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The Deconstruction of “Metanarrative” of Traditional Detective Fiction in Martin Amis’s *Night Train*: A Postmodern Reading*

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Abstract

This paper examines this view of “unreliable” or “little narrative” or “incredulity toward metanarrative” in Martin Amis’s novel *Night Train* as an anti-detective novel. In so doing, the paper falls into two parts. The first part focuses upon the convention of traditional “reliable” or “metanarrative” in a typical traditional detective story, in which Mike Hoolihan as a detective investigates Jennifer Faulkner’s suicide by collecting all the possible evidences and then examining them in a chronological linear way to solve her enigmatic death: who has killed her? Why was she murdered? If it is suicide, why has she ended her life? However, the paper also discusses that the way Mike passionately attempts to solve Jennifer’s mysterious death is not possible due not only to lack of evidences but also to the fact that there occurs various interpretations about her death, including Mike’s her one, which, after a while, turns into a psychological evaluation of the case with her own emotional involvement. Hence Jennifer’s death remains a mystery from the beginning to the end in the novel. This situation obviously defies the expectation of her father Tom as in the traditional sense because why Tom hires Mike as an “exceptional interrogator” with an outstanding “paperwork” in the past is to clarify the case and then appease his anxiety, as well as the mystery of his daughter’s death. Through his representation of Mike in such a condition, Amis apparently illuminates that it is almost impossible to create a detective story with a final legitimate total meaning and resolution as in a typical traditional detective novel in an age based on fragmentation, uncertainty, doubt, interruption, lack of authority, and self-expression.

Keywords: Metanarrative, Detective story, Little narrative and anti-detective story.

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Postmodern fiction, together with postmodern critical theory, has tried to deconstruct what Wayne C. Booth calls the “reliable narrative” (1983, pp. 83-4) and what Jean-François Lyotard, French philosopher and literary theorist, calls all-embracing “metanarrative” (1984, p. xxiv) as attempting to provide a comprehensively accurate explanation and understanding of the world through the interpretation of various historical, social and cultural events, human knowledge and experience – sense of completion, resolution, philosophical closure, and historical totality in which every fact and detail are cautiously and logically explained to “legitimate” universal truth, unity and meaning to experience (pp. xxiv, 34-5. See also Creed, 1987 and Habermas, 1997). The “reliable” or “metanarrative” had much to do with the traditional detective fiction. In such a narrative, there is always a horrible mysterious murder as a motive at the very beginning of the story, and a detective is hired to investigate the criminal act in various ways. The detective actively strives to collect all the evidences about the killing as much as possible and eventually evaluates all the findings meticulously in a chronological linear way with the purpose to achieve a total sense of understanding of all the clues and then reach a solid reliable solution about the awful enigmatic slaying by removing mystery, suspense and ambiguity in the mind of the reader: that is, the reader must learn in a realistic way the truth of how the murder has taken place and who has committed it, and ultimately the social order and peace are restored. However, historical situations and socio-cultural realities since World War II, which have radically transformed people’s perceptions towards life, meaning, reality, world and literature, have obviously undermined the basis of such a “reliable” or “metanarrative”, interrogating the view of a single unified authoritative narrative as being fixed, total, objective, and truthful in the final resolution. Instead, what both Booth and Lyotard propose is the perceptions of “unreliable” (1983, pp. 143-7) and “little narrative” and “incredulity toward metanarrative” (1984, pp. 60, xxiv), which reject the totality of meaning but favours local and provisional knowledge, multiple voices, openness, self-contradiction, inscrutability and irrelevance in the postmodern sense.

