

“THE JOURNALISTIC LICENCE OF IT ALL”:
CRIME, FICTION, AND JOURNALISM IN DAVID PEACE’S *NINETEEN SEVENTY FOUR*

“THE JOURNALISTIC LICENCE OF IT ALL”:
CRIMEN, FICCIÓN Y PERIODISMO EN *NINETEEN SEVENTY FOUR*, DE DAVID PEACE

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Abstract

This paper analyzes David Peace’s novel *Nineteen Seventy Four* (1999), first part of his Red Riding Quartet, to revise how the author uses the dynamics and conceptions of journalism and noir fiction to problematize the concepts of *truth* and *fiction* within the genre, on the one hand, and to reflect on the notion of historical past in relation to the present, also subordinated to the crossings between truth and fiction, on the other. By constructing a detective that in this case is embodied by an ambitious journalist in the Yorkshire County of 1974 and exploiting his sordid narrative style, the novel demands comparisons between the contemporary context and the past he fictionalizes through the presence of real-life events. Taking meticulous advantage of the precepts and expectations of noir fiction, the novel leads to a conscientious reading that exacerbates the growing instability of the boundaries between the discourses of reality and fiction in the 21st century. This analysis focuses first on the characterization of the protagonist, since the

Resumen

Este artículo analiza la novela *Nineteen Seventy Four* (1999) del inglés David Peace, primera parte de su Red Riding Quartet, para revisar cómo el autor utiliza las dinámicas y concepciones del periodismo y la novela negra para problematizar los conceptos de *verdad* y *ficción* dentro del género, por un lado, y para reflexionar sobre la noción de pasado histórico en relación con el presente, también subordinado a los cruces entre verdad y ficción, por el otro. Al construir un detective que en este caso está encarnado por un ambicioso periodista del condado de Yorkshire de 1974 y explotar su sórdido estilo narrativo, la novela exige comparaciones entre el contexto contemporáneo y el pasado que ficcionaliza a través de la presencia de acontecimientos de la vida real. Aprovechando minuciosamente los preceptos y expectativas de la novela negra, la obra conduce a una lectura concienzuda que exagera la creciente inestabilidad de las fronteras entre los discursos de la realidad y la ficción en el siglo XXI. Este análisis se centra primero en la caracterización del protagonista, ya que la construcción

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construction of a reporter as the detective and narrator of a noir novel emphasizes the thematization of journalism when seen in relation to the search for truth for profit. Then, it turns to the importance of the journalistic style of the narrator and protagonist since the narrative characteristics of the text outline very peculiar ways of reading that lead to questioning hegemonic discourses.

de un reportero como detective y narrador de una novela negra enfatiza la tematización del periodismo cuando se lo ve en relación con la búsqueda de la verdad con fines de lucro. Luego, se aborda la importancia del estilo periodístico del narrador y protagonista, ya que las características narrativas del texto perfilan modos de lectura muy peculiares que llevan a cuestionar discursos hegemónicos.

Keywords: *Press and journalism in literature* ||

Noir fiction || *Crime in mass media* || *Popular culture*
|| *Detectives in literature* || *Investigative reporting* ||
English fiction

Palabras clave: *Prensa y periodismo en la literatura* ||

Novela negra || *Crimen en medios de comunicación masiva* || *Cultura popular* || *Detectives en la literatura*
|| *Periodismo de investigación* || *Novela inglesa*

I don't want to read books about imaginary serial killers or wide-boy drug dealers or ex-Vietnam vets or TV coppers. I want to read fictions torn from facts that use those fictions to illuminate the truth. I read because I want to learn; I want to learn because I want answers. I don't want mystery and suspense because I've got that everywhere I look; I want truth and answers.

—DAVID PEACE

Introduction

According to Isabel Santaulària (2008), the origins of crime fiction can be traced to the morbidity that was exploited, for entertainment and mainly in the realm of sensationalist writing, with the so-called *Newgate Calendar* at the end of the 18th century, “a monthly newsletter in which the warden of Newgate, a notorious London prison that closed in 1902, narrated the executions of the criminals imprisoned there” (71).¹ The title *Newgate Calendar* was later adopted to refer to different texts of the 18th and 19th centuries that focused on crimes, the biographies of criminals, and even descriptions of the legal processes and the punishments

¹ All English translations from this and other sources are mine.

