. *Bleeding Edge*, on the other hand, contains many threads that might be linked, but it offers no explanation as to how they come together, leaving readers along with the protagonist to guess what really happened. We know nothing that Maxine does not, whereas in *Death in Holy Orders* we had a description of Munroe's death, and the narration in *When Will There Be Good News* provided us with three points of view. Since the principle of efficiency is violated to the effect that we cannot say what is a real clue, this chapter will contain only a synopsis of the mystery. The remaining content can be analysed in the context of discussing themes.

The other difference that sets *Bleeding Edge* apart from the prior texts and warrants a different approach in the analysis is the mode of thinking encouraged by Pynchon. While the plot in the first part of the book is centred around the murder of an unlucky entrepreneur, many of the clues that Maxine discovers point towards the far larger event that is the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, even before it takes place. There is an ominous foreshadowing of a sinister conspiracy that seems so far-reaching that any attempts of unravelling it appear entirely hopeless. Even the blurb on the back cover of the book makes no promises: "Will perpetrators be revealed, forget about brought to justice?", with an opening quotation from Donald E. Westlake⁸⁶ offering no further encouragement: "New York as a character in a mystery would not be the detective, would not be the murderer. It would be the enigmatic suspect who knows the real story but isn't going to tell it." The peculiar quality of the novel consists in the suggestion of a hidden story behind the 9/11 attacks, embedding them in a work of fiction where all the characters and major plot points are Pynchon's own creation. *Bleeding Edge* cannot be read as a conspiracy theory, and it also cannot be perceived as entirely fictional. In addition, unlike many works of fiction which present an alternative vision of history, the novel is set at a time that the majority of readers can

and maybe even cute, helps her find her way through the maze. Nancy fuckin Drew, here." (Pynchon 2013: 84)

⁸⁶ Donald Edwin Westlake (1933-2008), a prolific writer of crime fiction who was born in Brooklyn. Westlake also wrote non-fiction and screenplays.

remember. Nevertheless, because the detective mode of reading is employed as if we were dealing with a standard mystery, a hermeneutic expectation is created that by the end of the book we will discover the truth behind the terrorist attacks. When the reader realises this, the questions that come to mind are what exactly are we expecting to find out, and why are we hoping that the narrator possesses some secret knowledge about the real-world event? Thus, the clever construction of the text as a detective story raises issues that relate to the fundamental aspects of reading. Our willingness to speculate about the truth along with the characters, despite there being no realistic hope for learning anything new about the tragedy itself from a mystery novel, draws us towards the discursive mode of perceiving contemporary problems advocated by Baudrillard:

[Baudrillard's poetic quality] marks his particular mode of communication premised as it is upon a willingness to speculate and find the truth that inheres within exaggeration: 'All that remains for us is theoretical violence – speculation to the death, whose only method is the radicalization of hypotheses' (SED, 5)." (Smith et al. 2010: 39)

An additional factor producing this effect in *Bleeding Edge* is an unusual kind of intertextuality that we will discuss later, a feature reminiscent of Roman Polański's acclaimed *noir* film *Chinatown*.

From a cognitive perspective, mapping the plot of *Bleeding Edge* does not offer a clear picture of our thought process, because the latter is itself unclear. There are several dead ends, events that blur the line between fiction and reality, tangential cases which get developed further until the connection with the main plot line becomes strained. In addition, Pynchon's novel is also humorous, which further complicates the issue of which information is pertinent to the investigation, since quite a few passages are clearly intended as jokes. Taking these into account it is hard to say whether the more serious aspects of the story, such as references to conspiracy theories and science fiction, should be taken at face value and analysed without scepticism regarding their intention. All of the issues outlined here lend themselves perfectly to a Baudrillardian thematic analysis. Nevertheless, while a full outline might be unnecessary, a brief overview of the events and the cast of characters will be helpful for further discussion.

7.1 Character Cast and Plot Overview

Bleeding Edge is set after the dotcom bubble at the turn of the century, when many IT specialists and nerds-turned-entrepreneurs were left without an income or a backup plan. The events take place in New York's Silicon Alley, the East Coast equivalent of California's Silicon Valley – a centre for technological companies, which has been hit the hardest by the recent market crash. The novel begins with **Maxine Tarnow**, a decertified Fraud Examiner, mother of two boys and a divorcee, receiving a tip about suspicious activity at hashslingrz, an information security giant which works with the US government. Hashslingrz is headed by **Gabriel Ice**, a billionaire and computer geek with a rather unpleasant personality. The information comes from **Reg Despard**, a documentary film maker who became successful to some extent despite his lack of proper training in the craft. Reg is hired by hashslingrz to make a video about the company's success. Although he is supposed to have free access at their offices, he discovers there are places he is not allowed to go, and that it is impossible to obtain financial records about the firm's activities. Company records are hidden in the Deep Web, beyond the reach of Internet search engines. Reg hires a young hacker, **Eric Outfield**, to help him but he also wants Maxine to check whether hashslingrz is doing anything illegal. Other key characters include **Tallis Ice**, the billionaire's wife, and **March Kelleher**, Ice's estranged leftist mother-in-law. When Maxine begins helping Reg, she discovers a trail of money leading her to more parties potentially interested in the case. One such person is **Rocky Slaggiat**, a venture capitalist whose company helped fund a small technological start-up that became a contractor for hashslingrz. Because the small start-up went bankrupt but is still being used by hashslingrz to transfer large sums of money, Rocky hires Maxine to work on the case. The venture capitalist also introduces Maxine to **Igor Dashkov**, a friendly Russian businessman with ties to the Russian mob. Igor is an ex-spetsnaz paratrooper whose past holds the key to the solution of the main mystery of *Bleeding Edge*. The bankrupt start-up had two founders, **Lester Traipse** and **Felix Boïngeaux**, the former of which gets murdered after Maxine learns that he has been diverting some of the illegally transferred money. Maxine's activities regarding hashslingrz draw the attention of a mysterious government organisation, represented by **Nicholas Windust**. In Pynchon's novel, the subject of the Deep Web is explored via a piece of software called DeepArcher, invented by two Californian programmers living in New York, **Justin** and **Lucas**. Justin's wife, **Vyrva**, is the mother of a young girl who is

a friend of Maxine's children. The unusual program creates a connection between Lucas, Justin, Vyrva and Gabriel Ice because the latter wants to buy its source code from the creators.

In short, the plot of *Bleeding Edge* can be described as a hard-boiled detective story with neo-noir undertones that uses the convention of the extended commission. Maxine starts an investigation regarding the finances of a large company with ties to the government, and as she discovers more information, one of the people involved in the case is killed. Lester's death provokes Maxine to investigate matters further – she suspects that he was murdered because he stole some of the money that was illegally transferred through his company but later discovers that the truth is more complicated. In taking the money, the entrepreneur learned things he was not supposed to know about the secret dealings of the US government. His murderer is a secret agent, possibly from the CIA, and the motives of the case are political. Gabriel Ice is not the chief culprit, but rather a tool working within a larger system. Maxine is able to learn about the truth, but she is powerless to do anything about it, and by getting personally involved she risks the safety of her family. The following pages provide a synopsis of the most important events relevant to Maxine's investigation. This will allow for a focused discussion of various aspects of the text further in the analysis. However, it disregards the original chapter divisions in the text in order to illustrate the plot chronologically. Hence, I have broken up the synopsis into parts for easier reference, omitting the introduction of the problem which is described above, and which can be found in chapters 2 and 3 of the novel.

The hashslingrz and hwgaahwgh.com connection

Maxine's two sons attend the Otto Kugelblitz School, named after an estranged pupil of Freud whom Pynchon invented for the purposes of the book. In German, the word Kugelblitz can refer to ball lightning, a theoretical astrophysical phenomenon whereby a black hole is created through the accumulation of energy instead of mass, or a Nazi self-propelled anti-aircraft gun. The name of the school can be interpreted as a jab at psychoanalysis, especially when taken together with Maxine's emotional therapist, Shawn, who comforts his patients with faux-Buddhism and vernacular koans. The school's structure is based on Otto Kugelblitz's idea that the various stages of human development are characterised by different types of mental illnesses, with death being the only moment that brings about sanity and peace of mind. Reading the name

of the fictional psychologist as ball lightning offers some insight into Pynchon's perception of the American mainstream's reception of psychoanalysis.

The school has high tuition fees and because of this Maxine becomes acquainted with Vyrva McElmo from California, whose daughter Fiona is also a pupil at Kugelblitz. Vyrva moved to New York with her husband Justin, a programmer and start-up founder. Along with his friend, Lucas, Justin created a piece of software called DeepArcher (explained by Vyrva to be a pun on “departure”) with a security solution that has drawn attention from bigger parties, including the government and Gabriel Ice. Throughout the majority of the novel, Justin and Lucas ponder whether it would be better to sell DeepArcher, go public or give away the source code for free. The remarkable feature of the software is that it is navigated by clicking on hidden links, which take the user to different virtual spaces through a chain of untraceable connections. Thus, DeepArcher functions in the Deep Web, or the non-indexed web, where search engine algorithms cannot reach. The Deep Web is a collection of closed servers, abandoned websites and purposely hidden content. While the mechanisms through which the program operates and the poetic descriptions of various places in the Deep Web are closer to fantasy than reality, in the novel DeepArcher is a portal to a metaphysical space which is missing from the streets of New York. Free from the demands of the capitalist marketplace, with no coherent power structure, Pynchon's Deep Web is an anarchy populated by idealistic computer geeks who believe in a free Internet, and by those who seek refuge from the troubles of the real world. Maxine becomes fascinated by this hidden virtual world and throughout the course of the novel visits it several times for chance meetings with people whom she thinks she recognises.

In her investigation of the finances of hashslingrz, Maxine discovers several anomalies which point towards money being secretly taken away from the company: “It becomes dismayingly clear that somebody's taking money out of hashslingrz and starbursting it out again all over the place to different mysterious contractors, some of whom are almost certainly ghosts, running at a rough total to maybe as high as the high sixes, even lower sevens.” (Pynchon 2013: 42) A small graphics company, hwgaahwgh.com (an acronym for “Hey, We've Got Awesome And Hip Web Graphix, Here”), is the latest recipient of such a batch of money, despite having gone bankrupt some time ago. When Maxine decides to visit their headquarters she finds that the offices have long been abandoned and most of the equipment is missing. Sitting on the floor is Driscoll Padgett, a former temp at hwgaahwgh and now a freelance web designer who comes to

the building to access the Internet through the remaining broadband infrastructure. Driscoll tells Maxine that it seemed as though the owners of the company did not really care about the web graphics on offer, as if their real business was about something else.

Later, at a local bar, Maxine and Driscoll discuss hashslingrz, where Driscoll also worked for a short time. She claims that part of the company's recruitment strategy for hiring young hackers is setting up fake company websites with a sufficient level of challenge. Once a person has proven him or herself by bypassing the defences, they are offered work. Part of the training, according to Driscoll, is learning Arabic: “our Muslim brothers. They're the true global force, all the money they need, all the time ... Trouble ahead. Word around the cubes is there's 'ese huge U.S. government contracts, everybody's after em, big deal comin up in the Middle East, some people in the community sayin Gulf War Two” (Pynchon 2013: 48).

Already at this early stage of the investigation a connection is established between Maxine's interests in hashslingrz and a grand, mysterious scheme somehow related to 9/11 by the mention of Muslims, “trouble ahead” and “Gulf War Two”. This association will only grow stronger throughout the novel. At the same time, we receive some background information about hwgaahwgh, whose former owner, Lester Traipse, will be the murder victim. Thus, the premise for the detective convention of the extended commission is established. Maxine's involvement with the finances of Lester's company will inspire her to find out why he was killed, and by whom.

Sometime during their conversation, Maxine and Driscoll notice that they are being watched by two men who are not regular patrons and look like policemen. Driscoll stays at the bar and the two men follow a slightly drunk Maxine who loses them in the streets and subways of New York. At that point, we are first presented with one of many reflections concerning the transformation of the city driven by real estate investors and mayor Giuliani:

the melancholy bars, the cholesterol and fat dispensaries and porno theatres have been torn down or renovated, the unkempt and unhoused and unspoken-for have been pushed out, no more dope dealers, no more pimps or three-card monte artists, not even kids playing hooky at the old pinball arcades – all gone. Maxine can't avoid feeling nauseous at the possibility of some stupefied consensus about what life is to be, taking over this whole city without mercy, a tightening Noose of Horror, multiplexes and malls and big-

box stores it only makes sense to shop at if you have a car and a driveway and a garage next to a house in the burbs. Aaahh! They have landed, they are among us, and it helps them no end that the mayor, with roots in the outer boroughs and beyond, is one of them. (Pynchon 2013: 51-52)

The way in which greed influences the landscape of New York is one of the central themes of the novel, reflected in Maxine's excursions into the Deep Web as well as the suggestion of 9/11 being encouraged and perhaps even financed by the U.S. government in order to justify attacking oil-rich countries. Pynchon's Baudrillardian suggestion in the quoted observation is not about lawlessness and chaos being preferable to order and safety in a city that was notorious for its high crime rates before Gulliani managed to turn things around. Rather, it seems to suggest that a model of life is being artificially imposed onto the city, replacing the organic reality generated by its inhabitants. It is a description of the propagation of a hyper-real vision, self-serving and driven by avarice. Likewise, the crime Maxine willingly decides to grapple with is inherent within the system and lies beyond the power of individuals to punish.

Despite being only dimly aware about hashslngorz and Gabriel Ice prior to her investigation, Maxine soon learns that her connection with the company is stronger than she suspected. A graduate of Kugelblitz invited for the commencement speech is March Kelleher, a leftist blogger and activist whom Maxine has met during a picket against an unethical landlord many years ago. March is also the mother of Ice's wife, Tallis, although the two drifted apart after Ice became a billionaire during the dotcom boom.

The introduction of March will bring Maxine closer to Gabriel Ice's personal affairs. This is important from a structural perspective because outside of contacts with the billionaire's family and acquaintances our protagonist has no way of learning anything about him. Ice is the main antagonist and this type of indirect characterisation prevents him from being a faceless villain.

Reg Despard visits Maxine again bearing news about the findings of his IT specialist, Eric Outfield, who has discovered an encrypted folder containing analyses of small technological start-ups with predictions concerning their bankruptcy; Eric, challenged by Ice's security systems is growing increasingly paranoid and harder to contact. Investigating the case of hwgaaahwgh further, Maxine visits a Venture Capital firm, Streetlight People, which holds shares both in the small bankrupt dotcom and hashslngorz. The company is headed by Rockwell "Rocky" Slaggiatt,

who suspects that Gabriel Ice intentionally looks for small businesses that are likely to go bankrupt in order to buy them out and use them to transfer money to various places. Maxine agrees to help Rocky find out what Ice's purpose for moving these funds is.

At this point Maxine actually has a professional reason to pursue the investigation, instead of doing it as a favour for a paranoid friend. Rocky will also connect Maxine with characters who will be able to analyse clues, and ultimately reveal the mystery of Lester's death. It should be noted however, that while I am limiting my comments and synopsis to the central investigation, the characters in *Bleeding Edge* are described in far more detail than the detective genre would require. Many of them exist for thematic purposes, and are not limited by their hermeneutic function to the same degree as the characters from *Death in Holy Orders* or *When Will There Be Good News*.

Meanwhile, Reg meets Maxine again to give her more information about hashslingrz. He also believes he is being followed and claims that his apartment has been broken into. Reg explains that with the help of Eric they have managed to install a tap at the company offices. What he managed to gather from these recordings is that hashslingrz have been transferring money to the Gulf using the hawala⁸⁷ system. Reg is worried that there are no good reasons for being this secretive with sending money offshore if Ice or his company are not engaged in any illegal activities or are not planning “something big and invisible” (Pynchon 2013: 83). At a later meeting, at the Deseret apartment building which features a gym that Maxine attends, Reg tells her that he walked into a locked room at the hashslingrz offices and saw several Arabs working on some large device. He managed to film the scene and later withheld the footage from Ice.

⁸⁷ The hawala is a real way for moving money without banking that is based on the honour system. It is common in various countries around the world and there have been accusations after the 9/11 attacks that hawalas were used to transfer money to terrorist organisations.