This paper examines this view of “unreliable” or “little narrative” and “incredulity toward metanarrative” in Martin Amis’s novel *Night Train* (1997) as an anti-detective novel. In so doing, the paper falls into two parts. The first part focuses upon the convention of traditional “reliable” or “metanarrative” in a typical traditional detective story. In the novel, Amis parodies the traditional detective story when he represents his fictional character Mike Hoolihan, a former homicide woman police officer, in a way that she privately investigates the death of Jennifer Rockwell, the daughter of Colonel Tom Rockwell, a high-ranking police official. With an insatiable urge, she, like a traditional detective, strives to collect all the possible evidences and then examines them carefully in a chronological way to solve the enigmatic case of Jennifer’s death: who has killed her? Why was she murdered? If it is suicide, why has she ended her life? Secondly, the paper discusses that the way Mike passionately attempts to solve Jennifer’s mysterious death is not possible due not only to lack of evidence but also to the fact that there occurs various interpretations about her death, including Mike’s her one, which, after a while, turns into a psychological evaluation of the case with her own emotional involvement. Hence Jennifer’s death remains a mystery from the beginning to the end in the novel. This situation obviously defies the expectation of her father in the traditional sense because why Tom hires Mike as an “exceptional interrogator” with an outstanding “paperwork” in the past is to clarify the case and then appease his anxiety, as well as the uncertainty of his daughter’s death (Amis, 1997, p. 1). Through his representation of Mike in such a condition, Amis apparently illuminates that it is almost impossible to create a detective story with a final legitimate total meaning and resolution as in a typical traditional detective novel in an age based on fragmentation, uncertainty, doubt, interruption, lack of authority, and self-expression.

Like a typical traditional detective story, *Night Train* opens with the death of Jennifer Rockwell. It seems that she has committed suicide, yet her father rejects this possibility since he thinks that she did not have a solid acceptable reason to do so. Instead of using official channels, Tom hires Mike to investigate privately

the suspicious case of his daughter. As in the traditional crime story, therefore, there are two interwoven stories – the story of the death to be investigated and the story of the investigation to clarify the mystery of the death for the sake of order and justice (Todorov, 1977; Priestman, 2003; Scaggs, 2005; Stolarek, 2011; Anderson, Miranda and Pezzotti, 2012 and Seago, 2014). Joanna Stolarek argues that the detective fiction historically gains its popularity once again “between World War I and World War II” (2009, p. 27). As Stolarek quotes from George Burton, “all detective fiction is based on two murders of which the first, committed by the murderer, is merely the occasion for the second, in which he is the victim of pure and unpunishable murderer, the detective” and the narrative...superimposes two temporal series: the days of the investigation which begin with the crime, and the days of the drama which leads up to it” (Qtd. in Stolarek, 2009, p. 28. Also qtd. in Todorov, 1977, p. 159). As for the murder and investigation, Heather Worthington states that “Crime fiction is, centrally, about a crime and its investigation” (2011, p. 1). For Edward Quinn, crime fiction is “a type of fiction in which a crime or series of crimes is solved by a detective, either an amateur or a professional, and, if the latter, either a policeman or a ‘private eye’ (private investigator). The basic formula...consists of a murder or disappearance...” (2006, p. 114). Quinn continues to state that crime involves “a cluster of baffling clues that invites the reader to match wits with the detective”, “a number of plausible suspects” or “a detective who employs rigorous logic and creative intuition in solving the crime” by interrogating “a sidekick, spouse, servant, or, in the case of the private eye, secretary to provide [reasonable and satisfactory] relief” (p. 114). Moreover, Karen Seago also defines and explains the main engagement of crime fiction in a slightly different way, which, she argues, also changes from one culture to another:

It is about the transgression of a country’s legal, moral and social values, about understanding how and why this transgression occurred and, with the solving of the case, it is about returning to the normative centre of that society. Because crime fiction engages with the motives and means of how a crime is committed, it is deeply concerned with characterisation, psychological motivation and the minutiae of everyday life which give the investigating detective clues to departures from what is considered normal. Crime and criminals are indicators of what a particular culture views as legitimate and crime fiction functions as a barometer of a society’s values and morals reflecting and interrogating what is inscribed as crime. The central engagement with what, who and why a particular behaviour or action is deemed deviant gives insight into structures and ideologies of power and is indicative of cultural and social anxieties at a particular time in a particular culture (2014, p. 2).