suitable for each crime. “These narratives, therefore, combined sensationalist accounts of crimes, moral instruction, and legal history” (Santaulària, 2008: 71). In this sense, by establishing that these primary crime stories originate in an interest to report real facts that was later oriented to the construction of a fictional genre, there is a clear emphasis on a quality of crime fiction that continues to be relevant even today: the tension that is established between the intriguing, artful, and—in theory—invented stories and the reality of crime as a threat of which we are always aware. In the same vein, although it could be argued that crime fiction is too conservative given its clearly artificial logic of restoration and the prevalence of justice (Dunant, 2000: 10; Santaulària, 2008: 95), this does not prevent the genre from reflecting the concerns of societies that have perpetuated the interest in representing and “consuming” crime. Crime fiction, as any popular genre, turns out to be devoid of relevance if it does not get involved with the ethical complexities and social aspects that motivate it (Seeley, 2016). Even in the Nordic context, for example, which can brag about the lowest crime rates in Europe (Forshaw, 2012: 11)—where crime itself is somewhat of a fiction—the fairly recent international popularity of Scandinavian crime narrative (associated with names like Henning Mankell, Stieg Larsson, or Jo Nesbø) shows that the genre prevails as a cultural product of massive consumption whose distinct forms have established dialogues with the sociopolitical issues of the times in which these stories develop and are produced.

Of the different variants of crime fiction that have come to be identified as clearly defined subgenres, noir fiction is among the ones that more directly point at social criticism and commentary. In this type of stories, which present marked changes in how the context, the hero, and the nature of crime are defined, “the misdeeds that the detective faces are only small manifestations of a state of endemic corruption and criminality that affect the pillars that hold the social apparatus together” (Santaulària, 2008: 83-84). Noir fiction has the special capacity to be a political platform of denunciation, especially with what appears to be a new tendency of the genre; Nicholas Seeley (2016), for example, recognizes a renaissance of noir after the social movements and revolutions of the second half of the 20th century. By approaching racism, xenophobia, feminism, masculinities, or even narrativity, the current production of noir fiction seems to have what it takes to constitute itself as an effective tool for cultural analysis, which echoes the epigraph to this paper, in which writer David Peace,

one of today’s exponents of British noir fiction, claims his support for the role that such stories have in the understanding of the world we live in. In fact, Peace’s words might even go back to that tension between reality and fiction I addressed before, since Peace is not talking about news reports, chronicles, or other historical documents that could contain those “truth and answers” he requires, but rather about mere fictional truths that are “torn from facts” (Peace, 2001: n.p.). As he also claims, “Crime fiction has both the opportunity and the obligation to be the most political of any writing or any media, crime itself being the most manifest example of the politics of the time” (Peace, 2001: n.p.). In this sense, it is illuminating to consider Peace’s work to revise the ways in which he uses crime fiction and its characteristics to evince the truths that the author seems to refer to and, in a way, to reconsider the political aspects of the genre.

The Red Riding Quartet is a good example of the paths that noir fiction has taken. Published between 1999 and 2002, this tetralogy had sufficient relevance for the literary magazine *Granta* to name David Peace amongst the twenty best young British novelists in 2003, alongside authors like David Mitchell, Zadie Smith, and Sarah Waters. Set in Yorkshire County, in the north of England, the novels are set in to the years comprehended between 1974 and 1983, as their titles indicate: *Nineteen Seventy Four* (1999), *Nineteen Seventy Seven* (2000), *Nineteen Eighty* (2001), and *Nineteen Eighty Three* (2002). While the four novels focus on a series of fictional crimes, all connected through a complex web of corruption, impunity, and economical interests, one of the key aspects of this quartet is that its plot is inscribed against the background of real crimes and other verifiable events of the period, such as the hunt for the Yorkshire Ripper, the murders of Cannock Chase, or even the terrorist attacks of the IRA. This narrative quality is so inherent to the construction of the diegetic time and space in Peace’s work that the author has even been questioned about his decision to write novels instead of non-fiction (Nakajima and Peace, 2014). Nevertheless, it is not gratuitous that in the first novel of the quartet, which sets the foundations and concerns for the whole series, Peace presents the generic formula of noir fiction from the perspective of a character that moves in a journalistic context, since the notion of journalism itself resonates with both the origins of the genre in relation to the *Newgate Calendar* and the crossing between the fictional and the factual. Although works like Capote’s *In Cold Blood* (1965) had already re-kindled the nineteenth-century practice of using crime reporting as raw material to

produce “hybrid works of literary journalism” (Black, 2010: 80), *Nineteen Seventy Four* is peculiar because, far from “reconstructing” a real crime in an aesthetic way to demonstrate that creative reportage has the potential to consolidate an artistic form (Capote in Plimpton, 1966), David Peace sketches the sociopolitical background of 1974 Yorkshire via the news records of the time to finally thematize journalism as a meeting point between the real, the fictitious, and the historical.