Agent Windust, Lester Traipse and international black-ops

A new thread in the novel begins when Horst, Maxine's ex-husband returns from one of his business voyages⁸⁸, to announce, in an act of foreshadowing⁸⁹, that he has rented office space at the World Trade Center along with his business partner. Some time afterwards, after attending a musical prepared by the school, Maxine visits her parents who inform her that Brooke and Avram, her sister and her brother-in-law, are moving from Israel to New York. It also appears that some type of government agency is taking interest in Avram, and they would like Maxine to call them. While she has no intention of complying with this request Nicholas Windust, the agent who left the card, finds Maxine on the street the next day. Windust claims that his agency believes that Avi is working for Mossad, and is coming to the USA as a sleeper agent. Windust is also interested in any findings regarding financial fraud at hashslingrz. Maxine refuses to cooperate, noting the agent looks menacing (“Fiftyish, midnight brown shoes ... trench coat with a high polyester content, ever since grade school exactly the kind of person everybody including herself has warned her to stay away from.” Pynchon 2013: 102), displays a casual form of antisemitism and seems incredibly right wing (“How right-wing, Maxine wonders, does a person have to be to think of the New York Times as a left-wing newspaper?” Pynchon 2013: 105).

Her suspicions about Windust are later confirmed when she receives a USB flash drive from an anonymous source which contains a dossier with information about the agent, apparently taken from some Deep Web resource. In the one-way fashion of acquiring information pertinent to the case that was mentioned earlier, the flash drive is delivered by Marvin, a mysterious Trinidad-American bike courier, who always carries items that are relevant to Maxine's situation. Marvin's strangeness is compounded by the fact that he wears the uniform of a courier company that went bankrupt in the previous year's market crash. His role in the novel echoes that of a mythical messenger who bears important news, and there is never any explanation as to why he delivers his packages at precisely the right time. Windust's folder paints him as an enforcer of

⁸⁸ While he does not play a significant role in the mystery itself, his later departure with Ziggy and Otis for a summer holiday mark a point at which some of the strangest events in the novel take place. Since the narrative is always focused on Maxine, and sometimes on stories narrated to her by someone else, it might be argued that her state of mind is connected to her spouse – over the course of the story the couple effectively reunites, and neither are particularly happy about being single. This might be significant in the sense that some of the strange events in the text might be perceived as proof of the narrator's unreliability.

⁸⁹ “Next day Horst takes Otis and Ziggy down to his new office at the World Trade Center ... On days of storm, according to Horst's co-tenant Jake Pimiento, it's like being in the crow's nest of a very tall ship, allowing you to look down at helicopters and private planes and neighboring high rises. “Seems kind of flimsy up here,” to Ziggy. “Nah,” sez Jake, “built like a battleship.”” (Pynchon 2013: 95)

neo-liberal policies in various third-world countries, whose tasks might have included torturing people and ruining economies to fit the agenda of Washington and the International Monetary Fund⁹⁰.

Maxine meets March Kelleher after the Kugelblitz commencement speech. They have a conversation centred around hashslingrz and Gabriel Ice, and March suggests that he may be working with Islamic terrorists. She also asks Maxine to meet with Tallis, her daughter, because for several years they have lived separate lives and March is getting worried. Upon learning that Maxine has discovered financial irregularities, Tallis, who is also the comptroller at hashslingrz, attempts to hire her. Maxine refuses the offer, unable to believe that Tallis is not somehow involved in Gabriel Ice's illegal activities.

Horst takes Ziggy and Otis on a vacation to the Midwest, and Maxine meets Vyrva and Justin at the airport. The pair have sent their daughter to camp and are leaving for Vegas to pitch DeepArcher to potential investors. When Maxine returns to the office, she receives a phone call from Gabriel Ice, asking whether it would be possible to pay off March Kelleher so that she stops posting harmful material about his company on her blog. After receiving a negative answer he also warns Maxine not to meet with Tallis again. After the conversation, Rocky Slaggiatt visits the office and takes Maxine to lunch. His intention is for Maxine to meet Igor Dashkov, a Russian businessman who is also likely to be involved with the mob. Igor is worried about the money his friends have invested in Madoff Securities and Maxine advises him to pull out of the fund after seeing the financial reports⁹¹. Accompanying Igor are two young Russians, Misha and Grisha who will prove instrumental in providing the resolution of the plot.

Among the more sinister places described in *Bleeding Edge*, the most important is the Deseret, a posh apartment building which Maxine and her best friend Heidi have always wanted to get into when they were children. At the time the plot takes place there is an operating fitness club at the building with a swimming pool for which Maxine signed up to satisfy her childhood

⁹⁰ In this regard, Windust's character seems to be heavily inspired by two non-fiction books which were published in the early 2000s and detailed the crimes perpetrated by ostensible supporters of Western capitalism: James S. Henry's *Blood Bankers: Tales from the Global Underground Economy* (Basic Books, 2005) and John Perkins's *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc., 2004). What Pynchon hints at to be Windust's role is expressed in Perkins's book: "to encourage world leaders to become part of a vast network that promotes U.S. commercial interests. In the end, those leaders become ensnared in a web of debt that ensures their loyalty. We can draw on them whenever we desire—to satisfy our political, economic, or military needs." (Perkins 2004: 11).

⁹¹ Bernard Madoff is a swindler convicted for running the largest Ponzi scheme in US history. He is currently serving a 150 year sentence in prison.

curiosity. One day, she is surprised to meet Reg Despard at the Deseret and they talk in an unmonitored area. Reg tells her that he has been fired from his job at hashslingrz and that his apartment was broken into again, this time also vandalised, with any recordings that he did not hide stolen. The film maker believes it is time to move out of New York, especially because his ex-wife and children have relocated to Seattle. While Reg is convinced that Ice is to blame for the burglary, Maxine is no longer sure: “No, Maxine thinks with a sudden fluelike ache in her fingers, Ice would be best-case. And if it's anybody else, Seattle might not be far enough.” (Pynchon 2013: 143) Reg also tells Maxine that the Deseret is now partly owned by Gabriel Ice.

After this conversation Maxine notices Tallis on the street and discovers by following her in a taxi that she is having an affair. She manages to obtain information about Tallis's lover, Chazz Larday, from a concierge. When she is alone at home one evening, Maxine receives a call from Rocky inviting her to a karaoke club. While there, she meets his wife Cornelia as well as Lester Traipse, the former CEO of hwgaahwgh.com. Lester is now in a partnership with Canadian Felix Boïngueaux, whom Maxine met in Montreal while investigating a distributor for software that allows to cheat on cash register bills. Lester gets into an argument with one of Ice's dangerously looking men, and after being saved by Maxine they discuss the deals he made with hashslingrz. Lester seems to know more than he is able to tell about the situation at hwgaahwgh.com before their conversation gets interrupted by Felix. Later during the evening Maxine looks at Lester when they sing a duet together: “He carries a furtive fantasizing gaze she's seen too many times before, an awareness of living not only on borrowed money but on borrowed time also.” (Pynchon 2013: 158)

The next morning Igor arrives at Maxine's office in a black Russian limousine. Maxine goes outside and receives a bag full of money with thanks from Igor's friends whose investment she helped to save. Inside the car there is March Kelleher, who supplies Igor with drugs that she gets from her ex-husband, Sid. Maxine casually asks March about what happened in Guatemala in the years in which Windust was stationed there, and is told about the massacres of the Mayan population that were perpetrated during the civil war by the country's government, backed by the United States.

After delving deeper into the case of hwgaahwgh.com, Maxine discovers that some of the money transferred via the company has gone missing. It appears that Lester Traipse was diverting funds from this secret channel. Maxine meets Lester and the hapless entrepreneur asks

her to contact Ice and plead for his cause. Despite being honest about stealing the money embezzled by the tech tycoon, Lester also claims he is sorry and wants to pay it back. It seems implausible to Maxine that he might be capable of doing so, and there is an implication that the case is more complicated than simple theft – Lester knows something more but he cannot talk about it. Maxine offers to contact Ice through Avi.

The weird and the sinister

At this point, the story leaves the pure detective mode and enters the realm of science-fiction by introducing several distinctly unreal elements. When Maxine watches the tape delivered by Marvin, it turns out to be an amateur pornographic recording in which Vip Epperdew, a fraudster who cooperated with Felix Boingueaux, plays an active role. Vip has been evading the IRS and Maxine knows from a contact there that when he is found, he will be arrested and face long years of imprisonment. Deciding that she should warn him of his impending fate, Maxine decides to visit the house in the Hamptons shown on the tape. When she asks the locals at a bar about it, she discovers that the house, owned by Shae and Bruno, the couple featured in the film, was burned down but that no one was hurt. It also turns out that many of the bar patrons are construction workers involved in building Gabriel Ice's new residence in Montauk. Randy, a small contractor, is particularly disgruntled about not getting paid for his work. He offers to take Maxine to the mansion as he still has a pass to enter the construction site. Upon arriving at the giant residence, Randy proposes to go to the cellar to steal some wine as an act of retribution.

The events which subsequently unfold are related to conspiracy theories surrounding a military air base neighbouring Ice's estate. According to March Kelleher, Ice is especially interested in government secrets, and now, being able to work for them in the security business he intentionally built a new house next to the infamous site, hoping to cooperate in areas that are strictly off-limits to ordinary people. In real life and in the novel, there are theories regarding alien experiments and tests regarding time travel which allegedly took place in the subterranean corridors beneath the base. While Randy is busy pilfering bottles of selected vintages, Maxine finds a locked door with a numerical key-code. She tries several passwords gleaned by Eric from his Deep Web hacking escapades and manages to open the door. Inside there are long corridors stretching into the area under the military base, and Maxine is overwhelmed by a sense of

unease. Knowing that she should turn away, she goes deeper into the empty hallway and reaches a stair well, at which she is unable to determine whether the corridor branches or descends down. As she peers into the darkness, she witnesses a bizarre sight:

Oh shit, what's this – at the next landing down, something's poised, vibrating, looking up at her ... in this light it isn't easy to say, she hopes she's only hallucinating, something alive yet too small to be a security person ... not a guard animal ... no ... a child? Something in a child-size fatigue uniform, approaching her now with wary and lethal grace, rising as if on wings, its eyes too visible in the gloom, too pale, almost white... (Pynchon 2013: 194)

Terrified, she runs back the corridor and closes the door behind her when she reaches the cellar. She goes back to the bar with Randy and then quickly heads back home. Later in the afternoon Maxine switches on the news and learns that Lester Traipse was found dead at the Deseret. He was hit in the head with a ballistic knife, a weapon rumoured to be used by Russian special forces, the Spetsnaz. In the evening Maxine believes she sees Lester out in the street accompanied by some woman and heading for the subway, but when she catches up to them they are gone. She tells her therapist Shawn about this during her next session. After Maxine leaves his office, she meets Conkling Speedwell, a professional Nose, who uses his uncanny olfactory talents in a line of work similar to that of a private eye. Inquiring into the possibilities of what a Nose is able to glean from various odours, Maxine convinces Conkling to visit the Deseret with her and investigate the place where Lester's corpse was found. Conkling is able to smell the scent of a cologne that belonged to someone who was at the crime scene at the same time as Lester. After consulting his library of perfume, he determines that the brand is called 9:30, a punk-rock scent associated with a club of the same name, that was discontinued over a decade ago. When Maxine goes to sleep that evening she dreams of Lester Traipse, telling her he needs to go down into DeepArcher to hide from his fate.

As it turns out the next day, Heidi, Maxine's best friend, has started dating a police officer, who is willing to help in acquiring information from the NYPD database. Maxine learns of Chazz Larday's criminal past. Also provided by officer Carmine is an ID photo of Eric Outfield, the elusive and paranoid young hacker employed by Reg Despard to acquire classified

information about hashslingrz. Maxine visits one of the clubs which Eric is supposed to frequent. It is a strip club, and Maxine, preferring a non-direct approach talks to the manager and dresses as a stripper to find Eric among the patrons. They eventually leave for Eric's flat where Maxine satisfies Eric's foot fetish. Finally she admits that she has been working for Reg and that she is curious about the Deep Web. Eric agrees to take her on a tour of the un-indexed reaches of the Internet and they share contact information.

Later, Conkling visits Maxine's office to tell her that the 9.30 cologne scent is, according to his acquaintance (“She's proösmic – she can foresmell things that're going to happen” Pynchon 2013: 236), associated with a terrible event which will take place in the near future. His friend is leaving town for the weekend, afraid that something dreadful will happen. During the night, Eric calls Maxine and they descend into the Deep Web. In Pynchon's descriptions, it appears to be a place populated by avatars, with graphical environments, resembling 3d video games. They manage to hack into a cold-war-era military server in which, inexplicably, an animated head of a colonel reveals an inhumane plot aimed at training agents capable of time travel. Kidnapped as children, these people allegedly undergo torture and brainwashing in order to develop the discipline required for their missions. Maxine begins to wonder whether Windust might have been a victim of such a program but quickly reflects that she is falling prey to her own wishful thinking – Windust might be a genuinely bad person who has no regrets and needed little convincing to commit the crimes described in his dossier. In a session later on, Shawn claims that she is simply afraid.

Brooke and Avi arrive in New York. Maxine's brother-in-law reveals that he will be working for hashslingrz and that he has been hired by Gabriel Ice himself in Tel Aviv. Agent Windust arranges another meeting with Maxine, during which he gives her a mysterious folder and talks about Ice being Jewish. While the relation between Maxine and Windust is cold, it is apparent by this point that she has developed a strange affection for him. She receives an address at which they can meet if she decides to talk to him, although the invitation has an apparent sexual undertone. When Maxine returns to her office, she encounters Conkling, now enamoured with Heidi after a previous meeting. He immediately smells the 9.30 cologne and identifies it as coming from Windust's folder. Maxine decides to see Windust at the address he provided, in a dilapidated rental building. According to Windust, after nightfall a pack of wild dogs living in the cellar come out to roam the corridors. Almost immediately after Maxine enters the dingy

apartment Windust tells her to get down on the floor and they have sex. From the short conversation afterwards, Maxine learns that Windust has a wife. She discovers nothing more about Lester Traipse, although she becomes convinced that Windust killed him. Despite this, she still feels attracted to the “homicidal bagman”. (Pynchon 2013: 261)

Later in the evening, Maxine looks at the contents of the folder she received. It includes information about Gabriel Ice and the money he has been sending abroad, with a suggestion that the recipient is a terrorist paymaster known as the Wahhabi Transreligious Friendship (WTF)⁹². Several days later, Windust calls to warn Maxine about meeting with Misha and Grisha, who, according to him, are trained hackers from a state-funded school in Moscow. He also wants to know whether Maxine could compile the data in the folder into a form that he could present to his superiors and she refuses. After returning home from the office that day, she discovers a DVD in a plastic bag waiting for her in the mailbox. The footage seems to have been taken by Reg Despard, and it features a shot of a roof in New York in the early morning. There are two men with a shoulder-mounted missile and third who keeps talking on a cellular phone. Some time later, the camera pans to show a sniper on a nearby roof who seems to be aiming at the missile crew. An airliner comes into sight and the crew aim at and track its flight, but they do not shoot. After the plane has passed the men pack their equipment and vacate the roof, and so does the sniper. Maxine immediately decides to call March and visits her with the DVD. When they watch the film together Maxine realises that the roof videoed by Reg is the Deseret. Maxine and March head there to search for clues and they discover a screw cap with Arabic writing on it. They decide to take it to Igor in order to learn more. He tells them that the cap is from a Stinger missile launcher, and that the writing on it is in Pashto. He also denies that the knife blade found in Lester's head could have been used by a member of the Spetsnaz. Not only do soldiers from that formation throw knives instead of shooting knives, but Igor's contact at the NYPD crime lab saw the blade and claimed that it was made in China. Lester was also Igor's acquaintance, and the mysterious Russian seems to know more about the case than he is willing to divulge.

Seeking to show the DVD to someone who might be able to offer her some assistance, Maxine takes it to Chandler Platt, an attorney recommended by Rocky's wife, Cornelia. He

⁹² Pynchon repeatedly undermines the perceived seriousness of his story, further complicating the issue of guessing whether the inexplicable elements, such as the mysterious figure in the corridors of Montauk, are to be taken as “real” within the novel. It is often difficult to gauge whether we are dealing with an unreliable narrator, humour or *bona fide* weirdness.

seems to be well-connected in the world of politics. After watching the recording Platt makes a phone call in another office and returns to tell Maxine: "... as if they know already what's going to happen. This... event. They know, and they're not going to do anything about it." (Pynchon 2013: 284)

9/11

After several days pass, Horst returns with the boys. Maxine receives an invitation to a party called the Geeks' Cotillion and she decides to go with Horst. She meets Eric who claims that Felix, Lester's former business partner, is also there and wants to see her. Felix's intention is for Maxine to meet Gabriel Ice who organised the party. Suspecting that Felix might have been working for Ice and could be implicated in Lester's death Maxine decides not to approach the billionaire.

