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METAFICTION AND PARODY TO THE CLASSICAL DETECTIVE STORY: CRITICAL VIEWS ON POSTMODERN NARRATIVE STANCES AND CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL HISTORY IN JOHN FOWLESô S ñTHE ENIGMAò

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RESUMO: Na qualidade de professor do Curso de Mestrado em História Cultural da USS ï Vassouras, desenvolvemos pesquisa no campo dos Estudos Culturais, apontando suas relações com a História, Literatura e Cinema contemporâneos. Neste ínterim, destacamos a visão de teóricos culturalistas sobre o mundo ontem e hoje, salientando a conflitante relação entre as concepções de sujeito cartesiano e sujeito pós-moderno. No conto ñThe Enigmaò, várias destas temáticas aparecem mescladas a questões metaficcionais, questões estas que problematizam não somente a condição do homem de hoje, mas que também parodiam a teoria literária estruturalista através de um pensamento crítico e revisionário que substitui a noção de discurso enquanto ócescritura encerrada em si mesmaô, por ócorpus conectado a contextos culturais em que se insereô. A partir de considerações autodiégeticas e por meio da paródia à ficção policial clássica, mostraremos como John Fowles discute relações de poder apontadas por teóricos pós-estruturalistas (tais como Foucault e Derrida), como o ficcionista aborda a condição do sujeito pós-moderno e de que maneira descreve a complexidade multicultural típica da história do presente.

Palavras chave: autorreflexividade textual; história cultural contemporânea; paródia; sujeito cartesiano.

A metaficção e a paródia da história da história de detetive clássica: olhares críticos sobre posturas narrativas pós-modernas e a história cultural contemporânea em John Fowles, "The Enigma"

ABSTRACT: When teaching at the Masterôs Course on Cultural History at USS, Vassouras, I have directed my researches to Cultural Studies and its intercrosses with contemporary History, Literature and Cinema. In this realm, I have highlighted the conflictive relationship between the conceptions about óthe Cartesian subjectô and óthe postmodern subjectô. In ñThe Enigmaò, many of these topics are portrayed within metafictional narrative stances which problematize not only manôs

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condition nowadays, but that also parody structuralist literary theory through a revising critical thought which replaces the concept of discourse as ôan enclosed and self-centered writing pieceô for the token of ôa culturally contextualized corpusô. Departing from self-reflexive considerations and by parodying the Classic Detective Story, I expect to demonstrate how John Fowles fictionally problematizes power relations discussed by post-structuralist theorists such as Foucault and Derrida, the manner in which he approaches the postmodern subjectôs condition, and the way he depicts Great Britainôs multicultural complexity, typical of present history.

Keywords: textual self-reflexivity; contemporary cultural history; parody ; Cartesian subject.

Classical detectives like Poeôs Dupin, Conan Doyleôs Sherlock Homes and Agatha Christieôs Poirot are meant to embody the Cartesian subject, solving enigmas, deciphering complex codes and unveiling the central mystery in a given plot. Rationality, logic deduction and observation may be keywords to define this type of characters who, many a time, have amused us with their skillful perception and infallible abilities to find out virulent criminals, to restore social order and make justice prevail in upper classes. The pledge to this kind of detective, however, entails socially critical affairs as it acknowledges the private inspectorôs craftiness and intelligence, depriving, thus, the police officer from this peculiar virtue. After all, if policemen were efficient enough to find out murderers, no detective would be hired in mystery stories. Being so, the detectiveôs very role is to make up for the policeôs incompetence to combat crime and for their incapacity to punish serial killers by collecting clear evidences to their wrongs.

