

Resisting the Apocalyptic Tendency of Western Culture through Metafiction: Pynchon and DeLillo's Use of Detective Fiction

BIRCAN SIKIK

Department of Western Languages and Literature
Boğaziçi University
Turkey

Abstract:

*The realm of fiction has been distinguished from the domain of reality in Western culture sharply, and the idea of mimesis that describes the work of art by referring to its function to represent the truth out there (in “the real” world) has supported this habitual tendency for a long period. Still, the contemporary novel triggers a change in these conventional definitions by blurring the line between fiction and reality. It resists the apocalyptic tendency of Western culture, by which I mean our perpetual waiting for a moment of “unveiling” or “un-covering”, as the etymology of the word suggests. This study aims at examining how Pynchon and De Lillo play on this expectation of the reader by engaging in the form of the detective story through the tools of metafiction in their novels, namely *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Point Omega*. Roland Barthes’ theories on “the readerly text” and “the writerly text” guide us to explore how the novel is expected to form a structure and in what ways Pynchon’s and De Lillo’s novels deconstruct this conventional idea of the structured novel making its way to the apocalyptic moment for resolution. There will be references to Patrica Waugh’s, Linda Hutcheon’s, and David Lodge’s writings on metafiction , which will supply us with a theoretical framework with regard to what metafiction is and how it functions.*

Key words: Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Point Omega*, the contemporary novel, detective fiction.

The realm of fiction has been distinguished from the domain of reality in Western culture sharply, and the idea of mimesis, which describes the work of art by referring to its function to represent the truth assumed to be found in “the real” world, has supported this habitual tendency for a long period. However, the contemporary novel paves the way for a revolutionary change in these well-accepted definitions by blurring the line between fiction and reality. It resists the apocalyptic tendency of Western culture, by which I mean our perpetual waiting for a moment of “un-veiling” or “un-covering”^{1,2} as the etymology of the word suggests, to make sense of or interpret the text we are confronted with. This apocalyptic inclination is described by Matthew Gumpert in his *The End of Meaning* by stating that “the apocalyptic is an end deferred, but declared in advance” (Gumpert 2012, 318). This paper is an attempt to examine how Pynchon and DeLillo play on this expectation of the reader by engaging in the form of the detective story through the tools of metafiction in their novels, namely *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Point Omega*. It will refer to Roland Barthes’ theories on “the readerly text” and “the writerly text” to explore how the novel is conventionally expected to form a structure and in what ways Pynchon’s and DeLillo’s novels deconstruct this traditional idea of the structured novel making its way to the apocalyptic moment for resolution. Patrica Waugh’s, Linda Hutcheon’s, and David Lodge’s writings on metafiction will guide us in this

¹ apocalypse. Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/apocalypse> (accessed: July 02, 2014).

² This argument is inspired by Matthew Gumpert’s claim on which he dwells in his graduate course at Boğaziçi University, namely “EL 651.01 Contemporary Literary Theory: The Writing of the Catastrophe (Spring 2014) and in his book, *The End of Meaning: Studies in Catastrophe* in which he states that “the apocalyptic is an end deferred, but declared in advance” (318). For more information, See: Gumpert, Matthew. 2012. *The End of Meaning: Studies in Catastrophe*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

analysis as they will supply us with a theoretical framework with regard to what metafiction is and how it functions.

In order to explore how Pynchon and DeLillo employ the form of the detective story in a subverting manner, we should firstly pay attention to how detective fiction is conventionally understood, and later, acquires metafictional elements in contemporary fiction. As Bran Nicol states, “critics are in broad agreement that the detective story ‘proper’ begins in 1841, with the publication of Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘The Murders in the Rue Morgue’” (Nicol 2009, 171). To supply the reader with the basic elements of detective fiction, Nicol asserts that detective fiction has a “distinctive ‘tripartite’ structure, by which the narrative focuses first on the discovery of a crime, then on the casting of suspicion on the members of a community, and finally (the longest part) on the mechanism of investigation and solution” (171). So, it might be asserted that detective fiction favors and supports linearity through the narration of a story that requires a teleological interpretation. As the definition of the word “teleological” suggests, which is “the philosophical doctrine that final causes, design, and purpose exist in nature”³, the detective story relies on its faith in progress, which is the cornerstone of the project of modernity. In line with this interpretation, Nicol suggests that detective fiction has always been associated with modernity (Nicol 2009, 171):