Shortly before they take place, the events of September 11 are foreshadowed by Horst and Vyrva. The former notices a rise of put options on the Chicago Board of Trade for United and American airlines, with a rise in volume suggesting insider trading; the latter tells Maxine that a source for randomly generated numbers that Justin and Lucas used to encrypt access to DeepArcher has seemingly been corrupted, allowing outsiders entry into the program⁹³. On Tuesday, Maxine takes Ziggy and Otis to school and on the way back learns about the attacks. She receives a call from March, who likens the tragic event to the burning of the Reichstag and then from Windust who wants to know if Maxine is okay. There is a short period of suspense regarding Horst, whose new office was at the World Trade Center, but it turns out that he and his business partner decided to sleep in that day. During a meeting with Maxine one week after September 11, March discusses the possible connection between Reg's DVD and the terrorist attacks. She claims that the missile crew might have been deployed as a means of insuring that the terrorists would crash the planes into the towers, with the sniper fulfilling the same function for the men on the roof. In the meantime, Horst notices that there was also a large amount of trading against companies with headquarters at the WTC.

More information regarding Reg's DVD is provided by Igor who calls Maxine to tell her about a hidden track on the disc. It contains the material that Reg shot at the hashslingrz offices, including Arabs working on some kind of electronic device. According to Igor, the device is a

⁹³ Pynchon echoes two real-world theories that were associated with the 9/11 attacks. This aspect of the text will be discussed in more detail later on when we analyse intertextuality.

virtual cathode oscillator, also known as a vircator. It is used to create an electro-magnetic pulse capable of destroying other electronics in its vicinity. Igor also notices that the men are not building a new vircator but are instead modifying an existing one. The purpose of the machine remains unclear, along with Gabriel Ice's connection to it. Later, Maxine is visited by Driscoll and Eric, who were evacuated from their apartments because of the attacks. They move in with Maxine and her family. Eric claims that the information he found in the Deep Web suggests the Wahhabist Transreligious Friendship is not a terrorist paymaster but instead a cover for the CIA, who are funding anti-Islamic undergrounds in the Middle East. Eric strongly believes that hashslingrz and Ice are evil, and he declares that he will do everything he can to destroy them. Meanwhile, Reg Despard calls Maxine to tell her he arrived safely in Seattle and that according to him, 9/11 was an inside job.

Maxine decides to speak with Rocky about hashslingrz and shows him the file she received from Windust. Rocky and his business partner Spud Loiterman believe that it is time to pull their funds from Ice's company, and Maxine stops working for Streetlight People. Cornelia mentions that she has a dim-witted cousin who works at the CIA, and gives Maxine his contact information. Maxine calls him to ask whether he could find any files about Windust, hoping that this will draw the Agency's attention to him and give him some trouble.

At home, Maxine enters DeepArcher and meets Lucas, who tells her that when the random number source was compromised someone installed a back door in the program, allowing free entry. She also learns that Justin and Lucas abandoned the idea of selling DeepArcher and decided instead to release the source code for free. Their decision was motivated by a suspicion that Ice might have been trying to persuade their former VC, whom they owe money, to take over their assets in court. Later, Maxine is visited by Vyrva, who confesses that she had an affair with Ice in an attempt to get a better deal on the planned sale of DeepArcher.

For Halloween, Ziggy and Otis go to the Desert for trick or treating. Maxine comes to pick them up and meets Misha and Grisha, dressed as Osama Bin Laden. When Justin joins them, they reveal that they are fans of DeepArcher, and when he walks away they insist that it is a real place:

“No! Maxine, no!” with what could be either naïve faith or raving insanity, “it's real place!”

“It is asylum, no matter, you can be poorest, no home, lowest of jailbirds, *obizhenka*, condemned to die-”

“Dead-”

“DeepArcher will always take you in, keep you safe.”

“Lester,” Grisha whispers, eyes angling upstairs toward the pool, “Lester's soul. You understand? Stingers on roof. That.” (Pynchon 2013: 373)

That the Russians know more about the circumstances of Lester's death is confirmed in a conversation with Igor, when Maxine learns that the entrepreneur's murder was not motivated by the money he stole, but by him seeing too much. Lester called Igor to ask him for help in saving his life and left a message on his voice mail – he wanted the Russians to tell the people who were after him that he would never divulge the secrets he learned. Igor claims that Maxine knows who killed Lester and that he does as well. He believes that something should be done because the police will not act against the murderer.

Departures and the underworld

During the New York City marathon, Maxine meets Windust who is making arrangements for his retirement. It is apparent that the word is a euphemism – in his line of work it is impossible to simply quit. Assuming that they will probably never meet again, Maxine and Windust part ways. Unfortunately for him, however, March finally uploads Reg's footage from the Deseret roof to her weblog, and the secretive agent becomes a target for his employers. Calling Maxine at her office, Windust asks her to come to Chinatown and give him some money as all of his cards have been blocked. Maxine decides to help him, and they come under fire from a sniper. Windust claims that it is the sound of a Kalashnikov where he has been expecting automatic fire, suggesting that he thought he would be attacked by someone else: “Among your friends in the Russian mob, distance equals respect, so we should consider assassination by AK-47 an honor.” (Pynchon 2013: 391) Taking cover, they subsequently manage to flee in separate directions without getting shot at again. The next day at the office Maxine receives a phone call from Cornelia's cousin in the CIA. He informs her that he is not able to do anything more

regarding Windust who has “been the topic of an internal memo, several actually” (Pynchon 2013: 393). He advises Maxine to discontinue any further contact with Windust and another voice comes on the phone to say that it is for her own safety. The unknown voice also adds cryptically that “the assessment here on Brother Windust is that he's a highly educated asset, but doesn't know everything.” (Pynchon 2013: 394)

Maxine cannot forget about Windust however, and when school resumes and Horst is not home she opens DeepArcher with the hope that she will find him there. She encounters Vip Epperdew, the fraudster featured in the amateur porn tape that led her to the Hamptons and Windust, whose avatar is a picture of his younger self. After a brief conversation he invites Maxine to visit him at the same dilapidated apartment in which they met before. When she arrives, she finds Windust's body surrounded by the wild dogs which live in the basement. She manages to scare them off with her handgun and notices that he must have been dead for some time⁹⁴. He has no personal items on him, and after a while the stationary phone in the apartment starts ringing. Maxine does not pick up, but a voice on the answering machine begins to threaten her: “We know you're there. You don't have to pick up. This is just a reminder that it's a school night, and you never know when your kids might need you with them.” (Pynchon 2013: 411) This is enough for Maxine and she leaves immediately.

When she arrives home Ziggy and Otis are already there, along with Vyrva's daughter Fiona. Ziggy tells her that in today's Krav Maga class he helped his teacher, Emma Levin, take care of an armed thug who was trying to sneak into the studio but tripped on a flash grenade trap which she set up. The man, who looked like a private contractor, was swiftly incapacitated by Emma and then left in the street. Maxine is shaken by this news but she does not tell Horst about finding Windust's body. In the following days she reveals part of the truth to her father Ernie, but she does not mention being romantically involved with the agent. She notices that the file containing Windust's dossier on her computer is expanding, with someone adding information to it. Some of the new comments read like eulogies. Maxine enters DeepArcher again and meets someone who seems to be Lester Traipse: “instead of assuming it's a Lester impersonator with an agenda, or a bot preprogrammed with dialogue for all occasions, she sees no harm in treating him as a departed soul.” (Pynchon 2013: 427) He claims that he arranged to meet Ice at the Desert to

⁹⁴ Which suggests that he was not the person she met in DeepArcher, or may alternatively tie in with Misha and Grisha's opinion that it is a place where anyone can hide – having nowhere else to run, Windust sought sanctuary in the protected pocket of the Deep Web.

give him the first batch of stolen money and then he woke up in DeepArcher. Maxine suggests that she might help him get out of there but he responds that being “lost down here is the whole point. Take a good look at the surface Web sometime, tell me it isn't a sorry picture. Big favor you'd be doing me, Maxine.”

Out in the real world, Maxine meets Eric with a companion named Ketone who forges ID cards. As she will discover later, Eric is leaving New York. She hears from him again after several weeks when she receives another DVD via Marvin. It is filmed by Reg who is now travelling with Eric across the country in a big truck. They show her that the truck is carrying a vast array of electronic equipment and tell her that it is designed as a mobile blade server⁹⁵. It is supposed to be one in a fleet of many, funded by an undisclosed sponsor, and intended as an experiment for something even bigger. Eric is realising his dream of becoming an “outlaw guru” for hackers, but has not yet began his war on Gabriel Ice.

In the New York City subway, Maxine meets a woman who turns out to be Nick Windust's first wife, Xiomara, whom he met in Guatemala. Xiomara describes Windust's fascination with the Mayan hell, Xibalba, the entrance to which was believed to have been located near Xiomara's village. One day, when Windust saw that his cooperatives were gone, he escaped with Xiomara and helped her to get to the Mexican-American border. Leaving her with an engagement ring with a very large diamond, Windust told her to sell it when she arrives in the USA. That was their last meeting. I will return to this conversation in the analysis of the novel's themes later in this chapter. It closes the subject of Windust, but the mysterious forces he was working for remain in the shadows, unknown. The final chapters of *Bleeding Edge* deal with the only known associate of these powers, Gabriel Ice.

Maxine, Tallis and March

After the publication of Reg's video on her blog, March Kelleher becomes difficult to find. She is constantly on the move, accessing the Internet to post updates from free hot spots. One of these happens to be at the Deseret, which is where Maxine meets her. March tells Maxine that Ice broke up with Tallis and prompts Maxine to talk to her. Tallis is at the apartment in which she was previously meeting with Chazz Larday. Maxine notices that there is a hidden CCTV camera in the living room and tells Tallis that Chazz was hired by Ice to seduce her. She

⁹⁵ Eric describes it as “bleeding edge” technology, and the view described in the scene is the same as the cover of the book.

suggests that they should leave the apartment before Chazz comes back. When they exit the building, they are accosted by Misha and Grisha, armed with Russian sub-machine guns. They are taken into Igor's black limousine, but apart from them there is no one inside the car. The Russians are disappointed when they learn that Tallis and Gabriel Ice are no longer together because they were planning on using her as insurance for their plan. Since she is of no use any more, they decide to let Maxine and Tallis go at a train station where they have arranged to meet with an acquaintance. Misha and Grisha are on their way to one of Ice's hidden underground servers in the mountains, and they have a vircator in the trunk. They intend to destroy the server with an electro-magnetic pulse to honour Lester's death and as a general act of revenge against Ice. On the way to the train station, they explain the connection between Lester and Ice's money transfers, which are closely tied to Igor. Sometime during Russia's first war with Chechnya, Igor decided to leave the Spetsnaz and began helping Chechens instead. He became rich and well-protected, but when the second Chechenyan war broke out, several new Chechenyan organisations formed which were hostile to those that Igor helped. These rebels were funded by the money going through the Wahhabist Transreligious Friendship. Igor helped Lester divert it and took some of it as commission. When Ice or his mysterious superiors found out that Lester knew about the transfers, they decided to kill him.

The limo arrives at the train station where Misha and Grisha's friend is waiting for them with a giant generator for the vircator. Tallis and Maxine board a train back to New York and return to Tallis's apartment, where they meet Chazz. He explains that he is no longer working for Ice and encourages Tallis to talk with March. Maxine helps the estranged mother and daughter reunite, but during the conversation Gabriel Ice arrives. He is furious and argues with Tallis in the street. When he attempts to hit her, Maxine pulls out her gun and threatens to shoot him if he does not walk away. Ice complies and drives away in his limousine, but Maxine decides that Tallis and March should wait sometime before they go back into the apartment. After all of the events described in the story, Maxine offers an optimistic view regarding Ice's threats to keep Tallis from ever seeing her son again:

“You think her meant all that about getting Kennedy away from me?” Tallis quavers.

“Might not be that easy. He'll keep running cost-benefit workups and find that there's too many people coming at him from too many different directions, the SEC, the IRS, the

Justice Department, he can't buy them all off. Plus competitors friendly and otherwise, hacker guerillas, sooner or later those billions will start to dwindle, and if he has any sense, he'll pack up and split for someplace like Antarctica.” (Pynchon 2013: 475)

Leaving March and Tallis, Maxine returns home to find her sons ready to leave for school. She offers to go with them, but they say she should go to sleep. They enter the elevator and the novel ends.

7.2 Aspects of Detective Fiction

The first topic that the outline enables us to discuss is the matter of defining the extent to which *Bleeding Edge* belongs to the detection genre. The particular quality of Pynchon's novel, touched upon in the quotes from the back cover and the first page of the book, is that the reader never truly learns the answers to all the mysteries presented in the text. In *Death in Holy Orders*, a classic story presented as a police procedural, all the secrets were eventually revealed, including the mysterious death of Ronald Treeves which was not tied to the main plot. In *When Will There Be Good News*, the solution to the mystery of Joanna's disappearance was spread among several characters who acted as focalisers for the narration, so that only the reader could understand the overall situation. In *Bleeding Edge*, the mystery of Lester Traipse's murder is explained, but only to a limited degree – we are not provided with the clarity that usually accompanies the ending of a mystery novel: we know the identity of the killer and the likely motive, but the details are obscured. On the one hand, this fact is motivated by Maxine being a fraud examiner who can gather only circumstantial evidence. For example, she learns that the blade of a ballistic knife was found in Lester's head, and that the weapon is commonly associated with the Russian special forces. There is no reason for her to personally analyse the blade since she lacks the expertise to do so, and she cannot access the crime lab. Hence, it is entirely plausible that she receives the information concerning the weapon from someone with the adequate connections. However, that person happens to be an ex-Spetsnaz illegal arms dealer, Igor Dashkov, whose statements cannot be verified. In addition, even if the story told by Misha and Grisha is true, Igor is at least partly responsible for Lester's death—without his help the entrepreneur would never have been able to divert the money or learn the purpose of the transfers. The only evidence supporting the most

likely solution to the mystery of Lester's murder is Windust's cologne and his ties to the Deseret (getting shot after the publication of the video implicates him as the person in charge of the security of the Stinger operation), as well as Misha and Grisha's risky attack on Ice's underground server. All of the critical information Maxine receives comes to her from suspicious sources, mediated through files, videos and second-hand accounts. Even Igor's motivations are not revealed by him personally. For a novel in the genre of detection, which thrives on the certainty of the mystery's solution, *Bleeding Edge* is decidedly unorthodox – it provides *just enough* evidence for us to *almost* be sure that we understand the main plot thread, on the condition that we do not question the trustworthiness of the sources. The overall style of mystery plays in favour of a Baudrillardian reading, which will be provided later in this chapter, but it also frustrates the hermeneutic drive inherent in the genre to a noticeable extent.

Bleeding Edge also tests the limits of the detective story by opening new threads all throughout the investigation, some of which offer no hope of being resolved. We will never discover the true motivations of Gabriel Ice's superiors, or learn more about Windust's enigmatic agency. The only answers concerning the grand scheme of things are provided by March Kelleher, blending conspiracy theories, resentment towards the authorities and capitalism, suspicions, speculation and truth. The suggestion that the September 11 attacks were conceived or encouraged by the US government is largely based upon the fictional elements which Pynchon invented for the purposes of the story – Reg's footage of the Stinger missile crew on the rooftop of the Deseret and Windust's demise after the video is posted on March's blog. Felix Boïngeaux is implicated as Ice's partner in the scheme which led to Lester's death but we never discover his true role – did Lester tell him about his arrangement with Igor, and if so why was Felix trusted to live knowing what he knew? Additional issues which frustrate our hermeneutic drive towards learning all the answers include the mysterious creature Maxine saw in the underground corridors at the mansion in Montauk, the true identity of the dead people Maxine met in DeepArcher, and others. Some of these elements blur the boundaries between detective fiction and horror, reminding the reader of Poe's "The Black Cat" or "The Imp of the Perverse" rather than "The Murders in the Rue Morgue".

