

The Embroiled Detective: Noir and the Problems of Rationalism in *Los amantes de Estocolmo*

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In Ross Macdonald's novel, *The Far Side of the Dollar* (1964), Macdonald's serialized hard-boiled detective, Lew Archer, is asked "Are you a policeman, or what?" Archer responds: "I used to be. Now I'm a what," (40). Despite its place in a tradition of glib and humorous banter, typical of the smug, hard-boiled detective, Archer's retort has philosophical relevance. It marks a different sort of detective who is not sure about himself or the world around him, nor does he enjoy the epistemological stability afforded to a Dupin or a Sherlock Holmes. In other words, it references a noir detective. In noir, the formerly stable investigator of the classic tradition is eclipsed by an ominous question mark. Even if the novel or film attempts a resolution at the end, we, as readers and spectators, are left with unresolved questions. It is often a challenge to clearly map the diverse motivations and interests of the many private investigators, femme-fatales and corrupt patricians that populate the *roman* or *film noir*. Whether directly or indirectly, noir questions and qualifies notions of order, rationalism and understanding.

Of course, in the typical U.S. model, such philosophical commentary is present on a latent level. While novels by Chandler or Hammett implicitly critique and qualify rationalism, the detective rarely waxes philosophical. As noir literature is read and appropriated by a more postmodern, global audience, authors from other regions such as Latin America and Spain play with the model and use it as a vehicle for more explicit philosophical speculation. As of late Chilean Roberto Ampuero has been exploring such possibilities within the noir framework. The author was originally associated with the more realist and politically inflected *neopolicial* through his Cayetano Brulé series. Ampuero's earlier novels like *Quién mató a Cristian Kustermann* (1993) or *El alemán de Atacama* (1996) fulfilled a cathartic function by casting a hardboiled detective who is able to obtain justice in a nation where impunity has long been the norm. As Ampuero himself states, "¿Cómo va a ser prescindible la novela policial en un país donde parte crucial de su historia fue archivada en un cofre bajo siete llaves para que la transición a la democracia pudiera avanzar dentro de límites preestablecidos?" (qtd. in Marún 51). However,

Ampuero has subsequently ventured into the antidetective¹ or metaphysical detective story in order to more thoroughly flesh out the insecurities of reason tacitly present in noir. For example, his novel *Los amantes de Estocolmo* (2003) serves as a critical meditation on notions of order, knowledge and authorship that responds to the Latin American dictatorships, but, like other antidetective novels such as Piglia's *Respiración Artificial* (1980) or Juan José Saer's *La pesquisa* (1993), digs even further into the underpinnings of western enlightenment. As I will demonstrate in this article, Ampuero's *Los amantes de Estocolmo* exposes the fundamental contradictions of modern rationalism in order to explore the problems of detection and of the formation of knowledge. However, this critical reading does not amount to an all out rejection of reason, but acts as a more nuanced inventory of rationalism's various pitfalls in order to ultimately rescue the latter.

To facilitate this philosophical reading of detection, I pair noir literature with Kant, who also grappled with the contradictions of reason. To illustrate, Kant provides us with the building blocks for a critique of rationalism by delving into its many aporias and seemingly irresolvable conflicts. For Kant, instead of entertaining a relation of immediacy to the object world, we, as subjects, must create the object in our own personal Cartesian theater. In his "Preface on the Second Edition" in *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787), Kant responds to the overly zealous affirmation of unmediated knowledge demonstrated by modern science, which presumptuously claims that the individual's understanding of the outside world is based upon the object. In his critique, Kant realizes a veritable Galilean turn wherein he claims the opposite—the object exists in accordance with our understanding: "We should therefore attempt to tackle the tasks of metaphysics more successfully by assuming that the objects must conform to our knowledge. This would better agree with the required possibility of an *a priori* knowledge of objects, one that would settle something about them before they are given to us," (18). In other words, the object is our creation. Any content we perceive in the world is there because we have placed it there: "the attempts at thinking them [the objects] (for they must admit of being thought) will subsequently furnish an excellent touchstone of what we are