As seen in the discussions above and elsewhere, tradition detective or crime fiction deals with a murder case which is committed at the very beginning of story, and then investigations, which aim at elucidating the mystery behind how and why the murder has taken place, start at once. The story lines traces the chronological linear narrative, in which the detective tries to collect all the overt and covert evidences, questions relatives, close friends, wives or husbands, boys/girlfriends and meticulously examines official and unofficial documents for solving the case. This narrative process, which obviously arouses worries and suspicion of the reader, has two aspects. First, the reader or audience knows at the very beginning who committed the murder even though the detective does not know, so that the reader or audience closely follow up how the detective will solve the case of the murder. Secondly, both the detective and reader or audience do not know how and they the murder has taken place or who has committed the crime, so that they join together emotionally in their efforts to find who committed the crime and why and how. In this case, suspense continues till the very end of the story. However, what is the fundamental purpose of the traditional detective fiction is that the metanarrative narrative, as in a typical traditional realist fiction, should come to a fully satisfactory conclusion through strenuous and painstaking work of the detective,

which will restore not only the social order, justice and peace, but it will also remove all the uncertainties and mysteries over the story.

Similarly, *Night Train* begins in a way that it evokes a traditional crime story. Jennifer as the daughter of a policeman is “an astrophysicist”, “scientist” and “astronomer” (Amis, 1997, pp. 3, 13). She is very beautiful, cheerful and favourite of everyone, including Mike. Mike watches her “grow into a kind of embarrassment of perfection” (p. 3; emphasis added). She seems quite happy in her life, “cool, self-sufficient” and “unreproachable” without any ostensible financial problem (p. 9), yet she commits suicide by shooting herself in the head with a pistol. It is Mike who informs Tom of his daughter’s death, yet he, like any father, does not want to believe that his daughter may have killed herself, and for him, “something’s wrong” about her death (pp. 6-7). For him, there is no obvious reason for her to act in such a horrific way to end her life as he tells Mike: “Correct me if I’m wrong. *Did you ever meet anybody happier than Jennifer? Did you ever hear anybody happier than Jennifer? More stable? She was. She was sunny*”, even though Mike tells him that “No, you’re not wrong, Colonel Tom? But the minute you go into someone. You and I both know that there’s always enough pain” (p. 8; emphasis added): simply, he thinks of how such a happy girl shoots herself at a tender age, so that “*he wants a who*” as in the traditional detective novel (p. 13; emphasis added). Then another opposing question comes at once into Tom’s mind: if she has killed herself, why has she done it?: “If it’s suicide, I [Tom]’m going to feel an awful big *why?*” (p. 13; emphasis added). As the strategy of a successful narrative, these are the basic questions which not only keeps the reader’s attention on alert throughout the novel but also apparently disturb Tom, and thus they must be answered as soon as possible. In order to get convincing answers to these questions, Tom asks Mike to do a favour for him about clarification of his daughter’s death since she is “exceptional interrogator” and her “paperwork was outstanding” (p. 1). Since Tom saves her life in the past, Mike accepts to help him to clarify the mystery behind Jennifer’s death. Upon her acceptance, Tom “has reached down for his briefcase. From it he removed a folder. *Jennifer Rockwell. H97143*. He held it out toward me, saying, ‘*Bring me something I can live with. Because I can’t live with this*” (p. 8; emphasis added). During the process of investigations, Tom constantly brings or sends Mike the documents such as “sealed binder”, “autopsy reports” and many others to help her to finalize the Jennifer case as soon as possible and bring him satisfactory answers to quell his disturbing anxiety (p. 25): simply, he desires to speed up the process and get rid of what bothers him. Indeed, the way Amis represents Tom is a traditional fictional characterisation because the fact that he provides Mike with “a folder”, “sealed binder” and “autopsy reports” about Jennifer and her identity number, as well as his statements, ‘Bring me something I can live with. Because I can’t live with this’, suggests a traditional attempt in a traditional detective story, which solely requires only “*the truth. It is truth. It is the case*” in the end (p. 5; emphasis added). As in the plot structure of traditional detective story, Amis portrays Tom in a way that he wants something truthful, “something neat” and “something that measures up” to get rid of his worry, suspicion and frustration behind his daughter’s death, which obviously annoys him because he still believes that “It wasn’t an accident” (pp. 42, 8). In the respect, Tom becomes the representative of all the characters in a traditional detective novel who expect a pleasing close: that is, all “the truth” about a particular crime is revealed without any uncertainty, and the order and peace are restored once again as in a typical realist novel.