Nevertheless, despite the absence of a neatly presented explanation to all the mysteries of the story, *Bleeding Edge* manages to satisfy all of the constitutive conventions of the detective genre outlined by Dove:

1. Maxine Tarnow is central to the story, she is the focaliser and her perspective guides the reader; she is the detective.
2. Nothing in the novel overshadows detection, i.e. Maxine's drive to discover the truth about Lester's death and the motivations of the killer, Nicholas Windust⁹⁶; Pynchon often cuts directly to scenes that continue a thread brought up in a previous sub-chapter, so that once Maxine comes upon a clue we quickly learn of its significance.
3. If we follow Dove's statement that "the hermeneutic specialization of the genre demands that the mystery be not merely a problem to be solved but one deeply veiled and doubly wrapped" (Dove 1997: 76) we may say that *Bleeding Edge* easily exceeds that demand, and by a wide margin; as the outline illustrates the plot is convoluted to a great degree, and I have omitted much of the material that was not relevant to the solution of the mystery.
4. Closure, in the form of the resolution of the crime, is given to the reader with the caveats discussed previously. By refusing to give the reader answers to all the puzzling plot elements *Bleeding Edge* draws our attention to its themes: the disappearance of reality in a contemporary world, the lure of evil, the primacy of profit, relations between people and their government, the uncertainty of truth, and other phenomena.

Pynchon's novel draws from the hard-boiled tradition of detective fiction. According to Dove, the principle of efficiency, which we observed in the works of P.D. James and Kate Atkinson, is considerably relaxed in this sub-genre to make room for thematic content and social critique (Dove 1997: 78). Another aspect of the private-eye sub-genre present in *Bleeding Edge* is plot structure. We have already seen examples of the seven step formula of detection, but here another common convention is superimposed on top of this familiar structure – the extended commission. Originally, Maxine is asked by Reg to look into the finances of hashslingrz and she does so without compensation, until she is hired by Rocky Slaggiat to work on the same case. By the demands of the convention of the extended commission the situation grows more complicated with Lester's murder, which Maxine feels obligated to investigate due to her prior

⁹⁶ A matter further explored in the discussion of literary themes is Maxine's need to understand why Windust chose to become the person he became. The reasons she uncovers also give readers a glimpse into the character of Gabriel Ice and provide some of the motivation behind Maxine's predictions for the billionaire's future at the end of the novel.

involvement. In the hard-boiled mode, this schema is used to explain why the protagonist, a private detective, is working on solving a murder. Dove notes that the extended commission is one of the few concessions the genre makes to reality. Nevertheless, in addition to the convention, *Bleeding Edge* also follows the seven-step plot formula:

1. Statement of the problem: Reg draws Maxine's attention to the suspicious behaviour of hashslingrz and Gabriel Ice.
2. First solution: Maxine discovers the stream of money going through Ice's ghost subsidiaries and concludes that he is stealing it for some mysterious purpose.
3. The complication: Lester Traipse discovered the illegal transfers and has been diverting some of the money. He is killed soon after Maxine discovers his involvement.
4. The period of gloom: a significant portion of the text which includes the mysterious Stinger crew footage, the suspicion that Ice is cooperating with the US government for some unknown reason, the terrorist thread leading up to the events of 9/11, the underground facility at Montauk.
5. The dawning light: Conkling identifies Windust's perfume at the crime scene near the Deseret swimming pool. Since the Deseret is partly owned by Ice and Windust is employed by the government, it appears that Lester's death was not motivated solely by his theft.
6. The solution: in a conversation with Maxine Igor claims that Lester died because he knew too much, confirming the suspicion that the affair is linked with covert operations. This step of the plot is to some degree linked with the explanation, because Maxine, like the reader, does not know what it was that Lester discovered. Windust's demise is also a part of the solution, despite the fact that he was killed for unrelated reasons, because he was the murderer.
7. The explanation: a drugged Misha and Grisha reveal to Maxine and Tallis that Lester unwittingly became an accessory in diverting money intended for Chechen organisations supported by the USA. The money was being sent to the enemies of those organisations, after Lester and Igor have taken their shares. This plot was conceived by Igor, who, apart from being an illegal arms dealer might also be working for the Russian government. The implication, although never stated directly, is that the USA are financing terrorist groups in Chechnya for the purposes of attacking Russians, and that the Russians counter these actions by supporting other Chechen factions hostile to those favoured by the Americans. In all likelihood, Lester not only knew the names of these organisations and had the evidence to prove the transfers, he was also

helping Russians and interfering with a secret dirty war fought by his own country. Gabriel Ice was the middleman in the original transactions, and could be blamed for the situation if anything went wrong; hence, he enjoyed an outstanding level of protection.

He mentions this when Maxine threatens to shoot him in the final chapter (as if it could somehow save him from an unrelated threat on an empty street in New York):

He raises a hand. Tallis avoids it easily, but the Tomcat is now in the equation.

“It doesn't happen,” Ice carefully watching the muzzle.

“How's that Gabe.” “I don't die. There's no scenario where I die.” ...

“You heard what he said. I think this is in his contract with the Death Lords he works for. He's protected.” (Pynchon 2013: 473-5)

Ice's purchasing of the Deseret, the Stinger crew footage, as well as Lester's murder and the mansion built next to the abandoned air base in Montauk, all suggest that the billionaire is involved in more secret operations than the money transfers. On the other hand, Maxine's conversations with Windust and the people at the CIA also imply that few government agents are aware of these arrangements – Windust was looking for information that could incriminate Ice, while the person at the CIA claimed that Windust “doesn't know everything” (Pynchon 2013: 394). This probably implies that the agent, although he was responsible for covert operations taking place in a building especially purchased by Ice for such purposes, had no knowledge about the billionaire's involvement. Conversely, we might suspect that Ice also receives information limited to the extent deemed necessary by his contacts in the government. Hence, he might be ignorant or misinformed about the purpose of his transfers.

From the perspective of character development, it might be argued that Windust and Ice represent the same type of person – one who abandons his former self to heed the call of evil. For Maxine, Windust's appeal is in no small part the result of the mystery of his choices. Throughout the novel, she tries to understand how a young idealist can willingly cast aside his humanity and become an obedient agent capable of the worst crimes. This motif can be found in her reading of Windust's file: “considering the money to be made off troubled economies worldwide, his unexpected reluctance to grab a piece of the proceeds for himself soon aroused suspicions. Duked in, he'd've been a safely co-enabling partner in crime. To be motivated only by raw

ideology – besides greed, what else could it be? - made him weird, almost dangerous.” (Pynchon 2013: 109) The answer to the question “what else could it be?” is a mystery of the fatal attraction of evil as a conscious choice. Pynchon does not make his antagonist into an unwilling pawn who is simply following orders – Windust espouses evil without the motivations characteristic of those who do the same. It is neither greed or outside circumstances that propel him to kill and torture people or subjugate weaker countries. At a time when capitalism is synonymous with greed, which Pynchon underlines in his descriptions of New York, it seems inconceivable that Windust could serve the neoliberal ideology and be indifferent towards money. This subject is touched upon in Maxine's conversation with Chandler Platt, the attorney recommended by Cornelia to which the protagonist brings the Stinger DVD. Darren, Platt's young black intern gives Maxine a CD with his rap mix tape. Platt comments:

I made the mistake of asking him once how he expects to make money. He said that wasn't the point, but has never explained what is. To me, I'm appalled, it strikes at the heart of Exchange⁹⁷ itself ... Back when I was getting into the business, all 'being Republican' meant really was a sort of principled greed. You arranged things so that you and your friends would come out nicely, you behaved professionally, above all you put in the work and took the money only after you'd earned it. Well, the party, I fear, has fallen on evil days. This generation – it's almost a religious thing now. The millennium, the end days, no need to be responsible anymore to the future. A burden has been lifted from them. The Baby Jesus is managing the portfolio of earthly affairs, and nobody begrudges Him the carried interest...” (Pynchon 2013: 283-4)

Windust seems to be principled but not greedy, and he works with people who have become obsessed with profit. If idealism can be understood as a possible source for morals and

⁹⁷ It is interesting that Pynchon decided to use this phrase without qualifying it as e.g. the exchange of goods, capitalising the word, and choosing it over alternatives such as capitalism or the economy. If we recall the discussion concerning Baudrillard's classification of the various types of exchange, it is possible to conclude that Pynchon wanted to allude to the concept of symbolic exchange and the gift, which the French thinker borrowed from anthropology. Cf. Smith et al.: “Symbolic exchange is a broadening out of the terrain of obligatory exchanges of the same kind: from simple exchanges in conversation to sacred sacrifices, and the exchanges between the living and the dead. These exchanges are not based on use values, and as such they stand in marked contrast to market exchanges mediated by money values.” (Smith et al. 2010: 211) Darren's way of thinking is thus opposed to Platt's, which seems to be further underlined by the Darren making “Gongsta rap” (Pynchon 2013: 283), with contrasting references to Asia and Scandinavia.

ethics, and money is unimportant to him, what principles could motivate Windust to commit so many crimes against other people? Maxine's struggles to understand him render her unable to simply cut off all ties with the agent. Perhaps this is compounded by the fact that the actual motive behind Lester's murder does not provide a full explanation of the mystery Maxine wants to solve. Windust is a loyal agent who does not question his orders, nor is he responsible for engineering the plots he helps to realise, so the real reason for which he killed Lester was the same reason for which he became the person he is.

During the time travel episode, when Maxine and Eric hack into a Deep Web site containing information about a secret project in which young boys are kidnapped and undergo brutal training in order to master the discipline required for traversing time, Maxine finds herself trying to concoct an explanation for Windust's character. She quickly reflects: "Maxine, please. Where has she picked up the cockamamie idea that nobody is beyond redemption, not even a murderous stooge for the IMF?" (Pynchon 2013: 244) The truth is that Windust is simply evil, and whatever his internal motivation for abandoning all ethical standards is, he never explains it and takes the secret with him to his grave. Xiomara, Windust's first wife whom he married during a mission in Guatemala tells Maxine about the agent's interest in the Mayan hell of Xibalba:

Xibalba was – is – a vast city-state below the earth, ruled by twelve Death Lords. Each Lord with his own army of unquiet dead, who wander the surface world bringing terrible afflictions to the living. Ríos Montt⁹⁸ and his plague of ethnic killing ... not too different. Windust began hearing Xibalba stories as soon as his unit arrived in country. At first he thought it was another case of having fun with the gringo, but after a while ... I think he began to believe, more than I ever did, at least to believe in a parallel world, somewhere far beneath his feet where another Windust was doing the things he was pretending not to up here. (Pynchon 2013: 443)

The mention of a parallel world ties in with Maxine's encounter with Windust in DeepArcher when the agent should already be dead, while the Death Lords of Xibalba are

⁹⁸ Efraín Ríos Montt was the president of Guatemala and an army general in 1982-83. In 2013, when Pynchon published *Bleeding Edge*, Montt was found guilty of charges of genocide against the native Guatemalan population. The trial was noteworthy because it was the first instance of a head of state being charged with genocide in his own country. See: <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/05/10/world/americas/guatemala-genocide-trial/index.html>, accessed November 20th 2015.

brought up in an aforementioned conversation at the end of the novel, in relation to Gabriel Ice's dealings with the government. The supernatural motif of the Mayan hell is intertwined with the ability to gaze into the unknown reaches of cyberspace in Justin and Lucas's program. It is particularly interesting to note that by combining these two elements, Pynchon joins a product of modern technology with ancient myth, and that by having Maxine meet Windust in DeepArcher, and then claiming that he must have been already dead at the time, the author also inserts a spiritual aspect into a genre which is a product of the age of enlightenment. This is another instance in which *Bleeding Edge* pushes the boundaries of the detective story, prodding the very foundation it stands on – what Poe called ratiocination. The noteworthy part is not the supernatural element itself, but rather its disruption of the world's internal logic. There is nothing preventing a detective story being written in a fantasy or science-fiction setting, and indeed we find an example of the former in Dove's book, when he discusses a Robert Morgan novel in which the protagonist's detective agency hunts vampires, werewolves and fantastical creatures. Dove also reminds us that traditional detective fiction made use of the supernatural to mislead readers, as in Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Dove 1997: 118). However, in the two examples from Dove the internal logic of each setting is preserved, thus enabling the reader to participate in the game of detection. In Morgan's text fantastical phenomena are real, and in Doyle's iconic Sherlock Holmes mystery the hound is a fabrication designed as a means of confusion. In contrast, Pynchon describes a 2001 American computer program that allows its users to find hidden content in the Deep Web, which is consistent with the realistic, modern setting of *Bleeding Edge*; however, he then suggests that the space accessed in the program can act as a sort of limbo, a place between worlds, where it is possible to commune with the dead, and where a person can find refuge from their problems in the real world⁹⁹. This cannot be verified by the reader and yet it is pertinent to the main mystery – both Windust and Lester, whom Maxine finds in DeepArcher are characters of crucial importance to the plot. We can assume that Maxine did not really meet either of them, and that instead she talked to some

⁹⁹ Implying that they can be physically transported to DeepArcher. This subject is brought up, but not explored, in a conversation with Justin: ““Except that for those couple of days, DeepArcher was vulnerable. We did our best ... but still, DeepArcher's defences began to disintegrate, everything was more visible, easier to access. It's possible some people may have found their way in then who shouldn't have. Soon as the GCP numbers got random again, the way back out would've become invisible to any intruders. They'd be caught inside the program. They could still be there.” “They can't just click on 'Quit'?” “Not if they're busy trying to reverse-engineer their way to our source code.”” (Pynchon 2013: 342) Unless Justin means that closing the program would make it impossible for the intruders to enter it again, which they want to avoid, there is no good reason to say that they were “caught”.

anonymous DeepArcher users or computer bots, but we will never know this for certain. We have no data from which we could derive the rules by which the world of *Bleeding Edge* functions – perhaps the setting really allows for travelling between worlds in cyberspace, or perhaps Maxine's obsession with Windust and the paranoia fostered by her job is playing tricks on her mind. Whatever the answer, such unexplained paranormal aspects of the story may confuse the standard hermeneutic mode to which fans of the detective genre are accustomed. When the reader is uncertain about the laws of the setting, it becomes difficult to engage in solving the mystery alongside the protagonist. Thus, Pynchon's novel is not entirely fair to its mystery-oriented readers, but neither is it fair to its protagonist. The odds against Maxine seem to be impossible: not only does she face sinister forces which are able to evade justice, but reality itself appears to be uncertain about its own rules¹⁰⁰. Nevertheless, from a wider perspective, these aspects of the text allow for interesting readings which will be explored in the latter part of this chapter.

In terms of the resolution of the novel's main mystery, Maxine believes that the chief antagonist of *Bleeding Edge*—Gabriel Ice—will follow in the footsteps of Nicholas Windust and eventually face a similar fate. It is likely that Windust's killers were his own co-workers, but the shoot-out in Chinatown suggests another possibility: once the video from the roof of the Deseret was published on March's blog, the protection which Windust received from his agency was removed, leaving him a target for all the enemies he had made throughout his brutal career. Gabriel Ice seems to be in a similar position: his motive for cooperating with the government cannot be financial as he is already a billionaire; he is protected from any physical harm that might come upon him as a result of his involvement in shady government dealings; he is unscrupulous and eventually makes enemies out of nearly every character he meets, and many whom he never meets (e.g. Eric Outfield, who makes it his goal to destroy Ice). The CEO of hashslingrz.com is also fascinated by the dark secrets hidden from regular citizens and is more than willing to sacrifice the remains of his integrity to become a part of the evil machinations that attract him. Unlike Windust, he is not an assassin, killer or a field operative; and yet, like the ill-fated agent, with each orchestrated misdeed that he participates in, Ice's position grows increasingly precarious. Despite the apparent sense of impunity he displays, his paranoia drives

¹⁰⁰ Which is the same predicament as the one faced by agents Mulder and Scully in *The X-Files*, referenced in the novel on page 299: “OK, Reg comes to me with it, thinks it's sinister, global in scope, maybe to do with the Mideast, but it could be too much X-Files or whatever.”

him to outlandish efforts, such as hiring Chazz to seduce Tallis in order to record the affair and gain evidence in a potential divorce case.