It is the genre above all in which the modernist/ Enlightenment fantasy of order and control finds expression. Each classic detective story ends with a restoration of social order and a resolution of the mystery which it began—suggesting that social cohesion and hierarchy is preserved and that the human mind, the rational faculties (supported by scientific techniques) reign supreme. (Nicol 2009, 172)

³ teleology. Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/teleology> (accessed: July 02, 2014).

Furthermore, detective fiction has initiated a new way of reading according to Nicol, and he names it “paranoid reading” (Nicol 2009, 172). Paralleling the reader’s practice of reading the text, the detective figure is expected to follow and decode signs and “impose narrative upon an apparently chaotic mass of detail” (Nicol 2009, 172). Later, this new way of reading is associated with the subgenre of detective fiction, which has been called in various manners such as “the metaphysical detective story”, “the anti-detective story”, and “the postmodern” detective story (Nicol 2009, 172). In *Detecting Texts*, Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney define the term the postmodern detective story as “a text that parodies or subverts traditional detective-story conventions- such as narrative closure and the detective’s role as surrogate reader- with the intention, or at least the effect, of asking questions about mysteries of being and knowing which transcend the mere machinations of the mystery plot” (qtd. in Nicol 2009, 172). Due to its commentary on the status of being, the ways of knowing, and the human tendency to interpret, it may be claimed that this subgenre carries the features of metafiction, a term coined by Gass, and it may also be labeled as “the metafictional detective story” for this reason.

Metafiction is conventionally defined as “fiction about fiction: novels and stories that call attention to their fictional status and their own compositional procedures” (Lodge 2011, 206). As seen in its definition, metafiction involves the problematization of mimesis itself, or what we may call representation, through its focus on language and interpretative human acts such as reading and meaning making. Known as the inventor of the term, William H. Gass dwells on this aspect of metafiction, and views it as “the dilemma of all art” (qtd. in Waugh 1984,15): “In every art two contradictory impulses are in a state of Manichean war: the impulse to communicate and so to treat the medium of communication as a means and the impulse to make an artifact

out of the materials and so to treat the medium as an end” (qtd. in Waugh 1984, 15). In line with Gass’s argument, Waugh extends the meaning of the term “metafiction”. She asserts that although what is called the metafictional novel “may concern itself... with particular conventions of the novel, to display the process of their construction” (Waugh 1984, 4), every work of art that deals with the issues of being and reality inevitably entails the discussion of “fictionality”, at least to differentiate “the world *outside* the fiction”, called “the real”, from the “the world of fiction” (Waugh 1984, 3). This is the reason why Waugh reacts against the immediate and delimitative association between the metafictional novel and contemporary fiction:

I would argue that metafictional practice has become particularly prominent in the fiction of the last twenty years. However, to draw exclusively on contemporary fiction would be misleading, for, although the *term* ‘metafiction’ might be new, the *practice* is as old (if not older) than the novel itself. What I hope to establish during the course of this book is that metafiction is a tendency or function inherent in *all* novels. This form of fiction is worth studying not only because of its contemporary emergence but also because of the insights it offers into both the representational nature of all fiction and the literary history of the novel as genre. By studying metafiction, one is, in effect, studying that which gives the novel its identity. (Waugh 1984, 5)