¹ Franklin Rodríguez offers a sound cartography of antidetective literature in Latin America in his article "The Bind between Neopolicial and Antipolicial: The Exposure of reality in Post-1980s Latin American Detective Fiction," He defines this more philosophically inflected branch of detective literature as follows: "The antidetective genre indicts the detective's lack of ability in solving the crime and also casts uncertainties on the very nature of criminal activity and the categories of right and wrong. At the core of antidetective fiction or *antipolicial* there is a question of the methodology of detection and the hermeneutic enterprise, or an impulse to frustrate the detection process. This is achieved by emphasizing ontological dilemmas and by embracing the defamiliarization of the world in question, as opposed to the linear progression towards a final solution" (no pagination).

adopting as our new method of thought, namely, that we know of things *a priori* only that which we ourselves put into them" (19).

While this is consistent with Descartes' theory, Kant alleges that such a condition actually imposes a limit upon reason. The philosopher thus implores us to reassess what we know and how we know it. In turn, the subject, as the site where knowledge is created, becomes the central problem. Because the object is created by the subject, knowledge is limited to subjective perception, to the phenomenal, or how things *appear*. According to Kant, knowledge is "directed only at appearances and must leave the thing in itself as real for itself but unknown to us" (20). Paradoxically, the subject, which is the site of thought, gets in the way of knowledge.

With its flawed and extremely human detective figures, noir literature parallels the quandary of the Kantian subject. Slavoj Žižek has already signaled the relation between certain tenets of Kantian theory and neo-noir works like *Blade Runner* (1982) in his essay "'The Thing that Thinks': The Kantian Background of the Noir Subject." The theorist asserts that neo-noir, in Kantian fashion, unshrouds the existential void within the subject: "In order to grasp the implications of [the shift from classical film noir to neo noir] of the eighties...one has to reach further back to the Cartesian—Kantian problematic of the subject qua pure substanceless, 'I think'" (202). Žižek proceeds to elucidate the Kantian underpinnings of the tragic noir subject who is seemingly driven to his own destruction as he divests himself of all material being in order to affirm pure thought. What I would add to Žižek's theory is that not only does a Kantian analysis of noir elucidate the death drive of the noir hero, but that it sheds light onto the problems of detection itself, and demonstrates how noir also attempts to resolve these problems by more carefully qualifying the limits of knowledge. Furthermore, I maintain that these Kantian issues of epistemology transcend the historical confines of postmodern neo-noir, and can be identified in the very beginnings of classic noir itself.

For example, instead of unproblematically solving a crime, the classic noir detective, *a la* Philip Marlowe, becomes involved with those he investigates. He thus demonstrates, like Kant, that humanity complicates detection. The rational capabilities of the gum shoe are muddled by his libidinal drive and desire for money. More often than not, he is seduced by the *femme fatale* and pulled into a scheme of questionable legality. In *The Big Sleep* (1939), Philip Marlowe is wooed by Vivian Sternwood while simultaneously attempting to clarify the darker truths lying beneath the Sternwood estate. In *The Maltese Falcon* (1929), Sam Spade engages in under-the-table dealing with Gutman and Joe Cairo in order to ascertain the precise value of the falcon and to fabricate a cover-up story to feed to the police. The noir

detective's existence, thus, gets in the way of and complicates any analysis that occurs. What is more, like the Kantian subject, the noir hero often has a role in creating the very mystery he is attempting to solve. When Philip Marlowe, for example, finds Geiger dead, rather than reporting it to the police, he hides the body, only to return later and see that it has disappeared. By casting a flawed detective who is intimately entangled with those he scrutinizes, noir literature is able to question the process of detection itself. In this sense, noir fiction and film are implicitly philosophical since they examine whether or not rational thought is possible when it must pass through a tragically human essence.