Looking from this prism, the writer, when criticizing a governmental institution, favors the detective, placing him in an upper position as far as efficiency and scientific knowledge are concerned. The British police in Doyleôs novels set this example. Therefore, the detective is supposed to illustrate many 18th-century philosophersô ideas about man as a central figure in the universe. Although such view on man seems to begin with the Humanist philosophers in the second half of the 14th century, Enlightened intellectuals present the Caucasian as a superior being whose cognition enables him to rule the world. Of course, this extremely biasing idea points out the European subject as the most evolved man, meant to lead other nations all over the world. From the colonizerôs gaze, other races were surely underdeveloped both mentally and culturally, being heathen, uncivilized and barbarian creatures. According to this standpoint, all of them would be doomed to social

dismantling and disintegration, if the lights of a colonizing Illustration did not reach them. In other words, Europeansô prepotency and belief in their higher scientific knowledge would be responsible for the idealized construction of the Cartesian Man; that is, an intellectual whose epistemological methods based on science would shed the light of reason all over the word, banning the darkness of ignorance hither and thither.

As Stuart Hall explains (1996), this thought became an alibi fair enough to justify colonization and the widespread of European culture. As he remarks, ñThe Enlightenment subject was based on a conception of the human being as somebody fully centered, unified individual, endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness, and action, whose ócenterô consisted of an inner core which first emerged when the subject was born [...] [and] remain[ed] essentially the sameò (p. 597). Undoubtedly, the conception of the Cartesian man perfectly suits the classical detectiveôs characterization and, as we shall see, such stereotype is to be totally de-constructed in ñThe Enigmaò.

Since the ascension of *roman noir* in the 1940ôs, the classical detective novel has been chiefly challenged, changing the genre considerably; especially because, since then, scholarsô view on the private investigator has not always been directly associated with the noble thinking subject foreseen in the Enlightenment. According to Sandra Lúcia Reimão (1983), the *roman noir* was created by American writers like Dashiel Hammet (1894-1961) and Raymond Chandler (1888-1959). Also known as óthe American novelô, the abovementioned genre consists of a crime narrative which emphasizes pessimism, shaking the conventional prudishness from modern Christian societies by presenting sex crimes and other forms of violence. In this, the *roman noir* both parodies and deviates from Doyleôs approach to story-telling, building up a more cruel and corrupted detective who does not always solve the cases. Since 1945, the genre bloomed in France, and ever since, it has been produced elsewhere. On the whole, the *roman noir* delves into themes involving sorrow, every kind of extreme violence, mainly ñspanking and massacreò (REIMÃO, 1983, p. 50-3)[2].

[2] I have translated every quotation from this article orinally produced in Portuguese into English.

Complementing this viewpoint, Tânia Pellegrini (1999) adds that, even more recently, the parodying detective novel not only subverts old conventions from the Classical detective story but also undermines certain characteristics from the *roman noir*. Nowadays, not every detective is necessarily corrupted, but still, he features as an insecure, impotent figure, lost and stuck in abyssal investigations which gradually lead him to insoluble existential dilemmas. In the end, the initially far-fetched crime foments personal experiences which compromise the detectiveôs objective detachment from his scientific perusal. In either way, the postmodern crime story differs from Poe and Doyleôs detectives, ñde-mystifying and questioning, thence, their commonsense, logic and reasoning ï basic structures of the classic detective novelò (PELLEGRINI, 1999, p. 93).

This recent presentation of the subject in detective novels fully dialogues with what Hall defines as óthe postmodern subjectô. After all, either righteous or corrupted, to several contemporary theorists, the human being is, more than ever, unsure of who he/she is or might became. The matter is not necessarily viewed from a pessimistic perspective, provided that ongoing changes also bring many benefits; but, on the other hand, the subjectôs constant mutability unavoidably effaces oneôs dream of self-fulfillment or plenitude as he/she grows supposedly mature and older. As current theorists reckon, the postmodern subject is emotionally feeble, fragmented, unstable or psychologically unbalanced: ñThe subject previously experienced as having a unified and stable identity is becoming fragmented; composed not of a single, but of several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved identities. [...] the postmodern subject [...] ha[s] no fixed, essential, or permanent identityò (HALL, 1996, p. 598). So, in the case of Fowlesôs postmodern detective, he feels lost in a net of events in which he gets more and more entangled, going astray from his so yearned solution. In this fashion, the narrator manipulates both the detective and the reader, until the turning-point leads one to metafictional and uneventful considerations.