Having accepted to investigate Jennifer’s case, therefore, Mike, like a traditional detective, sets to work at once. She gets “all the chapter and verse” about the death and shores up “a sequence” in her mind to organize all the evidences she will collect, the people she will listen to, the official and unofficial documents she will examine and so on. Moreover, she always keeps her notebook open on her knee to write down whatever evidence she finds and listens to. First, Mike gets help from Tony Silvera, another policeman in her department, who “scans the entire epidermis for abnormalities, marks, signs of struggle. Particularly the hands, the fingertips” on Jennifer’s body while Paulie No, the state cutter, “takes nail clippings, and

performs the chemical test for barium, antimony and lead deposit – to establish that she fired the .22...[He also] takes oral, vaginal and anal swabs. Too, he inspects the perineal area for tearing or trauma” (pp. 10-1). Then Mike starts asking questions to anybody who used to be around Jennifer to get any clues related to her death. First, she interrogates Jennifer’s close neighbours who live in the same apartment if they have recently witnessed any abnormalities in Jennifer or heard any scream coming from her flat just before she committed suicide on March fourth (pp. 16-8). She records everything on type to analyse later on when she gathers all the evidences. Later on, Mike questions Trader Faulkner, Jennifer’s boyfriend, who is Tom’s prime suspect about his daughter’s death. She asks him how they met, how long their relationship has lasted, where he was on the day Jennifer killed herself and so on (pp. 18-25):

I don’t know how much you’ve told me is *just plain bullshit*. I’m assuming the ballistics document is not a hoax or a forgery and I’ll have to live with what it says. Maybe you’ll be good enough to tell me now what’s true and what isn’t. *Mike, you’ve tied yourself up into all kinds of knots trying to make a mystery of this thing*. It’s garbage, as you know. Some little mystery, all neat and cute. But there’s a real mystery here. *An enormous mystery*. When I say I feel homicidal, I’m not lying. On the night she died my feelings were what they always were. Devoted, and secure. But now...Mike, this is what happened: *A woman fell out of a clear blue sky*. And you know something? I wish I *had* killed her. I want to say: Book me. Take me away. Chop my head off. I wish I had killed her. Open and shut. And no holes. Because that’s better than what I’m looking at (p. 25; emphasis added).

Although she forces him to tell her what she wants to hear – that is, she, like Tom, deliberately wants to hear from Trader that he has killed Jennifer (p. 22), Mike compares and contrast him with the criminals she interrogated before and carefully considers what he has borne testimony to his relationship with Jennifer and her death, and eventually she comes to notice that he seems not only to have an air of confidence but also to have convinced Mike of his innocence:

Suspect and interrogator have joined hands on the table. Both are shedding tears. I shed tears for him and tears for her. And also tears for myself I shed. Because of the things I’ve done to other people in this room. And because of the things this room has done to me. It’s pulled me into every kind of funny shape and size. It has left a coating on my body, everywhere, even inside, like the coating I used to expect to see, some mornings, all over my tongue (p. 25).

After that, Mike strives to learn something about Jennifer’s health condition from her physician Hi Tulkingshorn if she had any serious and suicidal “medical history” he has ever witnessed (p. 31). The answer she gets is that Jennifer did not have any such health problems. When she asks him that Jennifer was on lithium and shows the toxicology report, Tulkingshorn is very much surprised and says to Mike that he would have been notified of it.

What she has collected so far about Jennifer’s suicide – type-recording, notes, bunch of folders, hand-notes, testimonies, eye-witness reports and official documents – indicates that Amis obviously represents Mike as a traditional crime investigator who collects all the possible information and documents to solve the mystery behind the crime by coming to a truthful conclusion about the crime. The metanarrative or the main idea behind this attempt is to achieve a sense of legitimate totality of meaning or a satisfactory relief or “the truth” by answering the following questions: who has killed this particular person? Why was s/he killed? Or if the case is suicide, why did this particular person kill herself/himself? Once these questions find their definite answers in a linear flow of narrative through the cause and effect relationship with enough evidences, everyone becomes happy in the end because the murderer is caught and sent to the prison, and

eventually the social order, peace and justice are finally restored: simply, this metanarrative with the idea of its convincing happy ending offers a perfect world commonly shared by everyone – individual and communal - in society.