As Roberto Ampuero rewrites the noir model in *Los amantes de Estocolmo*, these more subtle philosophical concerns take center stage. The novel is set in a wintry, isolated community in Sweden off of the Baltic Sea. Its central characters, Cristóbal and Marcela, are Chileans who have left their homeland for various reasons—Cristóbal was a political dissident in the 1970s who subsequently found asylum in Eastern Germany, and Marcela, an aspiring international art dealer, hoped to distance herself from her father, General Montúfar, who served in the military under Pinochet and is on trial for human rights violations. While leading semi-nomadic lives in Western Europe, they meet and are wed. However, just as the tedium and monotony of their marriage begin to settle in, Cristóbal stumbles upon some erotic lingerie in his wife's duffel bag. He has never seen these articles before and cannot help but conclude that she has a secret lover. The majority of the novel deals with Cristóbal's obsessively methodical investigation of his wife's furtive personal life and his sometimes perverse desire to know her alleged lover's identity. As Cristóbal is increasingly engrossed in the investigation, his sense of reason gives way to a deranged entanglement of speculation and delusion.

The novel's critique of reason stems from the Chilean historical context, wherein the incongruities of rationalism are manifest, albeit in the political arena. I refer, here, to the dictatorship of the 70s and 80s that attempted to restore order after the supposed bedlam of the *Unidad Popular*. The 'order' however, that Augusto Pinochet's military junta so vehemently espoused is questionable and subject to blatant contradictions that outweigh the regime's rhetoric of reason and economic stability. The military proponents of the 'political rationalism' imposed upon Chileans in the 70s and 80s were forced to dissimulate the darker, neurotic side of this political project—the systematic disappearance, torture, and murder of thousands of Chileans—in order to tout themselves as the only reasonable option for the nation.

Cristóbal can be read as a literary condensation of the problems within the Chilean dictatorship's sense of rationality. If, as Pinochet claims in his "Carta a los chilenos," the military junta was merely defending the values of Western society,² Cristóbal performs a similar function. He represents the rationalist, Cartesian current of the enlightenment and, like Pinochet, seeks to affirm order, however grotesque such a vision may be. His compulsive, sometimes sadistic desire to monitor and implicitly intimidate his wife brings to mind the military-police force responsible for keeping close track of subversives during the Dirty War. It is therefore no surprise that he at times draws parallels between himself and his father in law, General Montúfar. If the Latin American dictatorships signal the moment when Western modernity comes apart at the seams within the subcontinent, in Ampuero's novel, such a crisis is transplanted to Cristóbal's own psychotic breakdown. Following Kant's critique of rationalism, the novel explores those moments when reason itself seems neurotic.

Like the Kantian subject, the novel's tragic and feverish narrator gets in the way of his own investigation. Cristóbal is a crime novelist and spends a good part of his time in isolation, mulling over the plots to his novels and, in this case, obsessively speculating about his wife's possible infidelities. Paradoxically, because he is sundered from the world, he is forced to get involved and substitute his delusional fantasies for the reality around him. He enjoys no critical Cartesian distance, since he is the creator of the very fictions he attempts to analyze. By casting the novel's primary detective as a writer, Ampuero is able to posit the Kantian subject's primary aporia—the subject must examine what it has simultaneously created and thus, cannot be entirely objective.

In order to foreground this conflict, the novel constantly blurs the line between reality and fiction. Cristóbal is writing a novel that follows the same plotline as his investigation and predicament: the narrator is a jealous husband who believes his wife is cheating on him and who subsequently becomes embroiled in a murder. At some point, we realize that his "novel" has in fact evolved into a kind of journal of his own exploits wherein he reflects upon and digests reality. While Cristóbal hopes to reflect reality in his "realistic" crime novel, it is, once again, his creation and includes a fair amount of imagination and embellishment. It is thus difficult to tell where fiction ends and reality begins. In this case, fiction and reality do not necessarily oppose one another, but are dialectically intertwined as Cristóbal

² General Pinochet states the following concerning the Dirty War: "El dilema era: o vencía la concepción cristiana occidental de la existencia para que primara en el mundo el respeto a la dignidad humana y la vigencia de los valores fundamentales de nuestra civilización; o se imponía la visión materialista y atea del hombre y la sociedad, con un sistema implacablemente opresor de sus libertades y de sus derechos" (3).

interprets his world in terms of the roman noirs he reads and writes. In fact, as he states in a conversation with his neighbor, fiction acts as a repository of forms and categories that apply sense to brute reality:

Abordé el manido tópico de si la existencia cotidiana tiene sentido claro y direcciones evidentes, como lo sugieren las novelas y las películas, o si el sentido y la lógica constituyen el condimento que agregan autores y cineastas para empaquetar el producto que ofrecen y tornarlo más convincente. (71)

Fiction and reality are indissolubly linked within this writer who, like the Kantian subject, must deploy his own quiver of narrative forms in order to creatively intervene in the object world around him.