As Katy Shaw (2011) shows with her detailed analysis, it is easy to see such a thematic concern as a dominant poetics in the work of David Peace: “[His] fictions look back to the recent past and in doing so invite stark comparisons with our own contemporary world. Peace not only examines the traumas of the twentieth century, but also sheds light on wider issues that resonate with contemporary global events” (133). Nonetheless, apart from delving into these issues, part of what I intend to propose here is that David Peace manipulates the narrative and thematic chiaroscuros in *Nineteen Seventy Four* not only to invite comparisons, as Shaw explains, but to demand them, making sure that they do not go unnoticed. In other words, the author takes meticulous advantage of the precepts and expectations of noir fiction to lead to a conscientious reading that turns into—almost inevitably and as will be detailed in the following pages—the exacerbation of one of the themes that interest him the most: the growing instability of the boundaries between the discourses of reality and fiction. Under this light, the analysis of *Nineteen Seventy Four* that I present focuses on how the author uses the dynamics and conceptions of both journalism and noir fiction, on the one hand, to problematize the concepts of *truth* and *fiction* within the genre and, on the other, to reflect on the notion of historical past in relation to the present, equally subordinated to the crossings of truth and fiction. To do this, in the following pages I will first focus on the protagonist of the novel, for the construction of a reporter as the detective and narrator of a noir novel emphasizes the thematization of journalism when seen in relation to the search for the truth for profit. Afterwards, I will look at the importance of the journalistic style of the narrator and protagonist, since the narrative characteristics of the text outline very peculiar ways of reading that question the notion of the present in relation to the past through journalism.

“The journalistic licence of it all”

Broadly speaking, *Nineteen Seventy Four* follows the investigative research of Edward Dunford, the young crime correspondent of the *Yorkshire Post* who has been assigned the press coverage of the disappearance and subsequent murder investigation of Clare Kemplay, a ten-year-old girl who was last seen alive on 12 December 1974, according to the meticulous, obsessive chronology of the story. With this mission, Dunford delves into a twelve-day marathon to try and find the truth about a crime that ends up gaining more complexity than solutions, for all the evidence suggests that Clare’s murder is not an isolated incident and that whoever is responsible seems to have the authorities, the media, and the government on their side. The predominance of noir elements is evident. However, the figure of Edward Dunford stands out, given that his nature as reporter-detective contrasts with the more traditional presence of the policeman-detective that allows ambivalent explorations of ethical matters. The classic noir antiheroes are characters whose virtues and defects grant them rather diffuse and usually problematic nuances in terms of their ethical dimensions. “The detective of noir fiction is an unattached but honorable private detective, with questionable origins and violent, willing to use any means within reach to fight against crime” (Santaulària, 2008: 83). While this type of detective can “do little to restore social order and is content with solving the case at hand and move on” (Santaulària, 2008: 84), these characters do crack the cases that concern them in accordance with the general formula of crime fiction. In the case of *Nineteen Seventy Four*, notwithstanding, that the detective be a reporter allows to an interesting approach to the exploration of impunity and corruption in urban spaces, since the virtues and defects of the classic noir antiheroes are here given to a character that possesses neither the power nor the experience or the obligation to speak in the name of the law. Nevertheless, Eddie, as his colleagues call him, is constructed as a noir “detective” mainly because of the journalistic licenses he brandishes, because this is how his position inside a system of spheres of power is emphasized.

Dunford’s discourse is constructed in the first person and in past tense, yet the style creates the impression of immediacy because there are no traces of a temporal distance beyond the verbs that present the action. There are no retrospective reflections about the immediate perceptions and thoughts that the narrator reports from his subjectivity, or any discrepancy between the plot and the story—i.e., this is a

narration that presents the events in chronological order with no apparent narrative, temporal, or ideological filter. The text seems to correspond with the mere stream of consciousness of the protagonist in a seemingly objective representation of his subjectivity, though which he reports his actions, thoughts, discoveries, and experiences. In the narration there are plenty of sentence fragments and isolated phrases constituting entire paragraphs that, usually, have the sole function of providing apparently irrelevant details or that refer to what crosses the narrator's mind. Thus, the discourse gives way to many spaces of indeterminacy. These characteristics, not only of form but also of format (Palmer, 2010), are clear from the opening of the novel:

“All we ever get is Lord fucking Lucan and wingless bloody crows,” smiled Gilman, like this was the best day of our lives:

Friday 13 December 1974.

Waiting for my first Front Page, the Byline Boy at last: Edward Dunford, North of England Crime Correspondent; two days too fucking late.

I looked at my father's watch.