Though textual self-reflexivity is the storyôs main topic, the narrator firstly introduces a confusing and clueless police investigation which, paradoxically deviates one from the core of the narrative and foreshadows the postmodern detectiveôs impossibility to

decipher enigmas in a world where oneôs adoption of rational methods may not guarantee a crystal-clear resolution to a criminal case. Thence, the investigation, similarly to a labyrinth, keeps the detective going round and round in an ever-ending circle, which metafictionally explains the reason why the short-story is called ñThe Enigmaò. The opening lines of the text contain a list of causes for one to be kidnapped, departing from the most plausible possibilities, among which the narrator elicits young people with financial problems or family matters are highlighted:

> The commonest kind of missing person is the adolescent girl, closely followed by the teenage boy. The majority in this category came from working-class homes and almost invariably from those where there is serious parental disturbance. There is another minor peak in the third decade of life, less markedly working class, and constituted by husbands and wives trying to run out on marriages or domestic situations they have got bored with. The figures dwindle sharply after the age of forty; older cases of genuine and lasting disappearance are extremely rare, and again are confined to the very poor ï and even there to those, near vagabond, without close family (FOWLES, 1988, p.189).

From this, the narrator understates that wealthy elderly people with familial stability are very unlikely to be kidnapped. Nonetheless, the following paragraph proves the contrary as Mr. Marcus Fielding totally differs from the most probable profile for a missing person. In other words, right from the beginning, the story-teller conveys a mischievous textual game to be observed as closely as possible. In this, the enigma promptly features as food for thought; even because there is no evident motive for him to be missing. The victim happens to be perfect in every respect, according to bourgeois standards. Fielding is a Christian, a grave family man devoted to his children, a loyal husband, a successful businessman and a prosperous landowner. Moreover, he is also politically correct, a peacemaker, a generous surgery physician and, on top of it all, a Conservative Member of the British Parliament:

> When John Marcus Fielding disappeared, he therefore contravened all social and statistical probability. Fifty-seven years old, rich, happily married, with a son and two daughters; on the board of several City companies (and very much not merely to adorn the letter-headings); owner of the finest manor-houses in East Anglia, with an active interest in the running of his adjoining 1,800 acre farm; a joint ï if someone honorary ï master of foxhounds, a keen shot... he was a man who, if there were an -arium of living

> human stereotypes, would have done very well as a model of his kind: the successful City man who is also a country land-owner and (in all the game) village squire. It would have been very understandable if he had felt that one or the other side of his life had become too time-consuming... but the most profoundly anomalous aspect of his case was that he was also a Conservative Member of the Parliament (FOWLES, 1988, p. 189).

Mr. Marcus Fielding was last seen by his secretary Miss Parson on the previous Thursday afternoon. According to her, he got into a cab when leaving his apartment in Knightsbridge, as he had a board meeting with his party members and also a patient to attend later. As usual, he gave surgeries twice a month, so he was supposed to be following his habitual schedule. Inexplicably, Fielding did not meet the agent who might drive him home. When argued, Mrs. Fielding does not have much to say. She had even tried to phone him after Thursday afternoon, but there was no reply. After calling friends, she still has no news about her husband. As the narrator adds, Fielding is also healthy and in good shape: ñ[...] he was in good health, a fit man for his age ï no heart trouble, nothing like thatò (FOWLES, 1988, p. 191).