In fact, for Kant, rational judgment entails a constant interaction between *a priori* forms that the subject intrinsically carries with it, and the inchoate pieces of the empirical world. As we see in *Critique of Pure Reason*, the subject utilizes *a priori* forms in order to catalogue and interpret the empirical material encountered in its environs. Without such forms, for Kant, there is no possibility for understanding.³ While there are obvious differences between Kantian *a priori* forms and Cristóbal's mental repository of literary tropes (for Kant, the latter could in no way constitute an *a priori* form that we innately intuit), both signal the subject's tendency to impose its own psychology onto the outside world. For Cristóbal, Marcela's lingerie and suspicious phone and email messages act as the empirical content that he explicates by applying narrative categories. He takes into account a myriad of possible explanations, all of which seem to follow a rigorous and methodical pattern of thought, which Marcela later on sarcastically refers to as "una explicación racional y detallada, una lógica cartesiana" (139). Anything within his environment serves as a possible clue to unlocking the mystery. For example, when Boryena, the Eastern European house-maid, recounts the story of Cristóbal's deceased neighbor's (María Eliasson) possible infidelities, Cristóbal assumes that she is speaking in code, secretly intimating that his wife is likewise having an affair:

Pienso que no puedo descartar la posibilidad de que Boryena, quien es más astuta de lo que imagino, me haya mencionado el tema de la infidelidad de María Eliasson porque descubrió que mi mujer me engaña. De pronto me

³ Kant mentions the two most fundamental *a priori* forms, space and time, and maintains that they are the conditions of all synthetic knowledge: "Time and space are, therefore, two sources of knowledge from which a variety of synthetic knowledge can be drawn *a priori*. Pure mathematics gives a splendid example of this with respect to our knowledge of space and its relations. As time and space, taken together, are pure forms of all sensible intuition, they render synthetic *a priori* propositions possible," (73).

Polifonía

arranca rubores la suposición de que la polaca esté refiriéndose ambiguamente a la infidelidad de la muerte sólo para detectar si yo estoy al tanto del engaño del que soy víctima. (26)

Later on, upon finding Marcela's electronic mail account open, he similarly concludes that she is taunting him, even inviting him to peruse her messages, become jealous, and ultimately end their relationship. After secretly following her throughout Stockholm from one innocuous appointment to another, he speculates that she is on to him, and trying to throw him off of her trail. Later on, while observing one of her café appointments from a nearby convenience market, he deduces that one of the two men with whom she is meeting is her lover, and that the other is either her lover's alibi, or a third man in their hypothetical *ménage a trois* relationship. It is through this overly internal process of deduction that we see the symptoms of a delirious mind. While his literary explanations do make sense and follow their own internal code, they also seem like a liberal stretch of the imagination. Notwithstanding the "logic" with which he connects Boryena's remarks, the lingerie, the email messages and Marcela's many appointments, we as readers are left with the impression that he is taking excessive artistic license. Essentially, by over-explaining every minute clue, he loses any stable grounding in reality. As a tragic, hyperbolic look at subjective knowledge, the novel demonstrates that the closed system of the modern subject, when excessively sundered from the world, can have pathological consequences.

If, for Kant, the subject's intervention in the outside world is the stumbling block for knowledge, then Cristóbal's action and very existence likewise introduce variables that complicate detection. While as a writer he formerly constrained himself to the sidelines of all action, he now takes a more operative role, even if as a surveillant as he follows Marcela throughout Stockholm:

A pesar de que me inclino más hacia las letras que a la acción—de lo contrario me habría dedicado a los negocios o a la medicina, actividades que no me atraen debido a su carácter prosaico—, abandoné esta mañana la novela que escribo y también al escritor celoso que ella tiene por protagonista y decidí salir en pos de mi mujer para averiguar el verdadero motivo que la conduce a Malmö llevando las prendas íntimas que descubrí en su maletín. (37)