9 a.m. and no bugger had been to bed; straight from the Press Club, still stinking of ale, into this hell:

The Conference Room, Millgarth Police Station, Leeds. (Peace, 1999: 3)

The narrative control of time and space is crucial, in line with what would be expected of both a criminal investigation and a journalistic report. As the quote indicates, the story begins during the press conference in which the police department informs about the disappearance of Clare Kemplay the day before. Dunford's nuances, which allow to his association with a noir antihero, are subtly visible from the very beginning through insinuations, for the reporter hopes that little Clare's tragedy launch his career in the county's paper to success. When he sees the girl's mother crying inconsolably, he wonders, “did you do your own daughter?” (Peace, 1999: 4), and when minutes later the detective in charge of the investigation concludes the conference saying that they will keep them in the loop in case there are any developments, Dunford narrates: “I looked down at the notebook again, the wheels still turning the tape, seeing any developments face down in a ditch in an orange waterproof

kagool” (Peace, 1999: 6). In other words, the mind of the reporter seems to get ahead of the events and imagine possible causes and the outcomes of the mystery at hand, with no other apparent justification than already starting to reconstruct the story.

During the first day of Clare’s disappearance, Eddie must also face his father’s funeral, which highlights the relevance of what little by little is constructed as the motif of the watch he looks at repeatedly. This element, on the one hand, has the function of enabling the obsessive control of the chronology in the story and, on the other, emphasizes the naïve, young, and somewhat empathetic nature of the protagonist, whose nuances begin to be shown. The convergence of Dunford’s different creases is underlined when the vicar that is delivering the eulogy mistakes the deceased for a joiner instead of a tailor, angering Eddie and, ironically, making him reflect on the journalistic context that before long is problematized and problematizes him:

And I sat there, outraged by the journalistic licence of it all, thinking these people had carpenters on the bloody brain.

Eyes front, I stared at the box just three steps from me, imagining a smaller white box and the Kemplays in black, wondering if the vicar would fuck that up too when they finally found her.

I looked down at my knuckles turning from red to white as they gripped the cold wooden pew, catching a glimpse of my father’s watch beneath my cuff, and felt a hand on my sleeve.

In the silence of the crematorium my mother’s eyes asked for some calm, saying at least that man is trying, that the details aren’t always so important. (Peace, 1999: 9)

The attitude that could be labeled *pessimistic* regarding the as yet missing Clare Kemplay is evident: although later his prediction becomes true, at this point it is rather risky, and even a bit morbid, that the reporter takes the murder for granted. Moreover, the importance of the father figure regarding Dunford is reiterated and largely contributes to the sympathy towards the character, despite his tabloid attitude. Further on, this is portrayed as selfishness, for after the funeral the protagonist gives more hints about what really lies behind his assumptions and, to a certain extent, desires:

Back at the house, first things first:
Phone the office.
Nothing.
No news being bad news for the Kemplays and Clare, good news for me.
Twenty-four hours coming up, tick-tock.
Twenty-four hours meaning Clare dead.
I hung up, glanced at my father's watch and wondered how long I'd have
to stay among his kith and kin. (Peace, 1999: 9-10)

The narrator's hopes that the crime be so gruesome that it elicits a good story exhibit Dunford as an ambitious journalist with no qualms of horror who is afraid of missing his big scoop. Thus, the almost inhuman and indifferent stance regarding other people's suffering, which is tangentially related to the protagonist's own familiar situation, becomes another motif in the novel, for there are even constant references to a popular refrain of tabloid journalism: *if it bleeds, it leads*.

After all, the novel emphasizes the social rot that is crucial for noir fiction, as well as the supremacy that economic profit, here represented by the media as a business, has over everything else. The position of Edward Dunford inside a system of spheres of power that work in a type of closed circuit to preserve that very power contrasts with the vulnerability to which he is subject. By not belonging to the ranks of police authorities, Dunford allows Peace to address aspects of corruption that, in this case, are presented in a more realistic way than what happens with the private eyes that inaugurated the genre, since after World War II "the mythical nature of the Great Detective of the classic form and of noir fiction became evident, and it was clear that this was basically an icon produced by fiction, with no real basis" (Santaulària, 2008: 84-85). In this sense, moreover, Edward Dunford is in the threshold between the world of power that he is entering as a reporter and the world of "the common man" (Santaulària, 2008: 95) that the figure of the detective tends to protect, which lets the story delve into these issues. That is, by contextualizing in the journalistic universe not only the story that the novel presents, but also the interests that motivate the narrator, David Peace penetrates a bit more incisively the structures of noir fiction since, again, the detective

that usually regrets the corruption he sees around him—in which on occasion he also has to participate—is here substituted by a reporter that, naturally, strives for his own success through the ethical or otherwise selling of terrible information.