The above thoughts about the characters of Nicholas Windust and Gabriel Ice remind us of the detective genre's remarkable temporality, discussed previously. Windust's past holds the key to understanding the murder because it can reveal the motivation for abandoning one's integrity in the service of a shadowy cabal within the structures of the government. As in the other analysed novels, the buried secrets in *Bleeding Edge* impact the present investigation. Perhaps the most important of these personal secrets is Igor's support of insurgents in Chechnya, since it proves to be the driving force behind the plot. In *Death in Holy Orders* this element came in the shape of the Arbuthnot testament, and in *When Will There Be Good News* the search for Joanna was confused by her tragic past. All three novels follow this generic pattern. Another temporal aspect that has already appeared in P.D. James's novel, and is also present in Pynchon's text, is foreshadowing. *Death in Holy Orders* makes no secret of the fact that the Archdeacon will die, and readers of *Bleeding Edge* may find themselves anticipating the terrorist attacks of September 11, looking for clues that might connect Maxine's investigation with the atrocity. The difference between how foreshadowing is employed in the two mysteries lies in the centrality of each tragedy. Crampton's death leads to opening an official investigation during which Dalgliesh learns the truth about Margaret's murder that might have remained undetected otherwise. Maxine can only speculate about the links between the destruction of the World Trade Center and the murky activities of Lester's killers. As I already mentioned, the inclusion of 9/11 in a mystery novel creates the expectation of an accompanying resolution that is so important to the genre¹⁰¹. Nevertheless, the foreshadowing serves the same hermeneutic purpose in both *Bleeding Edge* and *Death in Holy Orders*.

This similarity reminds us that apart from the non-standard solution to the mystery, which the readers must infer themselves from unreliable evidence, Pynchon's novel possesses many of the trappings of a regular detective story. Some of the regulative conventions that we have seen before also make their appearance in *Bleeding Edge*. One is self-reflectiveness: other fictional detectives are mentioned in various conversations, as well as television shows such as *The X-*

¹⁰¹ A reader might be expected to judge the verisimilitude of the novel after learning the solution, on the basis of his or her own beliefs about what really happened on 9/11. However, Pynchon denies us the comfort of classifying *Bleeding Edge* as either complete fiction or crazy conspiracy theory solely by comparing our knowledge of the real event with the story. He achieves this by maintaining a distance between the main plot and the terrorist attacks, at the same time suggesting a cryptic connection that he never reveals.

Files. This particular reference is highly appropriate, as Pynchon's novel seems to draw inspirations from the iconic series. Apart from the paranormal elements in the story, one parallel between the two universes that comes to mind is the fact that whatever mysterious forces are pulling the strings behind the scenes, they seem to be tied to the government and at the same time not belong to it. Both the novel and the show suggest that there is a secretive group within the US government, working to fulfil its own agenda while avoiding any responsibility. They know more than government officials, cannot be impeached or lose an election.

Other regulative conventions that are present in *Bleeding Edge* are the death warrant and the most likely suspect. Both appear in slightly altered forms. When Maxine discovers that Lester has been stealing some of the money transferred by Ice, the entrepreneur admits that he knows more than he can tell. While he makes no promises of revealing that information – in the classic form of this convention the detective is called by a witness who wants to reveal what he knows but dies before he can do so – the very fact that he might ensures his demise. The most likely suspect in the novel is Gabriel Ice and later Windust, and both are guilty. However, despite all the evidence pointing to his guilt, Maxine longs to find an explanation that could expiate Windust, and this suggests that Pynchon is consciously playing with the well-known convention. The protagonist wants the convention to be true, even as she has sex with the killer and has a vision of a miniature Lester retreating into a power outlet. We see a hint of this in one of Maxine's sessions with her therapist Shawn:

“I've seen his [Windust's] rap sheet,” trying not to edge into Daffy Duck mode here, “he tortures people with electric cattle prods, he pumps aquifers dry and forces farmers off their land, he destroys entire governments in the name of a fucked-up economic theory he may not even believe in, I have no illusions about what he is-”

“Which is what, some misunderstood teenager, only needs to hook with the right girl, who turns out to know even less than he does? This is high school again? Competing for boys who're going to be doctors or end up on Wall Street, but all the time secretly yearning to run with the dopers, the car thieves, the convenience-store badasses...”

(Pynchon 2013: 245-6)

Shawn pokes fun at Maxine for her desire to fit Windust into an unsuitable mold, and so it seems Pynchon alludes to a convention he broke when writing his mystery – the most likely suspect is indeed the killer, and he has no hidden alibi. In a similar vein, Gabriel Ice, the proposed “main” antagonist appears increasingly more evil as the investigation progresses. The two characters go against the convention in an active way: not only are they guilty, they have gone so far down the dark path that wishing for some kind of redemption in their case is futile.

7.3 Hypertextuality, Postmodernism and Cognitive Elements

One additional quality of *Bleeding Edge* as a detective story that has not yet been discussed is its distinctive intertextuality. I believe that the sources which Pynchon references directly and indirectly reinforce the “detective” quality of the novel, although not in the sense we analysed throughout this thesis. It would be difficult to explain the various associations that are pertinent to the subject at hand without some methodological grounding, as we did in comparing *When Will There Be Good News* with *Silence of the Lambs*. The primary problem is that Pynchon's text includes references on many levels and the more obvious ones, such as movie titles (always italicised and followed by the year of release in parenthesis, as in an essay) and people, can obscure the less-visible general inspirations which explain the type of discourse the novel belongs to. Due to this complication, I will use the methodology developed by Gérard Genette in his work *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (1982). In my view, Genette's comprehensive approach simplifies the problems that would otherwise be inherent in the present analysis by ordering complicated relationships between various texts in a clear way. While it might not account for every nuance of Pynchon's intertextual artistry, it offers a common ground familiar to many literary scholars.

In this case, we will focus on Genette's concept of hypertextuality, in which certain modifications to a source, called a hypotext, yield an end result called a hypertext. Genette emphasises that several such operations on various sources may take place within one hypertext¹⁰². *Palimpsests* is a book that details the various hypertextual transformations

¹⁰² In fact, from a philosophical standpoint, Genette believes that almost all literature is hypertextual in relation to past hypotexts, although some sources may have been lost to time, or even destroyed by authors rewriting a previous version that had never been published. This stance might appear radical, but if one analyses the examples of literary transformations provided in *Palimpsests*, it is easy to see how much room for creativity it provides. I agree with Genette's belief that in many cases, a lack of knowledge of hypotexts impoverishes our

employed by different authors, but for our purposes the most important one is transposition. It is described as having a “serious” mode, although Genette is quick to add that often, there can be no clear distinction between the serious and the satirical (Genette: 34-35), and this is precisely what we observe in *Bleeding Edge*. Transposition is contrasted with other hypertextual transformations, such as travesty, parody, pastiche and forgery. It has enormous potential for producing interesting works of fiction by means of various sub-categories described by Genette.

Perhaps the most interesting of Pynchon's inspirations that Genette's terminology allows us to discuss is a movie essay by Thom Andersen *Los Angeles Plays Itself* (2003), a lengthy and passionate analysis of the image of the famous city presented in film. I believe that *Los Angeles Plays Itself* is a hypotext for *Bleeding Edge*, and that Pynchon includes a few crucial points made by Andersen in the movie by means of what Genette calls transposition.

The first problem that arises when we compare the two works is the media difference – one is a film, the other is a novel. Furthermore, one is a work on fiction, the other is a work of fiction. However, despite the differences in presentation, it is possible to treat the narration in *Los Angeles Plays Itself* as a text, while disregarding some scenes from various movies and TV shows that appear on the screen. This is an important note, because I will not argue that *Bleeding Edge* is a re-telling of Andersen's film, a spatial transposition from one city to another. One might make such comparisons based on some characters in Pynchon's novel, e.g. Justin, Vyrva and Lucas come from Los Angeles; New York has its own notable version of Silicon Valley, and the action of *Bleeding Edge* revolves around it. However, such echoes are bound to appear coincidentally in two works about two of America's most famous cities. In order to prove that Anderson's and Pynchon's works are actually related, we must look at the film critic's specific observations, in particular about Roman Polański's neo-noir *Chinatown* (1974). The way this film relates to the reality of Los Angeles and its history in Andersen's view is the same way in which Pynchon builds a fictional New York referencing conspiracy theories and opinions, a structure reflected by the mechanisms of DeepArcher¹⁰³.

understanding of the hypertext, even if, as in *Bleeding Edge*, the latter alone provides ample content. (Genette: 420-421)

¹⁰³ Of course, I have no evidence that Pynchon actually saw *Los Angeles Plays Itself*, and I feel this should be mentioned because the film was commercially released on DVD by the Cinema Guild in 2014, after *Bleeding Edge* was published. For 10 years, its availability was limited to private and public screenings and file-sharing. In order for it to be an actual hypotext for the novel, Pynchon would have to have seen it well before it was released.

Polański's film is set in 1938 Los Angeles and follows private eye Jake Gittes who becomes involved in a large-scale plot aimed at re-routing water from the city to a rural area in order to produce a hefty profit for a business tycoon. This is to be accomplished by building a large dam, but the project is opposed by the tycoon's partner, architect Hollis Mulwray, who thinks the structure would be unsafe. Mulwray is murdered and Gittes discovers the truth, but is powerless to do anything about it. Andersen notes that the way *Chinatown* is inspired by actual events created the lasting impression that the film was almost a documentary: "These echoes led many viewers to regard *Chinatown* not only as docudrama but as truth. The real secret history of how Los Angeles got its water." But the story in the film is fictional, to a similar degree as *Bleeding Edge*.

Andersen points out the parallels between the real events and their neo-noir retelling. In 1905, William Mulholland, after whom Mulwray was partially modelled, completed the Los Angeles aqueduct which took water from Owens River and directed it to the city and the San Fernando Valley. The effect was that farming in Owens Valley became impossible, but Los Angeles grew exponentially. Mulholland and other promoters of the project were subsequently accused of insider land trading in San Fernando Valley, while settlers from Owens Valley were left without the means to develop their farms. In the film, the proposed dam would also result in increasing the price of previously dry land, generating windfall profits for insiders, and deprive farmers of fresh water to irrigate their fields. The fictional architect Mulwray opposes the new dam citing a previous disaster, which is a reference to the collapse of Saint Francis dam in 1928, "the greatest man-made disaster in the history of California" (Andersen). Like the aqueduct, Saint Francis dam was also engineered by Mulholland. Unlike the situation in the film however, it was constructed many years after the aqueduct, and after Mulholland and his partners profited from the land in San Fernando Valley.

We see that the film conflated actual events, rearranging them chronologically and inverting the role of the architect – Mulholland was the chief engineer in the aqueduct and Saint Francis dam projects, Mulwray opposes the construction of the fictional dam. What is even more interesting is that in *Chinatown*'s portrayal of the water situation, Jake Gittes discovers the truth but is unable to prevent it from being covered up by the business tycoon and the police. The reality, as Andersen notes, was quite different: "In fact, the truth was always out there. The public history is the real history. The insider land deals were exposed by the Hearst Press in 1905, two

weeks before the public voted on a bond issue to purchase water rights. The bond issue still passed 14:1, and no artificial drought was required to fool the voters.”

One can easily see how the logic of this transposition from reality to film permeates Pynchon's novel. There are echoes of real 9/11 conspiracy theories in *Bleeding Edge*, two of which are quoted directly: insider trading on put options for airlines whose planes were kidnapped by al-Qaeda hijackers; and non-random results produced by random number generators operating as a part of the Global Consciousness project (see 9/11). The former is brought to Maxine's attention by Horst, who observes the movements on the Chicago Board of Trade. It is a direct reference to real world allegations which suggested that prior to the terrorist attacks a group of people who knew what was about to happen used the occasion to trade against the stocks of United and American Airlines, the companies whose planes were hijacked. It was alleged that the volume of trading was unusually high before the attacks and that tracking the transactions might reveal the guilty party that participated in planning the atrocities. Horst's opinion in the novel is that the trading is abnormal. However, as in the case of Andersen's explanations regarding the public's knowledge of the land deals in Los Angeles, this suspicious trading has been analysed by the 9/11 Commission which concluded that while the volume was indeed up on put options before the attacks, no links could be found between the trading and prior knowledge about the terrorists' plan¹⁰⁴. The Commission concluded that the trading was innocuous.

The second 9/11 theory, this time brought up by Justin and Lucas, refers to a controversial parapsychological research project which postulates that hardware random number generators (RNGs) might be influenced by the emotions of people¹⁰⁵. In *Bleeding Edge*, the results produced by these random number generators are stolen by Justin and Lucas and used to make DeepArcher untraceable online. Justin tells Maxine that:

¹⁰⁴ See: 9/11 Commission Report, p. 499. <http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report.pdf>. Accessed: 31.03.2016

¹⁰⁵ The researchers involved in the Global Consciousness Project claim that: “When human consciousness becomes coherent, the behavior of random systems may change. Random number generators (RNGs) based on quantum tunneling produce completely unpredictable sequences of zeroes and ones. But when a great event synchronizes the feelings of millions of people, our network of RNGs becomes subtly structured. We calculate one in a trillion odds that the effect is due to chance. The evidence suggests an emerging noosphere or the unifying field of consciousness described by sages in all cultures.” See: <http://noosphere.princeton.edu/index.html>. Accessed: 04.01.2016

All goes well till the night of September 10th, when suddenly these numbers coming out of Princeton began to depart from randomness. I mean really abruptly, drastically, no explanation. You can look it up, the graphs are posted on their Web site for anybody to see, it's ... I'd say scary if I knew what any of it meant. It kept on that way through the 11th and a few days after. Then just as mysteriously everything went back to near-perfect random again. (Pynchon 342)

This comment echoes the real-world statements of some researchers involved in the Project who claimed that the results from their RNGs were indeed non-random around the time of the terrorist attacks. But their opinions have been analysed by independent statisticians who failed to arrive at the same conclusions¹⁰⁶. Issues regarding these findings centre around the arbitrary selection of time windows for analysing data and statistical filters used. In other words, sceptics suggest that the results only look abnormal if a portion of the numbers is examined in a certain way. There is no evidence that a global consciousness really exists, or that it influences specific devices without having an effect on other electronic equipment, which makes the entire premise of the project suspicious. Furthermore, while the main researchers operate from Princeton, the Global Consciousness Project is not part of any of the university's departments. Its mere location lends it an air of credibility it would not otherwise have, as we see when Justin replies to Maxine's confusion ““Some... California thing.” “Princeton, as a matter of fact”.” (Pynchon 341)

The above two examples showcase Pynchon's use of conspiracy theories in a way that presents them as truth, in the same way as Chinatown's casting of real events in a more sinister light has led many people to believe that the film is factual. We can observe an interesting relationship between fiction and reality in which the two permeate each other. It is also different than the *X-Files* inspiration which we mentioned before because that show is candid fiction – it takes known conspiracy theories and tells its own stories about them. In *Bleeding Edge*, some

¹⁰⁶ See e.g.: May, Edwin C., Spottiswoode S. James P.: “Global Consciousness Project: An Independent Analysis of The 11 September 2001 Events”. The authors conclude that: “We have examined in detail the primary results with regard to the 11 September 2001 events as posted on the Global Consciousness Project web site and find that they do not hold up under close inspection ... The fact remains that if our analyses and interpretations of the data are correct, then it is our view that the worldwide network of EGG's did not respond to the terrible events of September 11, 2001.” The article is available at: <http://www.lfr.org/LFR/csl/library/Sep1101.pdf>. Accessed 04.01.2016

theories surrounding 9/11 are presented as true¹⁰⁷, despite the fact that they have been disproved, as in the *X-Files*, but they are not the main focus. By remaining in the background, these allegations form a part of the setting and are more easily accepted. A viewer who does not believe in the existence of aliens can watch the *X-Files* knowing that it is not true by suspending his or her disbelief. A reader who is not familiar with the controversies surrounding the claims made about the 9/11 attacks will likely assume that they must hold some merit. Thus, *Bleeding Edge* echoes *Chinatown* in the sense that the audience of the film accepted its story as an acceptable retelling of the facts.

In this example we see *Bleeding Edge* as a hypertext that is inspired by film criticism – metafictional discourse. But *Chinatown* is also a hypotext for the novel in a more “traditional” way. The omnipotent tycoon Noah Cross of the film resembles Gabriel Ice in his illicit dealings with the authorities. The power of both men means that they will not be brought to justice – each protagonist, Jake and Maxine, cannot act on the knowledge they gain during their investigations. Cross's scheme to profit from the newly irrigated land is not very different from Ice's wholesale purchase of network cables from companies which went bankrupt in the dotcom crash.