By explicitly becoming a man of action, Cristóbal reinforces his status as a subject who is actively entrenched in the intrigue and, as we will see, disoriented by all of the smoke and mirrors that the mystery entails. He becomes that noir figure who,

because of his involvement and lack of critical distance, according to Žižek, “undergoes a kind of ‘loss of reality,’ who finds himself in a dreamlike world where it is never quite clear who is playing what game” (Looking Awry 63). Rather than further his investigation, Cristóbal’s action adds heat to his feverish fire. He participates in what James Ellroy terms the “secret pervert republic” (XIII) of the roman noir, replete with protagonists who stare for too long and, by so doing, exacerbate their delirium and compulsion. While Cristóbal’s obsessive vigilance is, on one level, motivated by his desire to confirm his speculations and even catch his wife and her lover in the act, he also exudes perverse fascination. His observations are a provocative combination of sexual allure, jealousy and rage that propel his thoughts and narrative concoctions. While outside the hotel, where he believes Marcela to have absconded with her lover, he states the following:

Elevo la vista contra los copos de nieve que se arremolinan como pelusas en su caída y contemplo embelesado la fachada con las luces encendidas de los cuartos. En una de ellas yace Marcela desnuda. Alguien la acompaña. Lo intuyo. Y me digo que es ahora, cuando consuma la traición, que debo subir corriendo aquellos pisos y golpear a las puertas hasta dar con los amantes. (43)

At the same time, however, he recognizes that this could be nothing more than his own literary creation, and that she could be merely meeting with an elderly couple with hopes of making a sale:

Pero luego recapacito, me sereno y pienso que quizás es cierto lo de su cita con los anticuarios y que todo esto—mi viaje en tren, este hotel que comienza a flamear por efecto de la nieve y la iluminación, e incluso las prendas de la bolsa de plástico—es sólo fruto de mi fantasía de escritor, meras palabras y tramas probables, y no algo que ocurre en esta vida, sino sólo en las páginas de la novela que escribo en Djursholm o de una novela que alguien escribe en otra parte. (43)

Despite his better judgment, Cristóbal’s compulsive behavior pulls him further into this quagmire of obfuscation and uncertainty. Both action and thought intertwine to create this text that is reality, however delirious it may be.

In a subsequent episode he goes from active surveillant to full-on narrative actant, as he plans to confront Marcela in the very act of infidelity, and bring a revolver for the occasion. He drives to a secluded home in the outskirts of Stockholm, apparently occupied by an art buyer who turns out to be a member of the Russian mafia. When

he enters the unlocked house, he is surprised to hear Marcela screaming at Víctor Yashin, the Russian mafia-man, while the latter assaults her for unknown reasons. Cristóbal promptly intervenes, defends himself against the Russian with a kitchen knife, and, after grappling with the latter to gain control of his revolver, inadvertently fires, leaving Victor mortally wounded. Through a curious twist of fate, Cristóbal is now completely in over his head, consistent with other anti-heroes from noir films like *Out of the Past* (1947) or *Detour* (1945), whose tragic destiny has been dealt to them by a seemingly indifferent whim of fate.

From a more analytical perspective, he has furthered the very mystery that he is attempting to investigate. Like Philip Marlowe, who adds to the intrigue in *The Big Sleep* (1939) by hiding and, thus, losing the body, Cristóbal's involvement overcomplicates his investigation. Because he has accidentally murdered one of the principal witnesses, he has heightened the severity of the circumstances and is now unable to fully elucidate Marcela and Víctor's relationship. Additionally, he can no longer pose the question of what Marcela was doing at the house in Norrviken without being distracted by the deeper existential mystery that he has unchained—namely, why fate has sent him on this tragic detour. By inadvertently murdering Victor, Cristóbal adds another layer of quagmire to the plot that aggravates his investigation. His paranoid state, evident through his frantic and methodical efforts to destroy any incriminating evidence, leads him to increasingly delusional speculation about the plots and mysteries brewing around him, which, of course, he has helped sculpt.