All things considered, his wife grows suspicious he might have been involved in a sexual scandal, like other politicians the year before. Even so, she had no solid proof against him owing to his impeccable demeanor thus far. After making sure her husband missed his appointments at the party offices and at Tetbury Hall, Mrs. Fielding now fears of her public image blemished by the media. After all, Marcusôs disappearance will became the next newsflash all over England and abroad months to come; and no matter how hard she tries, she has no idea of what may have happened to her consort, especially after having checked hospitals and morgues. Everything points to the void which consolidates the big enigma of the story. As the narrator emphasizes, ñThese inquiries also drew a blankò (FOWLES, 1988, p. 191). Many failing attempts to reach him have finally made her believe Marcus Fielding has been kidnapped; and now, different negotiations involving his political decisions or alliances must be checked. Terrorism has been discarded as he was in favor of the Muslins and has never been chased by members of IRA. Besides, his scarce public speeches have usually been uncompromising; and if so, Mr. Fieldingôs disappearance must

be detached from political spheres. Worse still, there is no evident cause for him to have been chased on personal grounds either, which complicates the investigation quite a lot:

> The lady [...] began to discuss other possibilities: a political kidnapping or something of the sort. But Fielding had mildly pro-Arab rather than pro-Israeli views. With many other more ódeservingô cases in the House, he could hardly have been a target for the Black September movement or its like; nor could he ï for all his belief in law and order and a strong policy in Ulster ï have figured very high on any IRA list. Virtually all his infrequent Commons speeches were to do with finance and agriculture. [...] An apolitical kidnapping was no more plausible ï there were far richer men about... and surely one of the two Fielding daughters, Caroline and Francesca, both abroad at the time, would have been more likely victims if mere ransom money was the aim. And again, they would have had a demand by now (FOWLES, 1988, p. 192).

The more they discussed the matter the more it seemed that some kind of temporary amnesia was the most likely explanation at first, but in the end, doctors denied the possibility as Fielding had manifested no preliminary evident symptom days before his disappearance:

> The local doctor was called in from in front of his television set and gave an off-the-cuff opinion over the line. Had Mr. Fielding shown forgetfulness recently? Worry, tenseness? Bad temper, anxiety? All had to be answered in the negative. Then any sudden shock? No, nothing. Amnesia was declared unlikely. The doctor gently suggested what had already been done regarding hospital admissions (FOWELS, 1988, p. 192-3).

Then, it was high time Mrs. Fielding called the local police, but very gravely, she demanded total discretion, provided that ñLike all good Conservatives, she distinguished very sharply between private immorality and public scandal. What one did was never quite so reprehensible as letting it generally knownò (FOWLES, 1988, p. 193). Then, in order to conceal her husbandôs hypothetical misconduct, Mrs. Fielding decided to avoid further details, withdrawing from local journalistsô eagerness to broadcast blasts from aristocrats. As soon as the police inspector took over the case, ñShe tried to sound light and unworried, she was very probably making a mountain out of a molehill, she managed the man, she was desperately anxious not to have the press involvedò (FOWLES, 1988, p. 193).

Even so, the detective was really enthusiastic about solving the mystery when meeting Miss Parson, but to his surprise she remarks that Mr. Fielding has been irreprehensible in whatever he has done. As far as she knows, he has been flawless, morally correct and an exemplar man. As the secretary explains, Fielding has not traveled and there is no justifiable reason for him to be missing:

> The passport was where it should be. She knew of no threatening letters or telephone calls; of no recent withdrawals of large sums of money, no travel arrangements. There had been nothing the least unusual in his behaviour all week. In private, out of Mrs. Fieldingôs hearing, she told the chief superintendent [who] hastily moved in to handle the inquiry that the idea of another woman was ópreposterousô. Mr Fielding was devoted to his wife and family. She had never heard of or seen the slightest evidence of infidelity in her eighteen years as his confidential secretary (FOWLES, 1988, 195).