Still, many critics have focused on how contemporary metafictional novels engage in the problematization of language as a tool to represent and as an end to be discussed in a work of art. Linda Hutcheon is one of these critics, and in her *Narcissistic Narrative: the Metafictional Paradox*, she lists certain models “favoured by metafictionists as internalized structuring devices which in themselves point to the self-referentiality of the text” (Hutcheon 1985, 70). These models include “the detective story”, “fantasy”, “game”, and “the erotic” (Hutcheon 1985, 70). Thus, consonant with the terms, “the

metaphysical detective story”, “the anti-detective story”, and “the postmodern detective story” that Patricia Merivale and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney coin in their *Detecting Texts*, Hutcheon includes detective fiction as a model supplying contemporary metafictional novelists with a structure to parody. The reason why Hutcheon comprises detective fiction as a model for metafictional novels is that “the detective story is almost by definition intensely self-aware”, and she delineates detective fiction by listing its three major characteristics (Hutcheon 1985, 72): “the self-consciousness of the form itself, its strong conventions, and the important textual function of the hermeneutic act of reading” (Hutcheon 1985, 71).

Because of its engagement with what Linda Hutcheon calls “the hermeneutic act of reading”, detective fiction follows “the strong conventions of order and logic”, which Nicol evaluates as the marks of modernity, since “the reader expects them and needs them in order to read the work, in order to participate in the case” (Hutcheon 1985, 72). Leading the reader to build empathy with the protagonist of the detective story, this type of fiction makes the reader search for logic and order that will lead him to a sort of unveiling and uncovering at the end of the story. The yearning for recognition and inclination towards resolution are actually observed in traditional Western literature and culture as an apocalyptic tendency, which may be defined as the perpetual and habitual act of seeking a stable form of truth and waiting for a definite end. As the etymology of the word “apocalypse”, coming from Ancient Greek “apocalýpsis” meaning “un-covering”,⁴ suggests, the moment of uncovering is expected to come at the end of the detective story, and the link between the reader and the detective figure, both following signs to reach an answer and experience an unveiling in the end, is what attracts

⁴ apocalypse. Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/apocalypse> (accessed: July 02, 2014).

metafictionists according to Hutcheon: “The hermeneutic gaps are textually functional in explicit manner here, but the process is emblematic of that of reading any novel. It is this realization that covertly narcissistic metafiction exploits. Often a detective story will explicitly thematize this hermeneutic paradigm” (Hutcheon 1985, 72). Hutcheon uses the word “narcissistic” to refer to textual self-awareness in a figurative way since metafiction “includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/ or linguistic identity” (Hutcheon 1985, 1). In Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*, which may be named as a metafictional detective story, this self-awareness is seen in terms of the association between Oedipa and the reader, both trying to solve the Tristero mystery by following the clues Oedipa meets. As Hutcheon notes “the logical deductions demanded of the reader place him... in the shoes of the detective” (Hutcheon 1985, 73), and for this reason, the reader turns into a surrogate detective figure, which encourages him to produce his own meaning. In this manner, the reader’s very act of reading becomes a form of active participation in the process of meaning making, or what Hutcheon calls “production” (Hutcheon 1985, 73), and the text welcomes polyphony.

Although she is not a detective figure in traditional sense, Oedipa is portrayed as a protagonist who has embarked on a semiotic journey. Her continuous interpretation exemplifies what Nicol calls “paranoid reading”, since it involves a lot of meaning-making practices, composing a narrative out of what may be seen as irrelevant details which do not lead Oedipa to any stable point or conclusion. Oedipa has difficulty not only in reaching an end, but also in pinpointing when and how her semiotic journey has started. She thinks that it will be “logical” to take the night she spent with Metzger as the beginning point, and this shows the arbitrary nature of what has been regarded as a stable and fixed point of “beginning” or “end”. Moreover, it exemplifies how we tend to create a story with a beginning and an end out of what we go

through no matter how chaotic our experience is. At this point, the narrator ironically and parodically emphasizes the word “logically”, which may illustrate how the text borrows from the conventions of detective fiction characterized by rationality and order. The following paragraph displays that Oedipa’s journey lacks the linear logic a detective story is expected to have:

Things then did not delay in turning curious. If one object behind her discovery of what she was to label the Tristero System or often only The Tristero (as if it might be something’s secret title) were to bring an end her encapsulation in her tower, then that night’s infidelity with Metzger would logically be the starting point for it; logically. That’s what would come to haunt her most, perhaps: the way it fitted, logically, together. As if (as she’d guessed that first minute in San Narciso) there were revelation in progress all around her. (Pynchon 1999, 31)

Performing what Linda Hutcheon calls “the hermeneutic act of reading”, Oedipa appears to search for a teleological motive in her environment as the last sentence, “there were revelation in progress all around her” (Pynchon 1999, 31), indicates. Oedipa’s expectation seems to be consistent with the apocalyptic tendency of Western culture that has been defined in the first part of this study. Oedipa believes that she will eventually witness a moment of unveiling or uncovering. In this manner, Pynchon playfully leads the reader to expect a conventional (and logical) resolution, or revelation. This is highly in line with Nicol’s argument that Pynchon’s major novels develop on two levels:

For all the excess of character, event, and detail, Pynchon’s major novels effectively each boil down to a complex quest-narrative played out on two levels: one in the plot, conducted by a central character, and the second undertaken by the reader, whose efforts to decode what he or she is presented with in the novel mirror the frustrated efforts of the questing character. (Nicol 2009, 94)

Furthermore, it does not escape the reader that the city in which Oedipa seeks a definite meaning, or truth, is named as "San Narciso", reminding us of Hutcheon's calling metafictional narratives "narcissistic". By referring to the metafictional novel's self-awareness and introverted focus on its language and structure through the name of the setting, the novel continues to call our attention to the process of creating narratives and the notion of fictionality itself.

Furthermore, San Narciso is a city full of signifiers, but does not lead Oedipa to any transcendental signified which she appears to yearn for throughout her journey. In line with this interpretation, Nicol views the name of the city as "a cipher for the over-signified world of postmodernity" (Nicol 2009, 94). Describing San Narciso as an "infected" city, the novel demonstrates that any type of information functions like a virus in Oedipa's environment. For this reason, nothing she meets seems to cure Oedipa by supplying her with a solution. Instead, each sign complicates her semiotic journey:

So she got up after a while and left The Greek Way, and entered the city again, the infected city. And spent rest of the night in finding the image of the Trysterost post horn. In Chinatown, in the dark window of an herbalist, she thought she saw it on a sign among ideographs. But the streetlight was dim. (Pynchon 1999, 94)

As seen, even when Oedipa thinks that she sees a sign among ideographs, the street seems dark and she cannot be sure of what she perceives as the phrase "she thought she saw" (Pynchon 1999, 94) shows. Unlike traditional detective fiction, the novel does not portray a heroic and assertive protagonist that chases logically linked signs, but one who cannot actually interpret what is going on and lacks self-confidence for this reason. Although Oedipa finds what she perceives or reads as signs quite meaningful at some points, they actually give only the impression of clear meaning. So, both Oedipa and the reader have been deprived of any kind of clear, stable, and fixed

meaning. It might be the reason why she feels drunk in the dreamy atmosphere of the city loaded with images.

As Davis Seed notes, many critics have stated that “Pynchon draws on the detective genre in *The Crying of Lot 49* since this is a literary mode which revolves around the gathering and processing of information” (Seed 2003, 17). However, all these information does not provide her (and also the reader) with a definite meaning. Instead, by parodying the form of the detective story through the tools of metafiction, the novel portrays the never-ending human endeavour to interpret and produce meaning. According to Zygmunt Bauman, the postmodern artist gives voice to this striving and makes the reader participate in this process actively, which is the heroic side of postmodern art (Bauman 2005, 105):

The creation and the reception alike are the process of perpetual discovery, and a discovery never likely to discover all there is to be discovered, or discover it in the a form that precludes the possibility of an entirely different discovery... The work of postmodern artist is a heroic effort to give voice to the ineffable, and a tangible shape to the invisible- but it is also (obliquely, through the refusal to reassert the socially legitimized canons of meanings and their expressions) a demonstration that more than one voice or shape is possible, and thus a standing invitation to join in the unending process of interpretation which is also the process of meaning making. (Bauman 2005, 105)