Cristóbal's strained sense of reason, as well as his inability to take responsibility for his neurotic behavior, can be approached as a literary displacement of the Chilean dictatorship's specious rationale, which is similarly inflected by fiction and questionable narratives. More specifically, Cristóbal's view of himself as a victim of circumstance correlates to the arguments often made on the right to justify the '73 coup and the ensuing campaign of terror. This connection is made more palpable in the novel through Cristóbal's identification with his father-in-law, General Montúfar. Far from repentant, Montúfar considers himself a martyr for his ideals. Despite his own role in the torture of detainees during the dirty war, Montúfar sees himself and the other military officials as the saviors of the nation: "Yo tengo las manos limpias. Todo lo hice por Chile de acuerdo a mis principios y siguiendo las órdenes que emanaban de muy alto." (186) By initiating and participating in the coup, he and other junta members were merely letting history take its course. As Montúfar states later on, "las cosas ocurren" (216). Cristóbal makes a strikingly similar claim about his own fatalistic dilemma, and even draws an explicit parallel between his situation

and that of Montúfar: “Así es la vida, como dice el coronel Montúfar, las cosas ocurren y no se rigen por la justicia. Y si bien en esta pantalla puedo regresar al inicio de la novela apretando las teclas, como si fuese una grabación en la cual presiono el botón de rewind, aquí no logro, sin embargo, modificar los hechos,” (216).

Like Cristobal and Montúfar, Pinochet casts himself as a victim of circumstance. In his “Carta a los chilenos,” Pinochet claims that the members of the military junta did what was historically necessary: “No fue posible evitarlo y, finalmente tuvimos que asumir la conducción del país aquél histórico 11 de septiembre,” (2). In spite of the many accusations made on the left, as the general intimates, there was no other option. From Pinochet’s point of view, history is to blame for the violence, and he himself is nothing more than a scapegoat for the broader problems of civilization, itself haunted by the specter of bloodshed:

Soy un hombre que pertenece a un tiempo histórico y a unas circunstancias muy concretas. El siglo que ya termina bien podría ser definido como uno de los más crueles que la humanidad haya conocido. Dos atroces guerras mundiales y una guerra ideológica que sojuzgó a más de media humanidad lo han marcado profundamente al confrontarse dos visiones absolutamente opuestas. (3)

The problem with the General’s argument is that he eliminates all agency and responsibility by casting himself as an isolated pawn within a larger historical trajectory. He conveniently omits the fact that the military, more than merely letting history take its course, actually took history by the reigns by actively eliminating Marxist dissidents in order to pave the way to neoliberal capitalism. Like Cristóbal, the military junta’s sense of reason falls into contradiction by not recognizing its own role or involvement in history. Just as Cristobal’s investigation suffers as he becomes overly involved, so too does the military junta violate its own vision of a supposedly natural and, of course, rational, societal move towards capitalism in the moment they actively stamp out all leftist resistance, all the while failing to recognize such a gross violation of Western principles. If we cast the Southern Cone dictatorships as that moment when the values of Western, Christian culture are most grossly contradictory, then we can adduce a similar skepticism on the level of epistemology. If the basic principles of enlightened, Western society were able to spawn something as horrific as the Chilean dictatorship, then how can we be sure about the Enlightenment itself? How can the prospect for enlightenment and rationalism not be extremely dubious?

This implicit critique of Western Enlightenment seems very similar to recent trends in postmodernism and its crime literature equivalent, the “anti-detective novel,” both of which offer an indictment against the rationalist detective. According to Stefano Tani, the anti-detective novel envisions a world bereft of any stable epistemological footing on account of postmodernism’s “lack of a center,” as well as “its refusal to posit a unifying system.” He goes on to state that “postmodernism’s new awareness is the absence of a finality, a solution. This is exactly what the anti-detective novel is about,” (39-40). In a Nietzschean turn, Cristóbal makes a similar claim about his own novel. After entangling himself in his own mire of desultory thought and speculation, he concludes that order is diametrically opposed to reality, and that all desires to impose logic onto the world eclipses any inkling of the real. He accordingly structures the finale of his narrative as one which defies “sentido,” and leaves the reader without closure in order to emphasize this postmodern axiom of a world devoid of any transcendent meaning. Regarding his “novel,” he states the following:

No es una gran historia, desde luego, pues termina de modo abrupto, en un momento inesperado, como si yo la privase de un desenlace in crescendo, del clímax que todo lector anhela. Pero esto se debe a que me he propuesto una novela no tradicional, a que me he plegado conscientemente, quizás a trechos en exceso, a lo que recuerdo como realidad, con todas las ventajas y desventajas que eso implica, incluso corriendo el peligro de que las cosas que narro carezcan de sentido y no se ajusten a orden lógico alguno, como a menudo acaece en nuestras vidas. Queda claro, en todo caso, cuando releo estas páginas en la pantalla del notebook, que la realidad no se manifiesta necesariamente en la sucesión lógica, trepidante y apretada que hallamos en novelas y películas, sino en forma azarosa y anárquica, como si el caos fuera la regla y el orden su excepción, y todo pudiese ser de una forma o bien de otra. (282)

While Cristóbal’s musings smack of the latest developments in post-structuralist literary theory applied to detective fiction, the novel in its entirety should not be confused with an all-out rejection of order and rationalism. We must remember that Cristóbal’s conclusions regarding the absurdity of reality stem from his frustrated efforts to force the outside world into his personal literary symbolic order. Because the object that he has created does not coincide with his outward reality, he concludes that understanding and knowledge are no longer viable options. However, rather than completely ruling out cogency, the novel merely exposes a fundamental contradiction of the modern subject: it must analyze what it has also

created. Paradoxically, by accounting for these epistemological problems of the subject, the novel, like Kant, takes a rationalist turn. It poses these philosophical aporias in order to better understand the stumbling blocks of reason. The noir novel thus becomes a laboratory for exploring the problems of thought. Consequently, it possesses a rationalist dimension by illuminating the many enigmas of epistemology.

In addition to offering this inventory of reason, the novel makes an explicit attempt at a logical dénouement by changing narrators and thus, liberating the reader from Cristóbal's deranged ramblings. Through the new narrator, the inspector Duncan (another Chilean expatriate living in Stockholm), we learn that Cristóbal has lost all sense of judgment and, in a fit of paranoia, taken his own life. Duncan refers to Cristóbal's tale as a "visión maliciosa, afiebrada, típica de escritores" (305). In contradistinction to Cristóbal's postmodern ambivalence concerning narrative and reality, Duncan fervently affirms order and rationality. He informs us that he has altered the text in certain places in order to make it more readable. While Cristóbal has written the first draft, Duncan has added certain touches, as well as an epilogue, in order to complete the text:

Para bien o para mal, he modificado todo lo que me pareció vago, accesorio e insuficiente, tolerado ciertas imprecisiones en la descripción de Estocolmo y añadido datos a mi juicio útiles para la correcta comprensión del texto, autoridad que me confiere el simple hecho de haber sobrevivido a Cristóbal Pasos...ya es demasiado tarde para renunciar a mi nueva utopía, a esta utopía de luchar a diario por restituir el orden y la justicia en este alejado rincón del mundo. (305-6)

Duncan takes it upon himself to give us narrative clarification and closure that Cristóbal couldn't offer us because of his scattered psychology. He gives us the central key to the mystery by claiming that Marcela did have a lover—Marcus Eliason, the next door neighbor. He also sifts through all of the different possibilities concerning Marcela and Marcus's whereabouts afterward and calls into question the integrity of Cristóbal's confession, claiming that the entire account of Victor's murder could be mere fabrication.

One can easily interpret Duncan's supplemental interpretations as an extension of the postmodern vision⁴ laid down by Cristóbal. Iana Konstantinova interprets it

⁴ Gioconda Marín has a similar outlook to Konstantinova, claiming that Duncan's objective turn is a parody poking fun at the insularity of the rational detective: "Duncan el lector reescritor, borra las diferencias entre narrador y lector al ofrecer un discurso que parece contradecir el texto anterior y crea

thus: “Duncan’s interpretation is only a hypothesis and we have to remember that the text used to support it has been altered by Duncan himself... Duncan’s solutions become unreliable, and the mystery’s resolution remains itself a mystery,” (no pagination). In this sense, Duncan’s footnotes are a mere exercise in the playfulness of discourse, unshrouding the slipperiness of textuality and exposing reality to be nothing more than a series of unstable readings and texts which defer *ad nauseam*. Read from Konstantinova’s postmodernist perspective, Duncan’s concrete interpretation would be just one among many and thus, unstable.