Most importantly, however, the parallels between *Chinatown* and *Bleeding Edge* explain the novel's peculiar connections with the detective genre. In the noir tradition, which Polański's film emulates, the perpetrator can walk free. And since justice is not served, a full explanation of the mystery is not necessarily forthcoming – we are left to fill in the blanks. Pynchon's text can hardly be classified as a noir story, but it is inspired by one. *Bleeding Edge* does carry a dark implication that the greatest tragedy in America's 21st century history was orchestrated by its own government. Yet it is a thought that its readers have grown used to in the past years. The cited conspiracy theories have permeated the media for over a decade and are no longer really shocking. If Pynchon did not intend to subscribe to a radical view of the tragedy, there was no need for *Bleeding Edge* to be as dark as *Chinatown*. At the same time, the famous author did not write a satire to point out the flaws in popular conspiracy theories. We can see that the treatment of *Chinatown* as a hypotext in Pynchon's novel accounts for the circumstances surrounding 9/11

¹⁰⁷ Pynchon cites numerous other conspiracy theories about the attacks, such as the hawala as a means of funding terrorism (see Agent Windust, Lester Traipse and International Black Ops) which has also been debunked by the 9/11 Commission. But *Bleeding Edge* is not a story in which every allegation is true – an eventuality which would result in a farce. For example, the idea that the Jews who worked at the World Trade Center all took sick leave before the attacks is ridiculed (Pynchon 325). The fact that some allegations are presented as truth and others are derided confuses our reception of the extradiagetic content in the novel.

and its presence in the public imagination, and so the tone of the film is readjusted. As a hypertext, *Bleeding Edge* is a highly sophisticated transposition. The result, however, is that it strays from the highly conventionalised genre of detection we discussed in the other two analyses.

In my presentation of the features of the genre as transformed play, based on Dove's interpretation of Gadamer, I mentioned the aspect of freedom from stress. When playing a game, one should be able to detach the activity from the demands of the real world. A game should not challenge the player by producing stress. The detective genre can be perceived as transformed play, and several of its hallmark features serve to relieve the reader from stress. The certainty of learning the mystery's solution by the end of the story means that we do not have to worry about noting all the evidence: our investigation is an elective task we may choose to pursue or ignore; we will be told "whodunnit" either way. Furthermore, the self-reflexiveness reminds us of the fact we are reading a work of fiction, to prevent the gruesome subject matter from dampening our mood. To an experienced reader who is able to recognise various conventions from other mysteries, the artificiality of a detective story is apparent.

Pynchon's rendition of this aspect of the genre is subversive. We see in *Bleeding Edge* a mixture of tonalities, of seriousness and playfulness, skilfully intertwined to produce a result that does not truly commit to either direction. The element which helps to undermine various interpretations is humour: we cannot always gauge whether a particular scene or exchange should be taken seriously or not. This is caused by the text allowing us to read it in various ways: as satire, allegory, conspiracy theory or mystery. Our modes of interpretation are likely to shift at certain stages of the plot. For example, consider the sex scene involving Windust and Maxine. There are no introductions or setting the mood – a dingy apartment in a run-down building, an area of the city Maxine would never have visited otherwise. A few pages back, our protagonist has learned from Conkling that Windust was probably Lester's killer: "What happened to the chances for a giddy romantic episode today? Suddenly it looks a lot more like field research." (Pynchon 2013: 255) And yet, when she enters the flat, Windust tells her to get down on the floor and she obeys:

Shouldn't she be saying, "You know what, fuck yourself, you'll have more fun," and walking out? No, instead, instant docility – she slides to her knees. Quickly, without

further discussion, not that some bed would have been a better choice, she has joined months of unvacuumed debris on the rug, face on the floor, ass in the air, skirt pushed up. Windust's not-exactly-manicured nails ripping methodically at sheer taupe pantyhose it took her easily twenty minutes in Saks not so long ago to decide on, and his cock is inside her with so little inconvenience that she must have been wet without knowing it. His hands, murderer's hands, are where some demonic set of nerve receptors she has been till now only semi-aware of have waited to be found and used like buttons on a game controller ... impossible for her to know if it's him moving or if she's doing it herself ... not a distinction to be lingered on till much later, of course, if at all, though in some circles it is held to be something of a big deal ...

Down on the floor, nose level with an electrical outlet, she imagines for a second she can see some great brightness of power just behind the parallel slits. Something scurries at the edge of her vision, the size of a mouse, and it is Lester Traipse, the shy, wronged soul of Lester, in need of sanctuary, abandoned, not least by Maxine. He stands in front of the outlet, reaches in, parts the sides of one slit like a doorway, glances back apologetically, slides into the annihilating brightness. Gone

She cries out, though not for Lester exactly. (Pynchon 2013: 258-9)

This is not a scene we would expect to find in a traditional mystery novel, especially not between the detective and the murderer, and particularly not immediately after the detective learns the killer's identity. Violations of propriety aside – modern detective stories deal with adult subject matter routinely, but the focus is usually on the violence of the crime scene and the state the victim was found in, whereas *Bleeding Edge* never “shows” us Lester's body – it is impossible to avoid the bitter satire and the relationship between the crooked official and the complacent citizen in this fragment. The sexual position, the demeaning circumstances of a dirty rug, Windust's unceremonious ripping apart of a garment synonymous with feminine elegance, and Maxine's awareness of the disconnect between her reason and unconscious lust (throughout the novel she never describes Windust in a positive way, and her actions towards him are always the opposite of what she thinks). The genre of detection makes the circumstances of the encounter even more meaningful – as a detective, Maxine represents our drive to learn the truth; she is the vehicle of our desire for justice. In the hard-boiled mode of detection, this vehicle,

understood in metaphorical terms, is often a used and beat-up sedan that has to double up as an off-roader during an unexpected trip into the dark wilderness, but it never fails to deliver us to our intended destination. Technically, Maxine succeeds in providing us with the answer to the mystery of Lester's death, but the tone of this passage is strikingly different to the generic standard. Looking back at the other two books we analysed the discrepancy is more than clear: Commander Adam Dalgliesh jumps into the icy sea to prevent the killer from drowning and force him to stand trial; Jackson Brodie, after surviving a terrible train crash, tracks Joanna's kidnappers to their secluded hideout with no backup; Maxine Tarnow has sex with the murderer. Here, agent Windust appears as a play on the noir trope of the *femme fatale*, a dark attraction for the good detective, implicated in the crime. The difference is that unlike the “dames” of film noir he is described as profoundly unappealing.

The allegorical meaning of this scene can be fruitfully analysed using Lakoff and Johnson's theory of conceptual metaphor in which abstract concepts are conceptualised using primary metaphors that are “embodied through bodily experience in the world, which pairs sensorimotor experience with subjective experience” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 73). On the face of it, and taken in isolation, the sex scene might be summarised by the vulgar metaphor for being cheated out of something: “getting screwed”. The metonymy which immediately comes to mind in the context of detection, whereby Maxine stands for our hermeneutic drive for justice and Windust is representative of the crime that should be punished, results in a shocking reading of the scene. The impression is that the reader is being cheated out of his or her desire to see a confrontation with the perpetrator which could potentially yield a confession or some important clue. Taken as an allegory, however, the relationship between Maxine and Windust is not so one-sided. On some level, she does expect to have sex – she dresses for the occasion, and receives the address for the rendezvous in a conversation during which she notices that Windust has an erection: “A silence arises, and lengthens, and not only a silence, as her glance, inadvertently wandering to that other indicator of the inward, confirms. It's in fact a hardon of some size, and worse, he's caught her looking.” (Pynchon 2013: 253) She does not go to the address because Conkling told her about the cologne being associated with the crime scene, she pays the likely killer a visit because of her lust, which proves more compelling than her desire to learn the truth. Throughout the novel, she is constantly attracted to Windust, at the same time desperately trying to deny to herself that this is the case. Nothing about him seems attractive: his fashion choices,

cold demeanour, right-wing ideology and suspicion of Jews, as well as the connection to the murder of Lester Traipse; and yet Maxine is drawn towards Windust and thinks about him in unrelated circumstances, such as her exploration of the Deep Web where she and Eric learn about the time travel conspiracy theory related to Montauk.

The sex scene seems to be a representation of Pynchon's disillusioned view of the relationship between the U.S. government and the American people. This is an abstract concept that has to be reduced to a more basic-level category – a relationship between two people – in order to be immediately understandable. My reading of Pynchon's metaphor is built on metonymy: Maxine is the nation, and Windust is the government. Maxine learns about the secret evil deeds committed by those who are supposed to guard her from harm, and she denounces them for it. Despite this, she is unable to extricate herself from the relationship. She has been conditioned to desire the fruits of the atrocious labours that Windust engages in – a lifestyle of hedonism enabled by the exploitation of the poor (Windust's assistance in Montt's genocide of the natives in Guatemala, and other sins mentioned by Maxine in her conversation with Shawn) and the elimination of potential risks (Lester's knowledge of the government's backing of terrorist organisations in Chechenya, along with his access to financial data that might prove him right during a trial) – and this shows in her unwitting sexual arousal. While it might be tempting to say that Maxine is being taken advantage of, this does not directly correspond with the description of her intercourse with Windust – she is unable to tell who is moving, and she cries out in pleasure; unlike March Kelleher she is incapable of standing up for herself and protesting the government's unethical actions (although she is capable of protecting Tallis when the latter is in danger of being hit by Ice). The opulent lifestyle of people in the USA (Maxine's “demonic set of buttons”) is at least partly dependent on the country's economic domination of smaller states that possess natural resources – places like Guatemala where Windust enforces American interests. Maxine, as well as the remainder of people in the USA, is a beneficiary of the exploitative system, the immoral workings of which take place in faraway places¹⁰⁸. Thus, the

¹⁰⁸ Compare with this passage from *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*: “Is anyone in the U.S. innocent? Although those at the very pinnacle of the economic pyramid gain the most, millions of us depend—either directly or indirectly—on the exploitation of the LDCs [less-developed countries] for our livelihoods. The resources and cheap labor that feed nearly all our businesses come from places like Indonesia, and very little ever makes its way back. The loans of foreign aid ensure that today’s children and their grandchildren will be held hostage. They will have to allow our corporations to ravage their natural resources and will have to forego education, health, and other social services merely to pay us back. The fact that our own companies already received most of this money to build the power plants, airports, and industrial parks does not factor into this

physicality of the intercourse between Maxine and Windust can be read as a complex conceptual metaphor of the relationship between America's government and its people. It is not the lopsided game of exploitation that is a reality in third-world countries. Instead, it is a mutual, pleasurable relationship for both sides, even if it creates a feeling of guilt in the weaker party's conscience. What remains of the description, Maxine's vision of a miniature Lester leaving through an electric power outlet, is more symbolic in character. The businessman's departure into the "annihilating brightness" of electric power can be seen as his submission to the abstract power wielded by people represented by Windust; but it can also be read as Lester's descent into the cybernetic depths of DeepArcher, the ultimate sanctuary, where Maxine later finds him.

This scene is but one example in which Pynchon shifts the mode of *Bleeding Edge* away from detection to make a statement about society. I would argue that it is also a feature that points towards the novel's postmodern character, in that it muddies the distinction between a good (if often flawed) protagonist and the bad antagonist we might come to expect from a more conventional story. It also introduces an element of irony and can be perceived as an instance of bitter humour. In short, the scene points towards a complex reality with multiple meanings, adding an element of pastiche which Jean-Francois Lyotard identified with a postmodern way of dealing with traumas of the past (the 9/11 attacks were a momentous traumatic event for Americans) in *The Postmodern Condition*:

The right approach, in order to understand the work of painters from, say, Manet to Duchamp or Barnett Newman is to compare their work with the anamnesis which takes place in psychoanalytical therapy. Just as the patient elaborates his present trouble by freely associating the more imaginary, immaterial, irrelevant bits with past situations, so discovering hidden meanings of his life, we can consider the work of Cézanne, Picasso, Delaunay, Kandinsky, Klee, Mondrian, Malevitch and finally Duchamp as a working through – what Freud called *Durcharbeitung* – operated by modernity on itself. (Leitch et al.: 1615)

formula. Does the excuse that most Americans are unaware of this constitute innocence? Uninformed and intentionally misinformed, yes—but innocent?" (Perkins: 69) The difference being that Maxine can be counted among the informed, as she already knows that Windust killed Lester.

From our definitions of the detective genre, it seems obvious that such content and reflection reach beyond the readers' expectations, and in more general terms, beyond the subject matter of popular fiction. If we recall the discussion of the “highbrow” taste presented at the beginning of this dissertation, the element of uncertainty and multiple interpretations stood in opposition to the demands of the “lowbrow”. The aim of *Bleeding Edge* is to remind the reader of the critical voices concerning the official story of the September 11 terrorist attacks, which pointed towards the greedy motivations for attacking countries in the Middle East during the war on terror. Pynchon does this in a unique way, without telling us what “really” happened, but by weaving his story from authentic conspiracy theories as we discussed previously, historical events (American involvement in the genocide in Guatemala) and standard detective conventions. It is hard to say whether we are supposed to take some of these elements seriously. For example, Conkling the private nose, with a superhuman sense of smell, seems to be a parody of the talented detective whose fearsome propensity for logical thinking is able to create a full picture of a crime from seemingly unrelated clues.

Even among a cast of shady businessmen, Russian arms dealers, drug runners, bloggers and economic hit men, Conkling still seems completely out of place. There is nothing in our real-world experience that can correspond to his character, with the possible exception of a police dog. Pynchon goes even further with his characterisation by giving Conkling an olfactory weapon, called the Naser, which is capable of overloading one's sense of smell until they lie incapacitated on the ground. In one fragment of the novel, Conkling is engaged in an operation to intercept a large batch of fake Channel No5 perfume, and is forced to use the weapon to defend himself from the smugglers. All this makes the character silly enough, but Pynchon pushes the envelope further when Conkling mentions his psychic friend who can predict future events with her sense of smell, and when Maxine discovers that the private nose's hidden passion is learning the smell of Hitler's cologne. Nevertheless, Conkling is the person who provides the most important clue pointing towards Windust's guilt. The private nose can be seen as a parody of a gifted detective from the Golden Age of the genre (with strong echoes of Doyle's Holmes and Christie's Poirot), due to his unbelievable ability to come up with solutions to crimes using esoteric evidence: and in his case he is literally pulling a solution out of thin air. His talent does not seem accidental – the conceptual metaphor for sensing that something is wrong in English is “smelling something rotten” or “smelling something fishy”. Detectives, whether hard-boiled or

classical, often operate on their gut feelings, and they are invariably right. Conkling's extra sense is a physical representation of this, and it seems so outlandish that it casts a shadow of doubt over the circumstantial evidence he provides. If the private nose is a joke, then the target is also the detective genre itself, being represented ironically as outrageous and fun, detached from the real world. As we become involved in the dark secrets Maxine uncovers, and our hermeneutic drive strengthens to the point that we might expect that *Bleeding Edge* will have something to say about the 9/11 attacks, elements such as Conkling and Maxine having sex with Windust appear to be messages from Pynchon, saying “you know what actually happened, and I won't tell you anything more about the real event than what you already know”. *Bleeding Edge* was not written to put the blame for 9/11 on one person or organisation, or to prove that the government had secret contact with extraterrestrials, or that time travel is possible. These additions serve the purpose of testing our critical thinking, exposing our propensity to suspend disbelief in the face of generic conventions, and the state in which modern entertainment and the news industry so often require us to be—utter gullibility. Engaging the reader in an act of interpretation that promises no certain results is the postmodern¹⁰⁹ quality of *Bleeding Edge*. The interpretation of reality can be considered a central theme of the novel, and I would like to dedicate the latter part of this chapter to it using the theories of Jean Baudrillard.