All the police could know is that Fielding might have entered the British Museum, which was something totally unusual in his routine. But then, they suspected he might have left a taxi to take another at opposite outlet of the building. However, there was nothing but conjectures and hypotheses about his actual whereabouts. Other possibilities just like mental breakdown, paranoia, religious crisis, bankruptcy, official secrets, ghosts from the past, filial disarray, revenge on wife, love affair with either a poor, colored or married woman, repressed homosexuality, gay lived experience, espionage or tax-haven scandals, other illegal liaisons, a hide-out, traveling abroad with false documents, threatening or blackmailing situations were even mentioned but, in the end, all discarded. There was no evidence in his office and, when his bank accounts were examined, ñthere were no explained withdrawals, even in several preceding months, let alone in the week before his disappearanceò (FOWLES, 1988, p. 196).

Taking all these cultural and political implications into account, we can see the strategies Fielding has adopted to remain as a member of the Parliament. Very carefully, has chosen to follow a largely accepted political party, to support minority groups, to say uncompromising public speeches, to behave properly in his public and private life etc. to keep up with power. Indeed, all these aspects lead one to consider the multicultural environment found in England today. Far from being a homogeneous space in terms of

ethnicity and values, contemporary England stands as challenge for a conservative politician described as ñsome kind of Victorian tyrantò (FOWLES, 1988, p. 201). As seen, Fielding faces situations which go far beyond class stratification and veer into questions involving immigrated communities and political affairs with the Irish, which proves England not to be the same since the worldwide phenomenon of Globalization. It is true that, according to Robert Young (1995), Victorian London was already multicultural as the Chinese and Africans from different origins worked in the outskirts or at the outback of the city. However, as Young stresses, the non-white was mostly avoided by Victorian fictionists who neglected the presence of the colonized in metropolitan English spaces.

Unlike such writers, Fowles not only mentions IRAôs constant threats but also the presence of Jews, Arabs and Caribs. After all, when mentioning a suspicious runaway secretary of Fieldingôs, Fowles describes her as a West Indian girl who eloped with a Caribbean guitarist from a West Indian club in Bristol ï ñIt was strictly black to blackò (FOWLES, 1988, 204) ï having nothing to do with Fieldingôs disappearance at all.

This multicultural atmosphere appears as a very prolific scenario for studies on present history, given that the English capital city has become the home of many expatriates, a place where the notion of a culturally unified nation falls apart. For all these reasons, Fowlesôs England suits Hallôs description of Globalized spaces with multifaceted populations: ñWestern Europe has no nations which are composed of only one people, one culture or ethnicity. Modern nations are all cultural hybridsò (HALL, 1996, p. 617).

Although Fielding seemed to have always been careful with his public pronouncements, now, when he is missing for obtuse reasons, he has become front-page news in all the dailies. There are summaries with minute details about his entire career released by the press all over the country and abroad. In general, journalists now make a point to highlight Fieldingôs conventional lifestyle, once he was the...

> only surviving son of a High Court judge, he had gone straight from a First in law at Oxford into the Army in 1939; he had fought the North African campaign as an infantry officer and gained the MC; contracted kalaazar and been invalidated home, finishing the was as lieutenant-colonel at a desk at the War Office, concerned mainly with the Provost-Marshal department. They had followed after the war his success as a

> barrister specializing in company and taxation law, his giving up the Bar in 1959 for politics; then his directorships, his life in East Anglia, his position slightly right of centre in the Tory Party. [...] The abundant newspaper and television coverage, with all the photographs of him, provoked the unusual number of reports from the public. All were followed up, and none led anywhere (FOWLES, 1988, p. 197).