Nevertheless, Dunford’s nuances again come into play. After the body of little Clare Kemplay is found in a construction site and Dunford misses his first news due to his investigating what he considers to be connections with other cold cases, he receives, thanks to an anonymous tip, a copy of the post-mortem on the Kemplay girl, as well as the photographs therein. While reading the post-mortem, Dunford narrates the extensive horrors he finds in gruesome detail: a thorny rose inserted in the girl’s vagina, two swan wings stitched into the back, the palms of the hands and one foot pierced through, possibly by a large metal instrument, apart from marks of strangulation, bruising and tears in the vagina and the anus, and other clear signs of rape. The report also affirms that most of the wounds had been inflicted while the girl was still alive, probably conscious, and that the cause of death was “*ASPHYXIA DUE TO STRANGULATION*” (Peace, 1999: 51-52). While both the post-mortem and the photographs that Eddie does not dare see immediately would seemingly satisfy all his bloody journalistic desires, his reaction is of disgust, anger, and sadness. “I swallowed”, he narrates while absorbing the information in the post-mortem: “Horror on horror. || I fought hard for my breath. [...] Out the door, sucking in the Yorkshire air, tears and bile across my face. || None of the injuries were post-mortem” (Peace, 1999: 51-52). The narrator unexpectedly faces the rawness of the murder that he was so willing to cover, but the compassion that the graphic images and the degree of violence of the crime awaken in him motivate the reporter to rebel and go beyond the sensationalist reportage that would bring him success to find not justice, precisely, but something just as abstract and unattainable: the truth. Thus, instead of simply doing his job, which is to *cover* the facts, Dunford decides to *uncover* the truth. In this sense, David Peace uses the brutality of the prose in noir fiction not only to affect his readers, but also to reflect the degree to which his narrator is affected. Given his emotional reactions, after all, Dunford finds the courage to begin the exposure of the government, police, and journalistic mafias that apparently rule the northern side of the country, which, as the novel progresses, is more clearly constructed as an isolated space. As one of the cops that intimidate and try to hinder Dunford’s investigation claims: “THIS IS THE NORTH. WE DO WHAT WE WANT!” (Peace, 1999: 265).

The notion of the knowledge of the truth achieves great relevance for the novel, but not because it constitutes the great philosophical, epistemological concept that, for Brian McHale (1987: 9), lies at the core of crime fiction, but rather because it is first constructed as a motif in the novel and then as a topic subordinate to the journalistic dimension that Dunford embodies. Literally, it is this eagerness to *know* the truth, instead of simply *telling* a story that can be taken for the truth, what triggers the apparent change in the protagonist. This desire drives him to do exhaustive research even when it becomes clear that his life is in danger. Nevertheless, the very notion of *truth* seems to be ironized constantly within the journalistic context that the novel constructs: that Dunford understands that the truth is actually a construction devised by those in charge of “communicating” it simply increases the character’s despair while pessimistically trivializing the term. If we add the fact that Dunford’s narration becomes decreasingly reliable—not because he is a first-person narrator, but because his increasingly precarious emotional and physical state is conveyed by his already erratic discursive style—even the anchors that allowed the identification of the events in the story are questioned. Moreover, the protagonist’s ethical ambiguity has to be reconsidered finally when, towards the end of the novel, Dunford rapes Paula, a woman with whom he develops a relationship (Peace, 1999: 222-223). With this, when the character through whose consciousness and subjectivity the story is narrated ends up becoming another criminal who loses any chance for generating empathy, the readers’ empathic responses towards Dunford’s vulnerability and physical and emotional suffering become just as problematic. In a way, then, the construction of Dunford questions any attempt to trust him or what he narrates. Thus, the clearly contemporary conception of *truth* as the product of hegemonic power discourses pervades the novel, but more like a narrative tool that pushes towards concrete and, to a certain extent, constructive considerations of our relationship with the truths of the world, dramatized partially in our reading of the novel. In other words, David Peace is not interested in simply making us see something that post-modern thought has already made clear: *Nineteen Seventy Four* is critically engaged with the real dimensions of truth, its search, and its transmission in the 21st century.

“The journalism of the new century”

In an essay on the journalistic practice at the turn of the millennium, Ignacio Ramonet (2000) presents some considerations regarding the roll that both the media and its journalists play in social terms, which are largely mirrored in Peace’s work. According to Ramonet (2000),

Theoretically, until now, the information relationship was presented schematically in a triangular form. It was made up of three poles: the event, the journalist, and the citizen. The event was relayed by a journalist who checked it, filtered it, and analyzed it, before passing it on to the citizen. Now, this triangle has transformed into an axis: on one side there is the event and, on the other, the citizen. The function of the journalist has disappeared. In between there is no longer a filter, a sieve, but quite simply a transparent window. By means of the TV camera, the photograph, or the written report, all the media (press, radio, television) try to put the citizen directly in contact with the event. (32)

This contrast is relevant for my analysis of *Nineteen Seventy Four* in at least two ways: on the one hand, it takes us back to the historical context in which the novel is set. In the year 1974, in the Yorkshire County that Peace reconstructs, there is no media supremacy of the TV or—even less—the internet. This is, then, a space in which the filter and analysis of the event still must antecede its spreading. The degree of subjectivity that Dunford personifies emphasizes the implications of this process for the notion of dissemination of the truth. On the other hand, the characteristics that Ramonet associates with the journalism of the 21st century are significant here too because, through the narrator’s overwhelming inner focalization, readers are in direct contact with the events while the character experiences and perceives them. “Today, [...] informing is essentially ‘having people attend an event,’ showing it, which amounts to making us believe that the best way to inform ourselves would be to inform ourselves” (Ramonet, 2000: 31).