7.4 An Intangible Reality – Baudrillardian Influences

A good starting point for the analysis of the theme of reality in the novel is Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality and the proliferation of simulations which replace the real in a post-industrial world. Pynchon applies these concepts in two primary ways reminiscent of Baudrillard's critique. The first is the transformation of New York from a patchwork of social milieus into a unified, profit-driven metropolis. This point is brought up several times, along with the name of mayor Rudolph Giuliani, who is accused of forcefully replacing the reality of the town with a suburban vision benefiting real estate investors and the middle class. The Baudrillardian aspect is clear: it is a project aimed at fitting an entire city into an abstract model, disregarding those who fall

¹⁰⁹ It might also be called a high-modern trait if we consider the purposefulness of obfuscation and the multiplication of possible meanings in texts such as *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. Difficulty of interpretation cannot be seen exclusively as postmodern.

outside of its boundaries (“Maxine can't avoid feeling nauseous at the possibility of some stupefied consensus about what life is to be” (Pynchon 2013: 51)). The change is not peaceful, as undesirable elements must first be removed to make the new vision possible. Before Maxine's first described encounter with March Kelleher, the protagonist recalls meeting the woman at a protest against an unethical landlord who used terror tactics and brute force to remove tenants from their apartments:

March and Maxine go back to the co-opping frenzy of ten or fifteen years ago, when landlords were reverting to type and using Gestapo techniques to get sitting tenants to move. The money they offered was contemptuously little, but some renters went for it. Those who didn't got a different treatment. Apartment doors removed for “routine maintenance”, garbage uncollected, attack dogs, hired goons, eighties pop played really loud.” (Pynchon 2013: 54)

Thus, old buildings occupied by the less-wealthy are vacated and demolished for the purposes of constructing new developments, more attractive to “yups”, and also more profitable. The local community, historical heritage and the authenticity of an imperfect heart of a city is being erased to make way for a cleaner, capitalist vision of the world, where everything is transplanted into the system of economic exchange. As a result of this process of forced gentrification anything outside of the equation of use value and user exchange value is lost – symbolic exchange, disorder, seduction and evil.

Within the context of this replacement, the concept of Evil as understood by Baudrillard is significant in interpreting Pynchon's description of a city beset by hyperreality. The French sociologist proposed a notion of Evil as being removed from the realm of morality and constituting a type of reversal. In *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact*, Baudrillard wrote: “Evil has no objective reality. Quite the contrary, it consists in the diverting of things from their 'objective' existence, in their reversal, in their return” (Baudrillard 2005: 159). Thus, it stands in

opposition to hyperreality and the advancement of simulation, as Paul Hegarty elaborates in the *Baudrillard Dictionary*¹¹⁰:

Here the complexity of the idea of Evil begins to appear: transparency is of course 'good' ... Goodness and transparency meet up in a mutually reinforcing spiral, and all else, all that would be secret, or must now be done away with (things deemed inefficient, no longer desirable), will be seen as Evil. Simulation flattens, 'makes good' continually, and this is 'another world in which things no longer even need their opposites' (Baudrillard, in Clarke et al., 2009: 25). Baudrillard is in fact using Evil as a deconstructive term, one that restores duality, and through confrontation, the duel. At the same time. Evil is fundamentally caught up with simulated versions of goodness that are actually the thing that is bad." (Hegarty, in Smith et al. 2012: 63)

This is also how the vision in *Bleeding Edge* can be conceived. Pynchon does not argue that the seedy aspects of inner New York removed by Giuliani were *morally* good—the porn theatres, gaming arcades, greasy fast food restaurants, pimps and thieves. Instead, he argues against the imposition of a vision that has nothing to do with the reality it replaces, and, in Baudrillard's terms, has nothing to do with reality whatsoever, because it belongs to a self-referential system. The hyperreality of the new New York is orderly, clean and expensive. Its sanitised environment exorcises the demons of possible outcomes that the vision strives to avert, something that is illustrated well in one of the final scenes when Maxine holds Gabriel Ice at gun point:

The odd thing about March's street is that it would be rejected by any movie-location scout, regardless of genre, as too well behaved. In this fold of space-time, women accessorized like Maxine do not point sidearms at people. It must be something else in her hand. She's offering him something of value he doesn't want to take, wants to pay back a debt maybe, which he's pretending to forgive and will eventually accept. (Pynchon 2013: 474)

¹¹⁰ See also Chris Turner's summary of the opposition of hyperreality/integral reality and Evil in his introduction to *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact*, especially pages 8-16.

In terms of Baudrillard's theories, hyperreality strives to eliminate all events, situations that are unique and transgress its model. For example, in an essay published in *Le Monde* in November 2001, titled "The Spirit of Terrorism", Baudrillard wrote that the terrifying aspect of the 9/11 attacks consisted in the fact that the terrorists used the system they sought to destroy, without succumbing to its rules: "Money and financial speculation, information technologies and aeronautics, the production of spectacle and media networks: they have assimilated all of modernity and globalization, while maintaining their aim to destroy it." (Baudrillard 2001: n. pag.) In other words, they managed to reverse and subvert the strengths of their enemies without submitting to integral reality. This was possible only because the terrorists were willing to pay the price of death, thus offering something that Americans, with their policy of efficiency and minimising losses, could not repay. By defying the expectations of the system, Maxine's small gesture of pointing a gun at an unarmed man in a street unaccustomed to crime, becomes an act of Baudrillardian Evil, against which Gabriel Ice is powerless. His insistence that he cannot die, as per his agreement with the "Death Lords" he is working for, unmasks his helplessness in the face of a transgression against the hyperreal system. Of course, the Evil of the terrorist attacks also sends shock waves through the simulationist space of New York in *Bleeding Edge*. At several points in the story, reality itself seems to be breaking at the seams in the aftermath of 9/11. Apart from the real-world conspiracies mentioned earlier in this chapter, supernatural elements appear in the narrative. For example, some time after meeting "Lester" in DeepArcher, Maxine notices a strange event in the street: a very thin plastic cap from a takeaway container is rolling on its edge for half a block, pauses to wait for the lights to change, and then crosses the street. Soon afterwards, our protagonist meets an inventory fraudster known as Uncle Dizzy. He offers her an "invisibility ring", and urges her to put it on; when Maxine complies, Dizzy begins pretending that he is unable to see her. Maxine grows tires of his antics and takes the ring off, instructing Dizzy to put it on instead, which he does and promptly disappears. (Pynchon 2013: 429-30)

The weakening grip on reality after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center is commented on by Heidi, Maxine's friend who is an academic specialising in popular culture. She says something that is particularly important from the perspective of interpreting the events of *Bleeding Edge* using Baudrillard's idea of the opposition between hyperreality and subversion;

noting the demise of irony in gay humour in the wake of the tragedy she suggests: “As if somehow irony ... as practised by a giggling mincing fifth column, actually brought on the events of 11 September, by keeping the country insufficiently serious—weakening its grip on 'reality.' So all kinds of make-believe—forget the delusional state the country's in already—must suffer as well. Everything has to be literal now.” (Pynchon 2013: 335) Her statement appears to echo that of Baudrillard concerning hyperreality, and what he later called integral reality: “the substitution of the world is total; this is the identical doubling of the world, its perfect mirroring, and the matter is settled by the pure and simple annihilation of symbolic substance.” (Baudrillard 2004: 27) The situation that Pynchon describes, which alludes to the complicity of American society in the crimes committed by its government, is that once the orderly view of things is shaken by an event which is impossible to assimilate into the model that purports to be absolute, the people react with zealous submission to the model's demands, as if they were to blame for allowing the disruption to happen. It is important to clarify this issue: the substitution of the world that Baudrillard describes is our all-encompassing rational model of reality, comprised of laws of physics, our knowledge of biology, the dominant idea of what humans are and what they should be, as supported by the sciences which claim to be objective. In other words, it is a map of reality as humans understand it, far too complex to be learned in its totality by any single person, but which covers the uncertain and unpredictable world it was made to depict so completely that we no longer need to refer to the original. We have models for everything, and in the events of 9/11, these models are rejected by an outside force. Yet, according to Heidi, the reaction of society is that the model of reality was somehow not total enough, not established enough, because people inside this hyperreality have no outside frames of reference. Pynchon illustrates this with two other strange occurrences, recounted by Heidi and Maxine in the same conversation, in which the ages of people met on the street seemed reversed. Heidi tells Maxine about two girls she overheard talking in the street that sounded like teenagers but who turned out to be grown women when she turned to look at them. Maxine saw three middle-aged men standing in the spot of three schoolboys whom she sees routinely on her way to work: “and yet she knew, shivering a little, that these were the same kids, the same faces, only forty, fifty years older. Worse, they were looking at her with a queer knowledgeable intensity” (Pynchon 2013: 336). The two encounters can be interpreted as the intensification of society's conformity to the model of reality it inhabits. The women behave like teenagers because they are expected to do so

by the system of advertising and the concept of femininity—the glorification of youth and sexuality is so often portrayed by young girls, whose adolescent need to belong and naïvety make them the perfect consumers. The boys going to school are enacting the same patterns that will be required of them forty or fifty years later, following the path that has been laid down for them a long time before they were born. Thus, people defend themselves from the implications of the attack by regressing deeper into their hyperreal identities, the models of what they *should be*.

The idea of being incapable of reaching outside the simulation of everyday life is reinforced by March Kelleher's post-9/11 explanation of the Stinger crew DVD, according to which the purpose of putting the missiles on the roof was ensuring that the hijackers would actually crash the planes according to plan: “Somebody doesn't trust the hijackers to go through with it. These are Western minds, uncomfortable with any idea of suicide in the service of a faith. So they threaten to shoot the hijackers down in case they chicken out at the last minute.” (Pynchon 2013: 323) March suggests that for the rational, profit-oriented Americans the notion that an act as complicated as orchestrating the attacks might be motivated by a belief in a symbolic order is almost fantastical. Again, the comment echoes Baudrillard's observation about the terrorists' use of the tools developed by the Western model. At such a high level of involvement with these tools—learning to pilot the planes, engaging in illicit transactions to finance the operation, etc.—it seems inconceivable that one would not come to share the model of reality that spawned them.

An interesting addition to this subject comes from embodied cognition, which espouses empiricism as the best approach to understanding the world. On the one hand, Lakoff and Johnson chastise the concepts of absolute subjectivity in the post-structuralist sense, and complete objectivity, inherent in the beliefs of the scientific community about its findings. Our interactions with the world are the basis for our abstract ideas which in turn are metaphorical. Hence, they cannot be fully subjective or fully objective (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 24-26). On the other hand, however, the authors of *Philosophy in the Flesh*, like the Western minds March describes, seem incapable of fully acknowledging a metaphysical order, or accepting illusion as a part of reality:

And yet, as commonplace and “natural” as this concept is, no such disembodied mind can exist. Whether you call it mind or Soul, anything that both thinks and is free-floating is a myth. It cannot exist ... Embodied spirituality is more than spiritual *experience*¹¹¹. It is an ethical relationship to the physical world ... The vehicle by which we are moved in passionate spirituality is metaphor. The mechanism of such metaphor is bodily. It is a neural mechanism that recruits our abilities to perceive, to move, to feel, and to envision in the service not only of theoretical and philosophical thought, but of spiritual experience. (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 563, 566, 568)

From these quotes, it is clear that Lakoff and Johnson are loathe to abandon the concept of spirituality altogether, but they cannot believe unless it forms a part of the model of reality which they advocate. I do not want to make judgements about the superiority or inferiority of either Baudrillard's theories or embodied cognition at this point. However, it is clear that in the case of *Bleeding Edge*, the intricate thematic content of the novel would be substantially simplified if we assumed, along with Lakoff and Johnson, that Baudrillard cannot be right by virtue of the fact that the sign is not arbitrary. Here, we can observe the true difference between these two modes of perception: Baudrillard does not *advocate* the notion of the sign carried over from the works of de Saussure—he criticises its prevalence, as he observes it in the surrounding world, lost in constructing a duplicate reality that can be fully understood; in contrast, Lakoff and Johnson are engaged in this project of replication, but they believe that its rules are different than what Baudrillard describes. Fundamentally, the two sides agree that the triumph of objectivism is a negative force that is not what it purports to be (Baudrillard believes that objectivism creates a copy of the world rather than really describing its essence; Lakoff and Johnson claim that the objectivist model creates an empirically falsifiable description of the world). At the same time, the French sociologist and the proponents of embodied cognition represent two irreconcilable positions, because the success of the latter entails the worst possible outcome for the former.

Pynchon presents the attacks of September 11 as an assault on the hyperreality of New York and America, but he also describes a more benign force of escape from the ordeal of simulation—DeepArcher, a Baudrillardian cyber-utopia of the symbolic and the unknown. The

¹¹¹ Emphasis original.

particular qualities of the program that make it so special to many characters in *Bleeding Edge* are the same features that stand in opposition to the 'real' world. For one, DeepArcher is impossible to access without login information, as it is guarded by random untraceable codes. As one enters this impossibly sequestered realm, they pass into the unknown—the second feature of DeepArcher is the ability to find invisible links, single pixels, which upon being clicked transport the user to a new, unpredictable location. It is precisely this unfathomableness which constitutes a digital replica of what the real used to be before the age of simulation. In hyperreality nothing can be truly lost, as everything is 'as it should be'. In DeepArcher, everyone is lost, uncertain of where they will go next, and unable to return to the place they came from. Perhaps this is why Misha and Grisha tell Maxine that it is a real place. And because it restores the realm of illusion, it is also the one sanctuary of the impossible, of the metaphysical that used to shape the lives of men before the advent of hyperreality, the border between the land of the dead and that of the living, in which it is possible to commune with spirits. This is where Maxine meets Lester Traipse and Nicholas Windust, in the only place where they can hide. What remains of them is not allowed in the 'real' world—up there they would be destroyed, because integral reality cannot tolerate what they have become; as Lakoff and Johnson point out: “Whether you call it mind or Soul, anything that both thinks and is free-floating is a myth. It cannot exist.” (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 563)

It is noteworthy that Pynchon decided to put DeepArcher in the Deep Web. The Internet is derided as being dominated by the artefacts of capitalism, and the indexing of search engine crawlers: as the real was mapped, so is cyberspace being indexed, until all content becomes potentially knowable, and the unexpected becomes possible. One must go deeper to avoid merely traversing a digital copy of the hyperreal, and DeepArcher is a key to this escape. And yet, as a consequence of the 9/11 attacks, perhaps due to the strengthening of 'reality' which it caused, the random number generators which protected DeepArcher falter, and the program is infiltrated. A back door is installed, allowing its creator to come and go freely. It seems that this would herald the end of the utopia, but, as with other aspects of the novel, Pynchon does not determine the ultimate fate of the program. On the one hand, Maxine comes across virtual oil prospectors after DeepArcher begins to change, which is a strong symbol of the foundations of American capitalism, and ties with the wars in the Middle East that followed 9/11. On the other hand, once the program goes open source, it becomes an avenue for the creativity of people who begin to

recreate a lost New York, a more innocent city, already from a time of production, but not yet belonging to the order of simulation. Maxine observes this in a DeepArcher version of New York created by her two sons, Ziggy and Otis, a nostalgic vision informed by old photographs downloaded from the Internet (Pynchon 2013: 428-9). To her it is also not clear whether the strange episodes described previously were an effect of 9/11 or the amount of time she spends in Justin and Lucas's program.

Overall, it seems that Pynchon ends *Bleeding Edge* on an optimistic note when it comes to the issue of hyperreality. By the end of the book some characters, most notably Eric and Reg, dedicate themselves to a struggle against the crooked system represented by Gabriel Ice, the novel's sinister and enigmatic face of the hacker community. Eric claims that the mysterious truck filled with servers is but one in a fleet of many, and that he and Reg have not even begun to wage their cybernetic war on the maniacal billionaire. This, combined with Misha and Grisha's vircator attack and the fact that DeepArcher is not sold, but made available for free, seems to suggest a benign vision of the future, in which Baudrillard's predictions are not all fulfilled and the new networking technologies retain their capacity to oppose the profit-driven madness of American hyperreality. After all, *Bleeding Edge* is set against a backdrop of the millennial dotcom market crash, which deprived many talented computer programmers of a great deal of money but allowed them to retain their identities. While he is less radical than Baudrillard, Pynchon is able to be at least as subversive—his use of the detective genre in the presentation of a battle between hyperreality and Evil, along with a skilful weaving of 'real' conspiracy theories with satire, actual events and the paranormal, marks his latest novel as unconventional in every aspect it touches upon.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

8.1 “Popular” and “highbrow” as critical terms

Throughout this dissertation I attempted to compare two theories on the grounds of literary analysis. The common aspect of both approaches, Baudrillardian and cognitive, is that neither was designed with literary criticism in mind, but both purport to be far-reaching enough that they can be used for that purpose. I began with a research question of whether Baudrillard's obscure and sometimes chaotic ideas can be substituted for an empirically responsible and easily understandable method to arrive at similar conclusions. To this purpose, I turned to one of the most popular literary genres of our time, detective fiction. The three novels that were analysed in the previous section, represent a broad scope of approaches to this established genre. From the traditional, yet rather ambitious *Death in Holy Orders* by P.D. James, through Kate Atkinson's more experimental *When Will There Be Good News*, written with a mass audience in mind, to Thomas Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge*, a literary novel that crosses the bounds of generic conventions but is at the same time heavily indebted to them.