However, while this is a plausible reading, there is more to this ending than textual play. After being subjected to Cristóbal’s overly paranoid suspicions and obsessive sense of reasoning, the switch to Duncan’s more grounded and objective voice warrants a sigh of relief. While Duncan’s theories cannot be substantiated, his co-optation of the novel after Cristóbal signals a utopian desire to re-center the subject. Even if Duncan is not completely objective, his presence at the end of the novel can be seen as an effort to rescue the subject, but only after the novel has minutely qualified it and exposed its many flaws. Only then can the subject be resuscitated since it is at that point that we have a greater understanding of its epistemological problems. By recognizing these problems and limits, knowledge becomes a possibility again because it is taken with a grain of salt. Order and sense are constantly questioned, however, without relinquishing that higher ideal of reason. Because, as Duncan himself states, “en algo hay que creer en esta puta vida” (306). We are able to, once again, place our confidence in the detective figure, because we have a more nuanced understanding of knowledge itself and can thus foresee possible stumbling blocks in the future. In this sense, the resurrection of the subject inevitably follows its destruction. Like Kant, the novel attempts to advance rationalism by paradoxically pulling in the reins.

Duncan’s position in the text, as a foil to Cristóbal, is reinforced by his political persuasion. Duncan was exiled from Chile shortly following the ’73 coup because of his sympathy for the *Unidad Popular*. If Cristóbal correlates to the contradictions and eventual crisis in the order of the dictatorship, then Duncan can likewise be read as a parallelism to the Chilean left’s ongoing desire for juridical ideals of investigation and justice, which undoubtedly signal a rationalist project. These ideals coincide with Ampuero’s own vision of the noir novel and its political ramifications: “Toda nuestra realidad es una gran trama policial con muertes no

la falsa impresión de haber descubierto la verdad que Cristóbal no pudo. Duncan ofrece una ilusión del saber en su interpretación mucho más ingenuista de los hechos. Interpretación que responde a su calidad de detective y a la presunción de que se pueden conocer racionalmente las causas de todos los hechos. Este ilusorio convencimiento crea al final la falsa esperanza de haber alcanzado la verdad” (139).

aclaradas, oscuras transacciones, enigmas insolubles, acuerdos entre gallos y medianoche, y exige a gritos novelas policiales que no solo la iluminen, sino que también la desmenuen e impidan la amnesia colectiva” (Qtd in Marún, 51). On a more philosophical level, Duncan signals a similar desire to work through the contradictions of enlightenment that have ravished Chile during the past 30 years, as well as the problems of subjective knowledge. He projects the hope for a present that views the past through a critical, cogent lens—one that values human rights, punishes the perpetrators, and continually strives for justice.

This underlying desire to affirm a more nuanced form of rationalism responds to the social reality of Chile and other nations such as Argentina and Brazil, which, despite their problems with technocrats, dictatorships, and modernity itself, still hold rationality as a desirable ideal. Contemporary cultural politics within the Southern Cone accuse an ongoing need for understanding, enlightenment, and evidence, especially in the wake of the horrific dirty wars. Argentine philosopher José Pablo Feinmann, himself a noir novelist, says as much in his philosophical treatise *La filosofía y el barro de la historia* (2008), wherein he asserts the need to leave behind the ambivalence and slippery, but powerful discursive schizophrenia of postmodernism, and rediscover a sense of “cordura:” “La lucha por la autonomía sigue pasando por la lucidez, la inteligencia, por, sí, la filosofía. Hoy, hacer filosofía, es defender la libertad de nuestra conciencia agredida por los medios del poder...Buscar un nuevo concepto de razón que imponga alguna zona de cordura en medio de la demencia” (794). Ironically, though dealing with neurotic detectives, noir still sheds a light onto the darkness, and hopes for a way out.

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