By resisting one of Western literature's “legitimized canons of meanings”, as Bauman calls them, *The Crying of Lot 49* engages in a game changing activity as a metafictional detective novel. Instead of following the basic outline of the modern detective story, the novel reacts against the apocalyptic and teleological understanding of Western culture in the mode of the metafictional detective story, which covertly comments on the strategies of interpretation and displays the end of “fixed” meaning in the postmodern world:

The meaning of postmodern art, we may say, is to stimulate the process of meaning-making and guard it against the danger of ever grinding to a halt, to alert to the inherent polyphony of meaning and to the intricacy of all interpretation... Instead of reasserting reality as a graveyard of untested possibilities, postmodern art brings into the open the perpetual incompleteness of meanings and thus the essential inexhaustibility of the realm of the possible. One may even go a step further, and suggest that meaning of postmodern art is deconstruction of meaning; more exactly, revealing the secret of meaning, the secret which modern theoretical practice tried hard to hide or belie- that meaning 'exists' solely in the process of interpretation and critique, and dies together with it. (Bauman 2005, 107)

This is the reason why Oedipa cannot follow a single path in her journey, but has to accept the existence of different of paths such as science (exemplified by Maxwell's Demon), politics (the Tristero mystery and its relation to American history), and love (Oedipa's relationships with her husband, Metzger and Pierce). Still, Oedipa does not give up her search for the transcendental signified, an essence, truth, or the first cause, but she senses that she has already lost her contact with it. Portrayed as a treasure hunter, again chasing something to reach a valuable end as the adjective "gemlike" suggests, Oedipa becomes suspicious, just before she enters Golden Gate Park where she sees a circle of children:

Each clue that comes is supposed to have its own clarity, its fine chances for permanence. But then she wondered if the gemlike "clues" were only some kind of compensation. To make up for her having lost the direct, epileptic Word, the cry that might abolish the night. (Pynchon 1999, 95)

She takes these self-referent signs as "a kind of compensation" (Pynchon 1999, 95) for the transcendental signified, the essence, truth, or the answer she has been inquiring. Written with the capital "W", "the direct, epileptic Word" may refer to

any kind of ideology or grand-narrative that would impose logic and order upon Oedipa's journey, and in the end, would supply her with the illusion of a definite solution, which would be actually one of many other possible answers. Thus, the novel seems to pose an enigma, and then, it retreats unexpectedly since it does not provide the reader and the protagonist with a framework in which the Tristero mystery can be solved. For this reason, it might be called an example of "the writerly text", as opposed to "the readerly text", defined by Roland Barthes in his well-known work *S/Z*.

Barthes defines "the writerly text" by opposing it to the concept of "the readerly text", which is characterized by the tyranny of one definite meaning in a text. In a readerly text, the reader is continually directed by the text in his or her interpretive actions. The readerly text is disposable and digestible. Even when we have the plurality of meaning in a readerly text, this is a limited experience. Barthes explains this point by engaging in the description of the terms "denotation" and "connotation". Denotation is the primary meaning of the text and connotations are the associations that denotation paves the way for (Barthes 1974, 7). Although connotations seem like supportive of plurality of meanings in a text, Barthes calls our attention to the fact that connotations are meanings that denotations allow to appear in the text (Barthes 1974,8). For this reason, Barthes says that connotation can be a trace of plurality although it is limited (Barthes 1974, 8). This is the reason why he asserts that "connotation is a correlation immanent in the text, in the texts; or again, one may say that it is an association made by the text as-subject within its own system" (Barthes 1974,8). However, according to Barthes, the writerly text welcomes the plurality of meaning as it leads the reader to produce his own meaning (Barthes 1974,5), which may connect the notion of the writerly text to Hutcheon's view of metafiction as both terms are related with the reader's active participation in the process of meaning making, or what

Hutcheon calls "production". So, since *The Crying of Lot 49* encourages the reader to create his own narrative due to its open-endedness, it might be called a writerly text in the form of the metafictional detective story.