However, this convincing happy ending about Jennifer's death does not come out in the ways Tom and Mike expected. As Martin Amis represents her, Mike, though an "exceptional interrogator" with "outstanding" "paper works", becomes unable to get enough credible evidences and reach a kind of conclusion about the details behind Jennifer's death Tom wants to get. With lack of persuasive evidences, ambiguity and uncertainty, Amis obviously questions in the novel the very basis of the traditional metanarrative of the detective fiction which used to offer a legitimate explanation of all the facts and evidences through the anticipated completion of comprehensive totality of meaning about a murder. It is visible that Mike's attempt, choice and investigation to accomplish this totality of meaning about Jennifer's death have been the main concern and expectation from the beginning of the novel to the end, yet her investigations remain precarious and fuzzy in its early space. That is, the questions - who has killed Jennifer?" or "why has she ended her own life" – continue to be answered. In this respect, *Night Train*, as it is discussed below, clearly not only resists the legitimating totality of meaning of metanarrative but also undermines the authority of its own text in accordance with the spirit of the postmodern age based upon uncertainty, doubt, fragmentation, lack of absolute truth and unified sources, and self-expression and so on: that is, *Night Train* suggests what Lyotard argues "*incredulity toward metanarratives*":

This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it. To the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it. The narrative function is losing its functors, *its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal*. It is being dispersed in *clouds of narrative language elements-narrative*, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on. Conveyed within each cloud are pragmatic valencies specific to its kind. Each of us lives at the intersection of many of these. *However, we do not necessarily establish stable language combinations, and the properties of the ones we do establish are not necessarily communicable* (Lyotard, 1979, p. xxiv; emphasis added).

Lyotard's view of "*incredulity toward metanarratives*" derives from the view that the metanarrative is an Enlightenment project which started in the eighteenth century in Europe as a result of the Industrial Revolution, the advance of empirical science, the idea of progress, democratisation, and the development of human rights and so on. This project believed that science, reason and rationalism promised to satisfy all human needs as much as possible. That is, science aimed at merging all the aspects of life – individualistic and communal - in which history, philosophy, art and religion were all supposed to come together and explain the absolute truth and totality of meaning – that is, the idea behind the wall was that the metanarrative or discourse of Enlightenment offered a world of order, peace, justice, prosperity and harmony, leading to a perfect world for living. In the period just after World War II, nevertheless, people have come to realize that things did not go forward as they had been promised or as they had expected due to some important events and transformation in society such as World War II, disillusionment with modernity, nuclear and chemical armament, ecological disasters, global warming, and the gradual decreasing of natural resources, immense growth of cyber culture, as well as more liberal approach to what was regarded as tradition. Eventually, the idea of progress promised by Enlightenment has collapsed; instead, there have been views that the world is crumbling, falling into piece and getting worse and worse, so that people in general have started thinking: we are stuck in life, and thus we cannot move forward; the questions are as follows: what can we do? How can we survive in such a world? What is the purpose of