Considering the current function of the press and social media, we can establish that Peace’s work, grounded on the form and concerns of noir fiction, questions not only journalism regarding the truth that it must address—the connection between

the event and the journalist—but also the relationship between journalism and citizen. “Information has indeed become, above all, a commodity. It has no specific value linked, for example, to truth or its civic effectiveness. As a commodity, it is largely subject to the laws of the market, of supply and demand, before being subject to other rules, notably civic or ethical, which should nevertheless be its own” (Ramonet, 2000: 31). For the character of Edward Dunford, this becomes increasingly relevant: the change in the attitude of the narrator, interpreted as the revelation of his own condition, could be again understood through his liminal position as an agent of the spheres of power that control such a commodity and as a citizen who is meant to benefit by said commodity. The fact that Dunford’s narration is given with apparent immediacy could be related to those two ways of being informed that Ramonet presents: inside the narrative world, Dunford is a journalist who seeks to inform his fellow citizens about what happened to Clare Kemplay through his own discovery, reconstruction, and interpretation of the events; in narrative terms, the readers witness the events at the same time as the protagonist, and therefore are informed directly and remain as ignorant as the character, which is to be expected in the context of crime fiction. Thus, that the narrator uses “journalistic licenses”—such as shamelessly lying or deleting from his voice recorder the parts where he beats and intimidates his informers—to unearth the truth, while also facing other people’s journalistic licenses that aim precisely to hide that very truth, results in the distinct relativization of the notion of truth in narrative, thematic, and historical terms—not philosophical or transcendental.

After all, perhaps rather simplistically or idealistically, journalism ought always to be expected to disseminate truthful information. Edward Dunford’s dilemma is indeed knowing where the boundary between fact and fiction lies regarding the plot that he navigates. He understands how the discourses that surround him work, but that does not make it easier for him to separate them. Ultimately, tempering again with what tends to be expected of crime fiction, the protagonist of *Nineteen Seventy Four* ends up being incriminated by the same system he used to serve and dies with the certainty that he had not begun to understand the scale of the corruption that reigns in the north. It is interesting, then, to consider that the issue of the boundaries between fact and fiction is reflected in the very execution of the novel, which on the one hand includes several spaces of indeterminacy, due to the narrator’s limitations and subsequent ignorance, and on the other presents a fictional universe that coincides in many respects with “real” events of 1974.

David Peace uses the extratextual and real journalism of that year to construct in very complex manners the space in his novel. Considering that it was published in 1999, we could argue that the context of the story is alien not only for us, readers not necessarily familiar with all aspects of the British sociocultural context of the 70s, but also for most contemporary readers, simply because the novel refers to a context that has not existed for about fifty years. Interestingly, this trait reaches thematic implications given the reading process that, in a way, the novel demands, since Dunford’s narrative style requires an active reading that translates into a sort of investigation on the part of the reader. Taking this process into account, and since crime fiction appeals to a mental stimulus and intellectual pleasure that arise from the solving of the mystery before, after, or at the same time as the detective (Dunant, 2000: 11), what Peace does is taking advantage of the genre’s workings along with the high degree of indeterminacy to elicit curiosity.

This dimension of *Nineteen Seventy Four* can be succinctly illustrated and identified with the opening of the novel, which I presented before: “All we ever get is Lord fucking Lucan and wingless bloody crows,’ smiled Gilman, like this was the best day of our lives” (Peace, 1999: 3). Although here, as in any other work of fiction, we are expected to find information lacking on a clear, known referent for the reader, oddly enough Peace’s novel opens with a name that is never really delineated neither as a character nor as another relevant figure in the plot. “*League’s Lord Lucan? Where’s Our Likely Lad?*” (Peace, 1999: 136), reads a headline that Dunford finds at a café on 18 December; “Done a Lucan hasn’t he?” (Peace, 1999: 89), suggests an officer referring to the apparent disappearance of a famous local rugby player, the “likely lad” of the previous quote; “What about Sandra Rivett? Maybe it wasn’t Lucan after all, maybe it was Don Foster. And what about the bomb in Birmingham?” (Peace, 1999: 269), asks sarcastically Agent Fraser when Dunford suggests that the well-regarded Don Foster might be the criminal of the story. With these iterations it becomes evident that the reference is to a missing person, but the mention of a Sandra Rivett also seems to suggest that he might be a murderer. Through this strategy the novel addresses the logics of reading crime fiction, which given the thematic and formal aspects of the genre imply the creating of a particular type of reader who is meant to beware and mistrust any apparently insignificant detail that could lead to the cracking of the case (Borges, 1979). Thus, the constant mention of Lord Lucan seeks to tease the readers’ curiosity overtly for at least two main reasons. First, the text constructs the notion that the reader is