In these three readings, aided by George N. Dove's insights into the specificity of the detective genre, we were able to observe the strong and weak sides of both methodologies. The progression of the chosen texts also supported the conclusions from the second chapter, in which I considered the division of fiction into popular, often referred to as “lowbrow” and “highbrow”, or simply literary. The criteria established in the second chapter, based on a 1977 paper by Jerome Stern, seemed to hold true in the discussed novels. The three suggested points of divergence between a popular and literary novel were:

- 1) Characters in popular fiction are likely to behave in accordance with their role, dictated e.g. by their profession or social status.
- 2) The interpretation of a popular novel will follow a set of conventions and strive to offer a clear resolution of the plot.

3) Popular fiction favours clear communication over formal innovation; the reader must be able to understand what is happening.

In the case of “highbrow” fiction these points are likely to be intentionally violated by the author. Having analysed the three detective novels, we can thus classify *Death in Holy Orders* and *When Will There Be Good News* as “lowbrow” or “popular”, and *Bleeding Edge* as “highbrow” or “literary”. In terms of characters, James and Atkinson have their protagonists fulfil the roles that society expects of them. Dalglish and his team work on solving the murders in St. Anselm's College, and the killer is caught and punished. Furthermore, Karen Surtees, who is indirectly responsible for the death of Ronald Treeves, is presented as being incapable of empathising with a person with a different set of ideals. Her emotional shortcomings lead to tragedy, which clearly brands her as a social misfit. She might be seen as the emotional equivalent of a primitive, a representative of a stereotypical lower class in a world of upper-class values. The latter possibility is further implied by her incestuous relationship with her half-brother, who also happens to farm pigs. On the other hand, the real murderer, Gregory, is presented as a fairly typical intelligent villain, not unlike the arch-nemesis of Sherlock Holmes, Professor James Moriarty.

In Atkinson's novel we follow a reluctant protagonist with a heart of gold, who finds himself unable to refuse helping a young girl and her employer. Jackson Brodie might not be a professional detective in *News*, but he still takes up the role required of him. The fates of the characters in the novel are determined by the wrongs they have suffered, and the way they responded to them. Reggie Chase finds a new, happy family to replace a dead mother and a delinquent brother. Joanna Hunter kills the men who kidnapped her, as if she were avenging the murder of her family by slaying an evil which once harmed her. In the novel, the emotions of the readers are guided in a way that makes them want to see the outcomes that ultimately transpire. Jackson and Louise end up single because they are meant to be with each other, and the ex-private eye loses the majority of his unexpectedly inherited fortune because he does not feel he really deserves it. Despite the unlikely events presented in *News*, the roles of each character align with popular sensibilities, to reach a point where the underdogs triumph and justice is served without the fear of reprisal from the legal system. Even the death of Marcus can be justified by the common belief that bad things sometimes happen to good people, especially since the young

detective appears only briefly, and has few opportunities to elicit much sympathy from the readers.

These two examples stand in marked contrast to the characters of *Bleeding Edge*. Pynchon creates a dazzling menagerie of people who are all but normal. While Maxine Tarnow follows a similar design to Jackson Brodie, in that she possesses a strong professional desire to help those in need, she also ends up having passionate sex with Lester Traipse's killer despite suspecting his guilt. The Russians who reveal the majority of the truth about Lester's death are probably mobsters, ingenious programmers Justin and Lucas are pot-heads, Vyrva betrays her husband with the evil Gabriel Ice in the hopes of getting a better deal for DeepArcher, March Kelleher is an anti-government leftist activist, etc. Pynchon does not judge any of these people, and in fact makes the majority of them likeable, or at least relatable. The only real exceptions are Nicolas Windust and Gabriel Ice, whose motives seem incomprehensible. If the majority of the cast of *Bleeding Edge* is painted in morally grey tones, these two antagonists are black, because the details of their wrongdoings are never revealed and we are barred from discovering if their aims justified the unscrupulous means.

The second point distinguishing popular and “highbrow” fiction also places Pynchon's novel in the latter category. Both James and Atkinson provide an explanation for all the mysteries in their texts, and the mysteries are the main focus. In Atkinson's case the final chapters were almost entirely dedicated to explaining loose ends. Withholding this information until the very end even detracted from the detective character of the text, since the solution of minor puzzles seemed the sudden and unexpected; they made sense of many details that seemed irrelevant to the story throughout the text. *Bleeding Edge*, on the other hand, leaves the readers with more questions than answers. Although the mystery of Lester's death is ultimately solved, the novel presents us with puzzling events and phenomena whose secrets are never revealed.

The final factor which places *Bleeding Edge* in the realm of “highbrow” literature, formal innovation, is the least pronounced. In fact, James and Atkinson use unexpected shifts in focalisation to give their readers a better overview of the events. *Death in Holy Orders* begins with the death of Margaret Munroe, and Archdeacon Crampton's murder is revealed in the list of contents. *News* has a portion of the narration dedicated to Joanna's memories, interspersed throughout the novel, which culminate in a first-hand description of her predicament. What makes *Bleeding Edge* stand out in this regard is the fact that the strange events described by

Maxine call her reliability as a narrator into question. For example, the scene in which Dizzy puts on his “invisibility” ring and disappears, or Maxine's encounter with the strange creature in the depths of Ice's Montauk residence. In *Bleeding Edge* these fragments confuse readers by making the protagonist's narration suspicious, whereas the non-standard portions of *Death* and *News* are intended to provide us with a better understanding of the events.

Despite these conclusions, I would hesitate to call *Death in Holy Orders* a “lowbrow” novel. James' choice of themes and the portrayal of her characters exceed the expectations of a detective fiction enthusiast. She manages to combine the pleasure inherent in a game of detection with interesting observations about the decline of religious traditions in the Anglican Church. While her sensibilities are clearly conservative, the characters are nuanced considering the genre. Thus, if we use the distinction between “low” and “high” literature, James is probably “middlebrow”. It seems necessary to allow a third, intermediate class, since popular fiction written for the readers' pleasure cannot be unanimously equated with “lowbrow” taste. Interestingly, according to the three points above, many of the celebrated authors who lived before the 20th century and the advent of literary modernism would also have trouble being classified as “highbrow”. For example, Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* cannot be called intentionally obscure, and it follows a path towards a clear resolution of the plot. Of course, Dickens was tremendously popular in his time.

In the case of *News*, Atkinson clearly tries to appeal to a wide audience despite disrespecting certain generic conventions. If we compare her work with that of James, we might conclude that the latter is popular primarily because of her mastery of the detective formula, and the former appeals to her readers' sensibilities. Atkinson's text can be frustrating for a detective genre fan, while James' themes would probably be unbearable to a mass audience in any other form than a detective story. The appeal to common emotions makes *News* the most “lowbrow” among the analysed novels, despite the fact that it is technically a well-written text.

Nevertheless, I believe that distinctions between “lowbrow” and “highbrow” fiction do not warrant extensive critical attention. As I noted in my discussion of superordinate categories, these terms are too general to be useful, and they contain an inherent evaluation that should be proven in more detail in each individual case. Despite their many flaws, generic distinctions are a superior mode of categorisation, particularly in heavily conventionalised prose. On the other hand, the three points of distinction between “low” and “high” literature I used in this

dissertation aptly explain why it is often difficult to categorise novels in more “artistic” genres – frequently, the artistic merit of a work of fiction is positively correlated with how difficult it is to interpret or understand. Whether that should be the case is debatable.

8.2 Baudrillard's theories and embodied cognition as tools for analysing fiction

The main question posed in the preface to this dissertation was whether it was possible to use Baudrillard's theories and embodied cognition side by side and determine if one was better-suited to the study of fiction than the other. This question arises naturally from the philosophical opposition of the two approaches – if Baudrillard had accepted that the sign was not arbitrary he would have had to re-write a large portion of his oeuvre. On the other hand, it seems preposterous to suggest that there exists an empirically correct interpretation of a work of fiction, since criticism is a speculative discipline which allows for many co-existing readings. What can be argued is that certain modes of reasoning are to some extent grounded in our knowledge of the world while others are more ideological, and hence prone to oversimplification. It appears to me that the best options for a critic comprise of approaches that do not entirely predetermine the result of the analysis before it is conducted.

Based on my knowledge of Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*, I expected that the structure of a detective story could be described as a type of simulation. However, after a closer inspection of the mechanisms of the genre as described by Dove, it seems that the nature of the detective story as a mode of transformed play precludes this notion. The characteristics of transformed play are at odds with Baudrillard's bleak vision of the simulation. This conclusion is based on the role of negativity in the genre. A simulation is a self-referential system, and each detective story depends on the reader's prior experience with other stories. Hence, detective novels are far from the literary version of Baudrillard's vision. On its own, the formulaic nature of the genre is not sufficient to make such a connection. Perhaps better candidates for such comparisons might be found in genres that contain a heavy element of world-building, in which novels are crafted with the intention of immersing the reader in an alternate reality, and not simply to tell a story or play a game. In these areas however, I think that films and computer games are closer to what Baudrillard had in mind.

Perhaps the most hyper-real aspect of detective fiction is its propensity to create a certain conventionalised vision of crime-solving. It is safe to say that the majority of people who read detective novels care little about real police work, because it can never be as engaging as its fictionalised version. True crime stories and documentaries tend to focus on the notoriety of a particular criminal, because the road to catching him or her is rarely as exciting as a good police procedural. Overall, this tendency to replace reality with marketable models is natural in a consumer society, in which producers seek to commodify everything for the promise of profits.

In the analyses presented in this dissertation, Baudrillard's ideas worked well in the discussion of the structure of *When Will There Be Good News*. An ideological critique helped to note Atkinson's attempt to appeal to a mass audience through hyper-real characterisation. I suggested that Reggie Chase and Joanna Hunter were created with the intention of combining contradictory traits. They are people we might sympathise with due to their undeserved deplorable situation in life, who nevertheless fulfil artificial functions that are at odds with the reasons for which we should pity them. They are heroes masquerading as victims.

In the remaining two analyses, embodied cognition seemed better suited for structural commentary. I find the ability to visualise the reader's thought pattern for solving a mystery to be an interesting tool – it allowed me to illustrate the chief difference between the mode of thinking promoted by Atkinson and James. The overlap between the seven step plot structure and Narayanan's model of motor schemas is both unexpected and useful, because his “getting into a stage of readiness” phase offers the possibility of conceptualising how a reader engages with a text before he or she even starts reading. It takes into account elements that Gerard Genette calls paratextual – the blurb on the back cover, the list of contents and critical opinions about the novel or author. All these factors combine to shape the audience's expectations, as in the case of Crampton's death being revealed in the list of contents at the beginning of *Death in Holy Orders*.

Outside of the structure of the novels, both Baudrillard's ideas and embodied cognition produced interesting readings that did not overlap. Instead, they complemented each other. A surprising discovery was how adequate a Baudrillardian reading of the themes in *Death in Holy Orders* proved to be, considering James' conservatism, her adherence to generic conventions and the French thinker's radicalism. We might explain this by the fact that both the novelist and the philosopher were born in the 1920s, and their works attempted to capture what they thought was the decline of the Western world. Baudrillard's intellectual radicalism and speculations about the

future can obscure the fact that he was critical of the processes he described. His works proposed a way of thinking about contemporary phenomena but did not advocate these phenomena. James seems more nostalgic than speculative, although her complete series of Adam Dalgliesh novels refuses to look to the future with pessimism, which contrasts with the sense of rampant “endism” present in Baudrillard's works.

Rather unsurprisingly, *Bleeding Edge* proved to be the most fertile ground for a Baudrillardian reading. It seems fitting that Pynchon flirted with the French philosopher's ideas in a work dedicated to the period surrounding 9/11, as this was also a time when Baudrillard was particularly popular in the English-speaking world. *The Matrix* was released in 1999, and it is probably the best-known film that directly references *Simulacra and Simulation* – a copy of the book can be seen in it. Pynchon was undoubtedly influenced by Baudrillard, and it might be argued that *Bleeding Edge* is the writer's tribute to him. We might consider the themes, the transcendence of virtual reality, a paranoid world of actual conspiracies and the very idea of weaving a detective plot around the events of 9/11 to be a strong suggestion of a Baudrillardian twist.

On the other hand, a metaphoric approach to *Bleeding Edge* based on *Philosophy in the Flesh* was also productive to a certain degree. It provided some insight into the character of Conkling and a reading of the sex scene with Maxine and Windust. Arguably, similar results might be produced without Lakoff and Johnson's idea of conceptual metaphor, but such interpretations can be noticed more easily with their approach in mind. However, an orderly mode of reading suggested by embodied cognition would require tremendous effort when applied to a novel as complex as *Bleeding Edge*. The shortcoming of the method is its focused topicality and limited opportunities for generalisation. Embodied cognition in literary studies is an amalgam of concepts, none of which are capable of high-level thematic observations reminiscent of Baudrillard. In fact, achieving such a goal with an empirical approach would probably represent a spectacular development in the field of human cognition. For now, elements of embodied cognition work well as tools for specific tasks, such as analysing generic conformity, explaining thought patterns and metaphors that make up important concepts, as Lakoff and Johnson demonstrate in *Philosophy in the Flesh* using the notion of morality, time, the self, the mind and others.

A general conclusion that can be drawn from this dissertation is that at present, embodied cognition is unable to supersede the theories of Jean Baudrillard in order to generate readings on the same conceptual level. One might attempt to re-write my thematic analysis of Atkinson's *When Will There Be Good News* using cognitive concepts, such as prototypicality and conceptual blending, but I doubt that such a work would produce significantly different results from those gleaned through the application of Baudrillard's general observations. Similar analyses already exist for other works of fiction, e.g. Michael Sinding's paper "Genera Mixta: Conceptual Blending and Mixed Genres in Ulysses" (2005). In my view, the work required to produce a cognitive analysis of an aspect of a text should be justified by results that would be unobtainable with a different method. This is a pitfall of Peter Stockwell's influential *Cognitive Poetics* – many of the ideas from embodied cognition in his work lead to the same results as other, well-established approaches.

Perhaps in time, we will be able to eschew the chaotic legacy of post-structuralist and post-modernist thinkers such as Baudrillard in favour of more elegant ways of making similar observations. We know that the radical relativism these philosophers inherited from Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of the sign was to some degree unfounded. However, the keen mind of Baudrillard managed to dissect the workings of a consumer society obsessed with science and technological progress in a manner that is difficult to match. Many of his observations remain relevant, despite the difficulty of grasping their full meaning. Despite appearing to be mutually exclusive, Jean Baudrillard's ideas and concepts from embodied cognition supplement each other quite well in literary criticism.

I believe that a work similar to this dissertation would be far more demanding to write if one chose a different genre than detective fiction. The established conventions and broad range of stories created by hundreds of authors in this area provided me with a strong interpretative direction on the one hand, and an abundant choice of novels on the other. Setting aside the more common approaches to popular fiction has resulted in interesting readings that provide some insight into the future development of literary criticism. If post-modernism has left us with a relativist vision of an array of equivocal and competing ideologies, embodied cognition provides a breath of fresh air that refuses to be confined to the realm of formalism or politics. Its strengths and weaknesses can be analysed alongside more established critical views to guide us in new directions.

One interesting possibility for a future analysis in this area that might utilise Baudrillard's theories and embodied cognition is the way in which detective fiction influences real-world legal decisions. For example, researchers have been concerned about the so-called *CSI* effect, a term used to describe heightened demand among jurors for scientific evidence in court trials. It is attributed to the influence of popular television series such as *CSI*, which follow the conventions of the detective genre. Another phenomenon would be cases such as the conviction of a self-proclaimed serial killer in Sweden who turned out to be a fraud. In his book *Thomas Quick: The Making of a Serial Killer*, Hannes Råstam described how a willing police force and a team of doctors eager for recognition believed the lies of a mentally unstable crook who took the blame for disconnected murders across the country. The chilling consequences of that bizarre conviction are that the real killers were never captured or even sought by the legal forces, who were beguiled by an unproven theory of psychology which put its trust in the words of a mentally ill man. An interesting paper might be written about this case using Baudrillard's concepts of simulation and hyperreality.

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