living? Nobody comes up with convincing answers to them. These views apparently led to the emergence of the Absurd Literature developed by Franz Kafka, Albert Camus, Kurt Vonnegut, and Paul Auster, along with the Angry Young Men Movement first named by Leslie Allen Paul. Both movements focused upon the experiences of characters, who, unable to find an essential purpose and meaning in life, are represented through meaningless actions and events as in *Waiting for God* (1952) by Samuel Beckett and *Look Back in Anger* (1956) by John Osborne. In the face of these such unsettling changes and transformations in society, as well as in the perceptions of intellectuals and writers, therefore, Lyotard comes to realize that the system of the production of knowledge, along with the “order” of things as in the past, cannot go forward in such a condition because they used to force us to act in a certain fixed way and thus limited and suppressed our identity and actions for the sake of relatively stable pattern of individual behaviours and social cohesion. Since “The grand narrative [metanarrative] has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation” (Lyotard, 1984, p. 37), therefore, he offers “little narrative” or multiple narrative voices (1979, p. 60), in which meaning loses its autonomy but becomes limited, local and temporary: that is, there is no great idea or metanarrative behind meaning which controls and shapes us, but there are many local voices, views, expressions and so on, which cause multiplicity and diversity in meaning. As for the diversity and multiplicity and diversity, as well as “incredulity toward metanarratives” in literature, Joanne Stolarek argues that the detective genre-form has weakened since 1945 “mostly due to the shift of public interest from strict rules and out-of-date pattern of the classical detective story onto crime fiction, as well as the change of people’s attitude towards life, world and literature” (2009, p. 27). She continues to state that “as a result of the traumatic experiences of World War II, many a reader was no longer keen on the literature which invariably offered them a deep-rooted belief that human conflicts could be solved by reason and intellect, and virtue and righteousness must triumph in the end”, and she takes her argument to the classical detective story: “A classical model of detective story did not cater for the expectations of the new generation of readers. Thus, the post-war writers resolved to transform certain rules of genre and add new elements, such as the aspect of the motive of the crime, a new status of a criminal, detective and a victim, so that they would suit the tastes of the new reading public” (p. 28).

Likewise, *Night Train* is the product of this post-war situation which apparently favours “incredulity toward metanarratives” to “suit the tastes of the new reading public”. Through his representation of Mike’s own life, views and approaches to Jennifer’s case as a detective, in fact, Amis represents his own “incredulity toward metanarratives” in the story-plot of his novel from the very beginning to the end. As soon as the novel opens, for instance, Mike gives us the first hint that her job will be difficult to achieve a kind of clarity and fixity in her investigation: “What I am setting out here is *an account of the worst case I have ever handled. The worst case-for me*, that is. When you’re a police, ‘worst’ is an elastic concept. You can’t really get a fix on ‘worst.’ The boundaries are pushed out every other day. ‘Worst?’ we’ll ask. ‘There’s no such thing as *worst*.’ But for Detective Mike Hoolihan *this was the worst case*” (Amis, 1997, p. 1; emphasis added). Another example is that just after Jennifer commits suicide, her father strives to see her death at once not as a suicide but as a homicide. He does not presume that Jennifer would kill herself without a solid reason but is suspicious of Trader, her boyfriend:

If you’re dealing with the reasonably young and healthy, and if the means is violent, then the homicide/suicide gray area is TV, is bullshit, is ketchup. Make no mistake, we would see it if it was there—because we *want* suicides to be homicides. We would infinitely *prefer* it. A made homicide means overtime, a clearance stat, and high fives in the squad-room. And a suicide is no damn use to anyone.

This isn’t me, I thought. This isn’t me, sitting here. I’m not around.

“Trader?”

“Trader. He was there, Mike. He was the last to see. I’m not saying he... But it’s Trader. Trader owns her. It’s Trader” (p. 7; emphasis added).

Tom insistently wants Mike to find someone who might have killed his daughter as she tells Tony Silvera:

...Listen, you know what Colonel Tom is trying to do.”

“He wants a who. I tell you this. If it’s a suicide, I’m going to feel an awful big why.”

Silvera looked at me. Police really are like foot-soldiers in this respect at least. *Ours not to reason why. Give us the how, then give us the who, we say. But fuck the why. I remembered Something-something I’d been meaning to ask* (p. 13; emphasis added).