missing on something, since all the characters share this piece of information that happens to be mentioned even in the national papers. Second, Dunford's narrative style—the fact that it appears to focus only on the precise enunciation of events without any sort of description or explanation—contributes to a sense of ignorance because he does not feel the need to explain anything: he is merely going over the events. It is through this logic, then, that readers are tempted to follow what seems to be a clear suggestion: to find out who is this Lord Lucan who is not constructed in the novel.

Evidently, curiosity is easily rewarded, for a quick internet search of the words *Lord Lucan* reveals that “Richard John Bingham, 7th Earl of Lucan (born 18 December 1934 – disappeared 8 November 1974, declared dead 3 February 2016), commonly known as Lord Lucan, was a British peer who disappeared after being suspected of murder” (“John Bingham”, 2023: n.p.). The chronology and relevance of such a historical event tie in very well with the events in *Nineteen Seventy Four*. Furthermore, getting this information about a real-life criminal works along the logics of that same fascination and morbidity from which detective fiction arose, so Peace's novel proves appealing also in this respect. The particulars of this specific crime are more intriguing:

On the evening of 7 November 1974, Sandra Rivett, the nanny of Lucan's children, was bludgeoned to death in the kitchen of the Lucan family home. *Lady Lucan was also attacked after going to investigate Rivett's whereabouts. She identified Lord Lucan as her assailant.* Lucan had, by then, driven to visit a friend in Uckfield, East Sussex. *Lucan then telephoned his mother and asked her to collect his children, saying there had been an incident at the family home; he also penned a letter.* His car was later found abandoned in Newhaven, its interior stained with blood and its boot containing a piece of bandaged lead pipe similar to one found at the crime scene. By the time the police issued a warrant for his arrest a few days later, Lucan had vanished. At the inquest into Rivett's death, held in June 1975, the jury returned a verdict naming Lucan as her killer.

There has been continuing interest in Lucan's fate, with hundreds of alleged sightings being reported in various countries around the world, none of which has been substantiated. Despite a police investigation and widespread press coverage, Lucan has never been found. He was presumed dead

in chambers on 11 December 1992, and was declared legally dead in October 1999. In 2016, a death certificate was issued, allowing his titles to be inherited by his son George. (“John Bingham”, 2023; n.p; emphasis added)²

That this whole story is part of the background of Dunford’s Yorkshire is significant. Not only does it provide a useful cultural referent for a reader to understand what many characters mean when alluding to this event, but it also serves in itself as an autonomous crime narrative that stimulates readers’ responses. After all, when this unsolved mystery from British history is brought to attention, the real dimensions of crime and its chaotic nature are evinced. The fact that in terms of public domain it remains a cold case and that it can never be closed—if only in terms of Lord Lucan’s having been declared officially dead, with a death certificate issued only in 2016—hints at Peace’s implicit comment: in reality, as it is, a great amount of crimes remain unsolved and become mysteries; the lack of a typical closure in his novel emulates this principle effectively.

Through this same process, Peace draws similar paths that guide readers into getting knowledge, for example, about junior minister John Stonehouse’s “unsuccessful attempt at faking his own death in 1974” (“John Stonehouse”, 2023: n.p.); the political tensions after the 1974 general elections of October 1974, with which “the Labour Party won [...] with a very small majority of 3 seats and Harold Wilson stayed as Prime Minister” (“October 1974”, 2023: n.p.); and the conviction of Raymond Leslie Morris, who “was found guilty of the attempted abduction of Margaret Aulton and the rape and murder of [seven-year-old] Christine Dabry” (“Cannock Chase murders”, 2023: n.p.). Overall, then, the special attention given to the sociopolitical context constitutes a very precise stage for a fictional crime story,

² While working on the translation of this article and going once again over the sources, it was necessary to adjust some of the information that has clearly been updated, which is in itself quite telling of the argument I am making here. In this case, for example, a previous version of this Wikipedia entry claimed that Rivett had been bludgeoned in the basement, not in the kitchen. Moreover, what I present in italics is information that had not been included in the previous version of this same entry; as it turns out, those extra details have been added based on the testimony that Lady Lucan gave in the documentary *Lord Lucan: My Husband, My Truth*, which premiered only recently, in 2017. While venturing into the rabbit hole of all these updates and versions of a 50-year-old mystery would be unwieldy here—the byline announcing the premiere of the documentary in the *RadioTimes* site, for instance, reads: “More than 40 years after her husband Lord Lucan tried to kill her, his widow speaks out – but is it for validation or vengeance?” (Ling, 2017: n.p.)—noticing this aspect helps further demonstrate the complexity of the topic that Peace’s novel addresses regarding journalism, as I claim.