As the case remains as an enigma, Fielding has been declared dead: ñA cloud of embarrassment, governmental, detective and private, gathered over the disappearance. [...] [N]o story can survive an absence of fresh developments. On Fleet Street Fielding was tacitly declared ódeadô some ten days after the story first brokeò (FOWLES, 1988, p. 197). After this pointless perusal, detective Michael Jennings feels very curious and restless. He insists on interviewing the widow once more and talking to her three children, but the more he strives to find out what might have happened, the farther he gets to the resolution of the mystery. The only remaining suspicion lies on Marcus Fieldingôs planned suicide. Even so, ñHe found no one who could seriously believe for a moment that Fielding might have walked deliberately out of a world shortly about to enter the hunting and shooting seasonò (FOWLES, 1988, p. 210). Considering his professional failure, Jennings also reflected on the English police and the way they were led to cover up political scandals and unrest at all costs. As the narrator poses, the sergeant hated his superiors and felt depressed about his frustrated sense of justice and powerlessness in criminal investigations:

> Jennings himself was virtually apolitical. He shared the general (and his fatherôs) view that the police got a better deal under a Conservative government, and he despised Wilson. But he didnôt like Heath much better. Much more that he hated either party he hated the general charade of politics, the lying and covering-up that went on, the petty point-scoring. On the other hand he was not the fascist pig he very soon sensed that Peter [Fieldingôs son] took for him. He had a notion of due process, of justice, even if it had never been really put to the test; and he positively disliked the physical side of police work, the cases of outright brutality he had heard gossip about and once or twice witnessedò (FOWLES, 1988, p. 206).

But right then, Jenningsô ideas about life start foreshadowing Fowlesôs short-storyôs main project on metafiction when the reader learns that, according to the character, life does resemble a game: ñEssentially, he saw life as a game, which one played principally for oneself and only incidentally out of some sense of dutyò (FOWLES, 1988, p. 207).

Actually, the syllogism the narrator proposes points out to textual self-reflexivity because, similarly to a game, life is made of tricks, demanding careful observation from the competitors.

Looking from this prism, the snares someone might face in life can be directly compared to the ambushes the narrator craftily prepares for the reader. Deep inside, the data about Fieldingsôs disappearance and the policeôs investigation are only an intentional way to deceive him/her. In this, Fowles shows the reader how unreliable, manipulative and authoritative can the author/narrator be, leading one hither and thither, maneuvering one to and fro as he/she pleases. Considering that Jenningsôs life is found within the narrative, the text itself is meant to be a game for an attentive reading public. Actually, eyewash about power relations is what Fowles really proposes as he plays not with the investigatorôs role but mainly with the readerôs interaction with the tricky short-story. As the latter gets to the storyôs turning point, he/she can both acknowledge the surprising and creative nature of the text and detect how fooled he/she has been so far. By then, the reader can deduce the intangible enigma is supposed to remain as such, provided that the actual investigation Fowles proposes is exclusively metafictional and not criminal.

The text gradually induces one to think about structural elements of the narrative and how Fowles manages to subvert them, presenting uneventful situations linked to critical reflections on literary theory. By establishing power relations and clarifying the narratorôs total autonomy over the text, the author brings out a post-structuralist discussion concerning the passive condition of the reader and his/she aesthetic derision when discovering the textôs interactive and playful nature. In other words, the story focuses on the rhetorical seduction of the text through specific literary devices and narrative stances, highlighting the narratorôs subtle tyranny both to his characters and to the public.

In allusion to Michel Foucaultôs (1996) discussion of power relations, the literary theorist Jacques Derrida (1980) ruptures with structuralist premise that the narrator, and not the writer, is who dictates the textual law. In this, Derrida posits that the narrative is certainly made of discursive conventions prescribed by the author who imposes a particular point-of-view to the text as he/she holds the readerôs position before concluding his

creation. According to this viewpoint, the author stands on a privileged position, both establishing an account and striving to control not only his/her narrative but the reader in special:

> [W]e might be jolted from our certainties by an allusion that ólô will make the one who says ólô, who is not by force of necessity a narrator, nor necessarily always the same, notes that the representatives of the law, those who demand of him an account in the name of the law, consider and treat him, in his personal and civil identity [...]. [...] [He] ought to be able to speak and recount; as a competent subject, he ought to be able to know how to piece together a story by saying ólô and óexactlyô how things happened to him ï they regard him not only as an óeducatedô man, but also a writer. He is writer and reader, a creature of ólibrariesô, the reader of his account (DERRIDA, 1980, p. 64-5).