The way Tom wants to turn Jennifer’s case from suicide to homicide seems inscrutable and doubtful in the sense that he seems to have something secretive about his daughter’s death or he seems to conceal something from the public. There may be three possible reasons behind her suicide. The first one may be the view that Jennifer is an astrophysicist and studies the universe and stars, as well as meaning behind them. Once compared to the universe, life is very short, and thus Jennifer starts questioning the meaning of life. She finds life empty and meaningless. Then the question is: what is the purpose of living? The second reason may be the disturbing childhood experience of Jennifer. Like Mike, she was exposed to her father’s abuse, whose impact she always “tried to suppress” with “drugs”: “When she [Jennifer] was just a little girl, she asked her daddy...why he came to her bedroom. Why he made her do those bad things. Why he...Oh no. Oh no...That’s okay. But let’s stop this. Jennifer did it. ‘Jennifer did it. See? Why doesn’t everyone just keep their mouth shut. Why doesn’t everyone...just shut the fuck up” (49). This “truth would never occur to anyone sane”, yet Tom seems to be aware of how his daughter was under the influence of his intrusion into her bedroom, and thus he appears to show that he is not the source of his daughter’s being weary of life, as well as the reason behind her death. Finally, as seen throughout *Night Train*, there might be lack of communication or generational conflict between father and daughter in which he may have been unable to understand probably his daughter - her expectation, view of life – because “she just had standard: high ones”, which her father “didn’t meet” (p. 64), so that she might have suffered from lack of understanding, which may have led her to feel herself agonized psychologically and physically as Mike give him a hint: “*the minute you really go into someone. You and I both know that there’s always enough pain*” (p. 8; emphasis added). The following quotation also gives us a hint as to Jennifer’s pain:

I said I never felt judged by her, even when I was defenceless against all censure. And, as of this writing, I feel no need to judge Jennifer Rockwell. *With suicide, as with all the great collapses, exits, desertions, surrenders, it gets so there isn’t any choice.*

And there’s always enough pain. I keep thinking back to that time when I was holed up at the Rockwells’ house, sweating out my soul into the bedding. *She too had her troubles. At nineteen-slimmer, gawkier, wider-eyed-she too was under siege.* I remember now. *One of those late adolescent convulsions, with the parents pacing. There was a spurned boyfriend who wouldn’t or couldn’t let go. Yes, and a girlfriend too (what was it-drugs?), a housemate of hers, who’d also flipped out. Jennifer would give a jolt every time the phone or the doorbell rang. But yet, as sad and scared as she was, she would come and read to me and tend to me.*

She didn’t judge me. And I don’t judge her.

Here's what happened. *A woman fell out of a clear blue sky.*

Yes. Well. I know all about these *clear blue skies* (p. 26; emphasis added).

Through suicide, it appears that Jennifer did not submit herself to "pain", "troubles" and "siege" which her parents seem to have imposed upon her. Her parent may have done it in line with their own value systems – to judge and put her "under siege" against her wishes, so that the way her parents acted towards her did not suit her, her life style and expectations. First, "Jennifer was on Lithium" to escape her unnoticed psychological and physical conflicts as Miriam Faulkner, Jennifer's mother, tells Mike during the funeral:

"You didn't see the toxicology report. Tom made it disappear. Mike, Jennifer was on lithium." Lithium... I absorbed it-this lithium. In our city, in Drugburg here, a police quickly gets to know her pharmaceuticals. Lithium is a light metal, with commercial applications in lubricants, alloys, chemical reagents. But lithium carbonate (I think it's a kind of salt) is *a mood stabilizer*. There goes our clear blue sky. Because lithium is used in the treatment of what I have heard described (with accuracy and justice) as the Mike Tyson of *mental disorders: Manic depression...* "See, Mike, we were looking for *a why*. And I guess we found one. But suddenly we don't have *a who*. Who was she, Mike?"

I waited.

"Answer that, Mike. Do it. If not you, who? Henrik Overmars? Tony Silvera? Take the time. Tom'11 push you some compassionate. Do it. It has to be you, Mike."

"Why?"

"You're a woman"

...

I said, "You're sure *you want an answer?*"

"Tom wants an answer. He's a police. And I'm his wife. It's okay, Mike. You're a woman. But I think you're tough enough." (pp. 27-8; emphasis added).

Why Tom wants to see Jennifer's death not as suicide but as homicide becomes little bit clear because he knew that his daughter was on lithium, yet he has hidden the toxicology report from Mike as though he had something enigmatic. Tom's clandestine attitude noticeably not only arouses suspicion and wonder in the mind of the readers but also makes Jennifer's case difficult to ascertain in the expected way. Hence why Tom wants Mike to consider his daughter's death not a suicide but a homicide hints a hole in the narrative of *Night Train*. There may be two reasons behind. The first one may be the view that he, as briefly debated above, tries to avoid the blame on him for maltreating and not understanding his daughter, her life and expectations because it may both spoil his image as a father and damage his reputation as a high rank police officer. Secondly, if it is homicide, it will help Mike as a detective to collect easily evidences to get a quick answer to placate Tom's urgent desire to get a clear explanation about his daughter's death and pacify the public demand. But what is important here is that once the investigation turns from suicide to homicide, it obviously suits Tom, yet it distorts the whole affairs of investigation from Mike's point of view, and then the story and the detective's investigation go out of its main purpose in the postmodern sense.