Likewise, by resisting any metanarrative tending towards generalization and any authoritative voice that yearns for giving shape to what reality is, Don DeLillo's *Point Omega* illustrates how its characters experience reality in different manners, and how the reader may independently construct his meaning out of this text. The novel welcomes interpretation as a freedom to organize individual meaning, and in this way, supports and celebrates the plurality of meaning. For this reason, DeLillo's *Point Omega* may also be viewed as an example of the "writerly" text. Any work of fiction that can be grouped under the title of the "readerly" text poses an enigma, and hence, leads the reader to embark on a semiotic and interpretive journey, the path of which has already been constructed and determined by the authoritative text itself. However, *Point Omega* reacts against this determination by leaving its enigma unsolved, by which I mean the text does not provide the reader with a definite answer about what has happened to Jessie.

Searching for clues that might help him find Jessie, Jimmy becomes a surrogate detective figure in this novel. However, like Oedipa, Jimmy cannot find a logical framework that may impose a linear narrative upon what they go through. Because the novel lacks linearity, teleological motive, order and rationality that detective fiction conventionally has, the reader feels that there is something uncanny and disturbing about Jessie's sudden disappearance. Actually, even Jessie's inclusion in the story signals this character's difference as it is displayed in the following quote:

He looked at the beer glass in his hand and announced that his daughter would be coming to visit. It was like hearing that the earth had shifted on its axis, spinning night back into budding day. Significant news, someone else, a face and voice

called Jessie, he said, an exceptional mind, otherworldly.”
(DeLillo 2010, 36)

So, Jessie's participation in these two men in the desert, her father Elster and Jimmy, who is after shooting an unconventional movie with Elster, is reflected as the intrusion of the other who is “otherworldly”. Jessie's strangeness is emphasized in another passage where she is described by mentioning her special and unusual habit or gift: “She was pale and thin, mid-twenties, awkward, with a soft face, not fleshly but roundish and calm, and she seemed attentive to some interior presence. Her father said she heard words from inside them. I didn't ask what he meant by this. It was his job to say such things” (DeLillo 2010, 40). Here, Jessie's father Elster refers to her ability of lip-reading. In the later part of the novel, the reader learns that Jessie as a child used to lip-read in order to grasp meaning before it is conveyed through language. So, this signifies the character's problematic relation to meaning and language. She does not rely on language to attain meaning as her lip-reading demonstrates. In harmony with this portrayal, language in the novel cannot convey her sudden disappearance, and it deliberately fails to put an end to this enigma. Thus, similar to *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Point Omega* as a writerly text in the form of the metafictional detective story, does not promise an answer to the reader, and seems to intentionally violate the conventional structure of the readerly text by leaving the enigma of the narrative open-ended.

In line with what Barthes asserts in *S/Z*, that is the writerly text celebrates polysemy, and for this reason, the reader becomes the writer simultaneously in his semiotic journey in reading the novel (Barthes 1974, 5), the reader of *Point Omega* is invited to enjoy the freedom of interpretation in Jessie's case. Unlike many other examples of traditional detective fiction, *Point Omega* as a metafictional detective story shows that the number of the systems of meaning can never be closed, which is the main characteristic of the writerly text

according to Barthes (Barthes 1974, 6). Through its metafictional commentaries on reality (which are observable in a covert manner), the novel shows that there is actually no linguistic or any other kind of structure behind what we perceive as reality: "True life is not reducible to words spoken or written, not by anyone ever. The true life takes place when we're alone, thinking, feeling, lost in memory, dreamingly self-aware, the submicroscopic moments" (DeLillo 2010,17). Because it lacks conventional narrative structure driven towards an apocalyptic end, the novel shows that not only true life but also fiction "is not reducible to words spoken or written" (DeLillo 2010, 17). This is highly in line with Roland Barthes' suggestion in *S/Z*, that is "there is never a whole of the text" (Barthes 1974, 6):