Most probably acquainted with the literary discussions in the 1980ôs, Fowles seems to propose deconstructive reflections on Structuralism. Since the ascension of The New Criticism, scholars from Formal Structuralism, mainly the Russian Formalists, plunged into discussions concerning elements of the narrative, developing theories on point-of-view, characterization, time, space etc.; but since Derridaôs questionings of genre as a discursive mode, other scholars have continued his discussion, generating cultural trends linked to Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Post-colonialism, Discourse Analysis and Queer Studies (EAGLETON, 1996).

As Post-structuralism historically coincides with Postmodernism, and postmodern art is prone to irony, Fowlesôs ñThe Enigmaò seems to portray this kind of viewpoint, establishing reflections which transcend Structuralism. This short-story provocatively plays with Narratology, especially from the moment Sergeant Detective Jennings interviews Isobel Dodgson onward. Initially presented as Peter Fieldingôs girlfriend, she meets the sergeant. His first impression on Isobel was very positive, as he ñhad the immediate impression of someone alive, where everyone else had been dead, or playing dead; of someone who lived in the present, not the past; who was, surprisingly, not like Peter at allò (FOWLES, 1999, p. 215). So, the detective finally discovers she is a graduate on language and a writer of stories for children. When they get to talk about her overall ideas on Marcus

Fieldingôs being missing, he feels amazed at her preposterous and unbelievable hypothesis about his absence.

To the sergeantôs surprise, she fancies that their world is fictional, and that all they can see illusive. As she adds, there is a particular creator who takes control over the narrative, mastering what takes place to each of them. If so, this detective is supposed to fail his duty to decipher what may have happened to Fielding. Even though the hypothesis sounds crazy, her sexiness and seductive rhetoric captures his attention more and more. Shifting the storyôs focus, she dares to state that, rather than people, she and everybody else around her are characters; that, supposedly, they live in a plot whose writer has deliberately decided to let go of Fielding. If not, the former allowed the latter to leave the story as Fielding has refused to lead a totally uninteresting life:

> Nothing is real. All is fiction. [é] Letôs pretend everything to do with the Fieldings, even you and me sitting here now, is in a novel. A detective story. Yes? Somewhere thereôs someone writing us, weôre not real. He or she decides who we are, what we do, all about us (FOWLES, 1999, p. 224).

Continuing her suppositions, Isobel believes the writer who has built them up is careless about details. He has randomly given up on providing his story with a closure and, due this fact, the plot is supposed to avoid conclusion. In other words, she claims that the characters have been created by an irresponsible writer who, having abandoned them, will prevent them from discovering what may, actually, have happened to Fielding:

> óA story has to have an ending. You canôt have a mystery without a solution. If youôre the writer you have to think of something. [é] He [the writer]ôd have to make it a kind of spur-of-the-moment thing. Obviously it could have been much better planned, if the missing man had it in mind for some timeô. [é] óSo our writer would have to tear this ending up?ô [asks the sergeant.] [é] óHe ought never to have started it in the first placeô. óWhy?ô (FOWLES, 1999, p. 225). óForgot to plant any decent leadsô. óDoes that suggest something about the central character?ô óYou know, in books, they do have a sort of life of their ownô. óHe didnôt mean evidence to be found?ô [é] óI think the writer would have to face up to that. His main character has walked out on him. So all heôs left with is the characterôs determination to have it that way. High and dry. Without a decent endingô The sergeant smiled down. óExcept writers can write it any way they likeô [, she says]. óYou mean detective stories have to end with everything explained? Part of the rules?ô óThe unrealityô. óThen if our story disobeys the unreal

> literary rules, that might mean itôs actually truer to life?ô She bit her lips again. óLeaving aside the fact that it *has* all happened. óSo it must be true, anyway. [é] There was an author in his [Fieldingôs] life. In a way. Not a man. A system, a view of things. Something that had written him. Had already made him just a character in a book. [é] So in the end thereôs no freedom left. Nothing he [Fielding] can choose. Only what the system saysô (FOWLES, 1999, p. 226-7).