and this, of course, adds to the *need* for clarification that the novel does not provide. By extension, then, the questions that this narrative strategy elicits have more to do with the relevance of all these events for the story. While this novel is certainly an autonomous work of noir fiction regardless of the readers' unveiling of every extratextual referent, it is easy to see that incorporating the various dimensions that those events add to the plot is not only useful in terms of clarity, but also gratifying as part of the reading practice that crime fiction offers its readers in terms of emotions and thematic explorations. It is important to note that these elements are designed to converge in a story that deals with abuse of power, corruption, impunity, and even with the role of the media in the construction of an influential discourse, as when the *Yorkshire Post* tries to sell a convenient scapegoat, despite Dunford's claims that he is following the trail of another, more complex solution.

In other words, the factual events to which the novel calls attention echo the motifs and topics of the story to amount to broader thematic concerns: the novel pushes its readers to learn about specific aspects of recent British history while toying with the topics of impunity and journalistic licenses that have the capacity to bend reality to their benefit and to constitute a narrative that can then be regarded as *the truth*. If we assume that the means through which most readers nowadays inform themselves about historical events, more likely than not, is the internet, an endless web of stories and reports that establish what ought to be consumed as *the truth*, the reaches of the themes that Edward Dunford and his narrative style weave together expand to a reconsideration of our relationship with the press and the media in the 21st century. After all, when both the information gained through this active reading and the plot converge, it is perhaps even harder not to regard those other extratextual references with a skeptical eye. A BBC News piece published in March 2014, for example, communicates that "Cannock Chase child killer Raymond Morris has died in prison after repeated attempts to prove he did not rape and murder a seven-year-old girl," and provides the context that "[i]n 1969, Morris *was found guilty* of the murder of Christine Darby, from Walsall, following the discovery of her body on Cannock Chase" (Lumb, 2014; my emphasis). While it is inconsequential to think that, perhaps, Raymond Morris could have been innocent, it is at least quite provoking to realize that the unfolding of events incorporates, at least, conflicting testimonies and conceptions about the past. Precisely in the way that Edward Dunford, a journalist within the system, knows for a fact that in many cases

economic and political power guarantee impunity, these considerations resonate with a discourse that affirms that someone *was found guilty* of something. The inability to even reach definite conclusions to affirm that some *is* guilty is brought to the spotlight and constitutes a powerful theme in the novel.

Conclusion

It seems that David Peace’s story is set in the distant 1974, from today’s vantage point, because it is now when we could believe that we *really* know what happened in that year. Nevertheless, the author’s stance is quite ironic and puts into perspective the very understanding not only of journalism—which in a country like Mexico, where I am writing from, is already quite wobbly—but also of those mechanisms through which we remain informed. Such an artistic attitude could be related to the post-digital aesthetics and themes, characterized by the presence of bygone media in a context in which the fascination with digital systems and devices has reached its peak of normalization (Cramer, 2014). By making us reconsider the concepts and tools of journalism, the critical involvement of *Nineteen Seventy Four* with the informational realm in which we *attend* the events—as Ramonet suggests—enables the questioning of any event we could consider factual or truthful, as well as any institutional source that can make us attend said event. Ironically, and making this commentary all the more effective, this post-digital dimension of Peace’s novel is accessible through the information that sites such as Wikipedia and other historical records present. In fact, the internet is the most common means of communication in the 21st century, but by making us turn to the previous century, to 1974, when obtaining and disseminating information involved a more subjective and not unproblematic process, the information that the internet and any other media can offer about both the past and the present is reconceptualized.

Given that in this novel the theme of the search of the truth is presented as futile in narrative and generic terms, since the author does not give his detective and therefore his readers the solution to the crime, as would be expected in a detective story, the novel emphasizes a paranoid vision of the world (Esposito, 2011). Thus, at different levels of interpretation, the press and other sources of information, in a not quite metaphorical way, can be seen as a discourse with the capacity to play with

that line that separates not truth from lies, or fact from fiction, but some established truths from others. In this way, the social criticism is evident, and, at the very least, noticing this thematic and constructive dimension of *Nineteen Seventy Four* it becomes clear that, indeed, these explorations are possible thanks to the practice and conceptualization of fiction. In the end, more than asking why Peace writes novels and not non-fiction stories given his detailed investigation and use of historical contexts, perhaps a truly useful stance should instead suggest the possibility that there is really no such thing as non-fiction.

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