This necessary assertion is difficult, however, for as nothing exists outside the text, there is never a whole of the text ...: the text must simultaneously be distinguished from its exterior and from its totality. All of which comes down to saying that for the plural text, there cannot be a narrative structure, a grammar, a logic.... (Barthes 1974, 6)

In line with Barthes' definition of the "writerly" text that promotes and celebrates plurality and with what we labeled as "the metafictional detective story" defying the basic elements of detective fiction through its metafictional tools, *Point Omega* does not offer a solution to the enigma of Jessie, who, as a child, tried to challenge speech, which is indeed a linguistic structure, by lip-reading when she does not really have to do this to communicate meaning. For this reason, it might be claimed that Jessie as an "otherworldly" character deserves such an ending, which is not an ending at all, at least in traditional sense.

Still, although it reacts against the imposition of a single narrative upon a situation, *Point Omega* shows the human tendency to conform to the common structures of society such as its institutions, which may be taken as the product of the

age-old tyrannical meaning-making processes. Living with Elster and Jessie, Jimmy is prone to see himself as a member of this family immediately as the concept of family is among the conventional institutions of society: "I wondered if we were becoming a family, no more strange than most families except that we had nothing to do, nowhere to go, but that's not so strange either, father, daughter, and whatever –I-was" (DeLillo 2010, 54-55). However, as seen in the quote, Jimmy cannot find a proper role for himself in the conventional family structure, as their unique situation resists any kind of traditional narratives of society.

The novel also plays on the same tendency of the reader by supplying him with clues at some points. For instance, Jessie's mother calls Jimmy to tell him that she has remembered the name of her boyfriend, whom Jimmy is suspicious of: "I was sleeping. Then I wake up with his name. It is Dennis" (DeLillo 2010, 88). This piece of information that pops out suddenly and unexpectedly may quicken the reader's pulse since, in a conventional detective story, a clue will lead to another clue, and in the end, there will be a definite answer to the enigma of detective fiction. However, this clue does not make Jimmy find another clue, thus, the novel seems to portray the excess of information, not necessarily connected to each other, in postmodern culture. It resists the teleological motive lying behind detective fiction, and continues to keep all possibilities about Jessie's sudden disappearance alive. This is highly in line with Bauman's argument that postmodern art "enhances freedom through keeping the imagination awake, and thus keeping the possibilities alive and young. It also enhances freedom by keeping creeds liquid, so they would not petrify into dead and blinding certainties" (Bauman 2005, 107). In the same vein, *Point Omega* surprises its reader by resisting the linear structure of the conventional novel, by which I refer to the traditional fictional structure having a beginning introducing the story, a middle part posing its main enigma,

and an end including the solution of the mystery. Instead, the novel starts and ends with remarkable episodes in which the reader cannot see the three main characters of other chapters, but a man watching (and almost enchanted by) a movie called *24 Hour Psycho*. Making the reader wait for a moment when the disappearance of Jessie will be connected to these two unusual chapters, the novel deliberately causes frustration since it does not render a link between these chapters and the rest of the novel except that Jimmy and Elster meet at the museum showing this movie and in the last chapter we see a woman who has the ability of lip-reading, which suggests that she might be Jessie. Furthermore, the novel refers to Hitchcock's movie, *Psycho* with these two chapters. Thus, as a metafictional detective story, *Point Omega* exemplifies how fiction is able to comment on fictionality through this intertextual element in the story.

All in all, both Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* and DeLillo's *Point Omega* may be evaluated as metafictional detective stories that comment on the nature of reality, being, fictionality, knowing, and the act of interpreting in various manners. Through these commentaries, they pave the way for the postmodern negation of the so-called "stable" meaning, and exemplify the polyphony of meaning a text can trigger. Thus, through the use of the tools of detective fiction in a subverting manner, these two metafictional novels resist conventional structures associated with the novel as a genre, and portray the elasticity of fiction in this way.

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