From Isobelôs point-of-view, Fielding has disappeared for being too pathetic and devoid of human flaws. He was stereotypical, too honest, too politically correct, totally caricatural, someone below the status of a character and mainly of a person. Owing to this, he deserved to be abducted from the narrative and never to be found either because he endeavored to or because the writer demanded so. As Isobel poses, ñI think in real relationships people are rude to each other. They know itôs safe, theyôre not walking on ice. But Peter said theyôd always been like that. He told me once, heôd never once heard them have a row. Always that façade. Front. Perhaps I just came in late on something that had always been thereò (FOWLES, 1999, p. 219). That would explain the reason why the enigma was to be sustained and remain unsolved.

Having heard that, the sergeantôs self-confidence, his rational capacity and even sense of reality, they all vanish instantly, making him feel powerless and useless in such situation because, if Isobel is right, the expectations about his existence, his free will and decision-making are all ruined. To the detective, her theory sounds uneventful, leading him to a hopeless condition, to a nonsensical and meaningless existence. It destroys and effaces his identity, his conviction of who he is, what he is supposed to pursue in his professional career and so forth: ñThe sergeant felt the abyss between them; people who live by ideas, people who have to live by facts. He felt obscurely humiliated, to have to sit here and listen to all this [é]ò (FOWLES, 1999, p. 227). Being so, the detective gets lost in a maze, shaken by the enigma which transcends his scientific understanding of facts. Though he strives to embody the condition of the Cartesian subject, the Jennings suits the profile of a contemporary *roman noir* inspector. He lives in an incomprehensible universe, supposed to be lost and deprived of answers about his existence or the roles he might play in life.

From Isobelôs standpoint, the characters are meant to play specific parts in the plot and to never change their future. After all, the writer has predestined their fate dictatorially,

manipulating his characters as he wills. Although the detective claims her comments to be commonsensical, Isobelôs apparent lunacy metaficionally explains what the reader has been aware of: that the individuals involved in this enigma are nothing but fictional representations, and that the world in which they live is unreal and uneventful. What must be noted, however, is that metafiction arouses in the text so as to de-construct the detective story traditional frame and to intensify the readerôs interaction with the narrative. This turning point introduces a new topic which ruptures with the first proposition, leaving it incomplete, unexplained and meaningless.

Defeated by the enigma, the sergeant decides to let go of the case and joins Isobel in her new enterprises. She needs to write a detective story and, as he has been sexually interested in her, he accepts the proposition. That is how the story ends. At last, the detective yields his mission, gives up on questioning his existential condition and makes a point to enjoy life either by exploiting his creativity or by having sex with a very talented woman. Obviously, the story sounds hilarious and extremely ironic, in a way Fowles surprises the reader with his inventiveness, his approach to metafiction and sardonic sense of human. Anyway, as elicited in the title, the story is about an enigma supposed to remain as such.

As final considerations, I might add that Fowles intentionally fools his reader, frustrating his/her expectations concerning the unveiling of the mystery. In a single story, he points out the multicultural complexity in England nowadays, the difficulties a politician faces to maintain his/her position, he questions upper-bourgeois and aristocratic values and priorities in contemporary Great-Britain; he discusses the de-construction of the classic detective story in a postmodern short-story *à la roman noir*, and just by relativizing the detectiveôs ability to decipher crimes, he still poses that the contemporary subject is a fragmented identity unable to explain every single fact or phenomenon through a scientific or rational method. So as to say, ñThe Enigmaò is undoubtedly a very critical and transgressive text, featuring as a paramount manifestation of artistic self-reflexivity in postmodern fiction.

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