As to the quotation above, further complication is also added to the ambiguity of narrative of *Night Train* through the talks of Miriam. She obviously seems silly and awkward in her attitude and talk. On the one hand, she knows that her daughter was on lithium used for the treatment of "mental disorder" and "manic

depression” and that her husband made the toxicology report disappear, yet she does not help Mike to get it for the sake of her daughter’s case. On the other hand, she tells Mike that “*we don’t have a who. Who was she, Mike?*” This question is important in the sense that Miriam constantly vacillates from one view to another – she gives up the question of who has killed her daughter and then focuses upon who Jennifer was. For a mother, it is a silly situation not to know her children. It implies that Miriam, like her husband, did not understand her daughter and what she was interested in life and how she viewed the world – the generation gap, lack of communication between the old and young generations in line with the spirit of the age. Miriam’s ambiguous does not help Mike, either. Hence Miriam believes that Mike is a woman, and thus she may answer the question of who Jennifer was. As a woman, Mike ruminates:

And I said yes. I said yes. Knowing that what I’d find wouldn’t be any kind of Hollywood ketchup or bullshit but *something absolutely sombre. Knowing that it would take me through my personal end-zone and all the way to the other side. Knowing too-because I think I did know, even then-that the death of Jennifer Rockwell was offering the planet a piece of new news: Something never seen before* (p. 28; emphasis added).

The quotation illuminates that Jennifer through her suicide changes “the values” and changes what were “the givens” (p. 50) – “the values” and “the givens” pertained to the past and old generation, which did not suit the tastes of the new generation, so that Jennifer indirectly gives a strong message to the world and to those who still try to force people, like Jennifer, to act according to their own value systems whether they are old or new: that is, the values, pre-given identities and world views are not acceptable any more in the postmodern period. However, Jennifer’s case becomes increasingly even more complicated in that attention turns now from who has killed her to who she was and why she has ended her life. To this complication is also added Mike’s own emotion attachment to Jennifer’s death because she had also been exposed in the past to the same situation in her family (p. 37). For Mike, therefore, rather than viewing Jennifer’s suicide as a crime, Mike thinks that it is “*a piece of new news never seen before*” and an escape from what disturbs a person psychologically and physically, or for Mike, when Jennifer “headed toward death she imprinted a pattern that she thought would solace the living: *A pattern. Something often seen before. Jennifer left clues. But the clues are all blinds*” (p. 63; emphasis added). Eventually, she comes to an emotional conclusion about Jennifer: “what happened. A woman fell out of a clear blue sky. Yes. Well. I know all about these clear blue skies” (p. 26).

Under the impact of all these new evidences, notes, eye-witness reports, type-recordings and other relevant documents, along with ruminations, reflections and ambiguities in the story of *Night Train*, Mike sits down, classifies, analyses and then makes a list:

When I got back home I dug out the list I’d compiled on my return from the funeral. Briskly, boldly, this list is headed, Stressors and Precipitants. *But what follows now seems vague as rain:*

1. Significant Other? Trader. Things he didn’t see?
2. Money?
3. Job?
4. Physical Health?
5. Mental Health? Nature of disorder: a. psychological? b. ideational/organic? c. metaphysical?
6. *Deep Secret?* Trauma? Childhood?

7. *Other Significant Other?*

Now I cross out 4. Which leaves me wondering what I mean by 5 c). And thinking about 7. Is Mr. Seven her lithium connect? (p. 33; emphasis added)

As Amis suggests in the quotation above, Mike as a detective fails to organize her evidences into a smoothly moving linear narrative to elucidate Jennifer's death; the result metaphorically seems vague as rain without a concrete explanation, so that she feels frustrated in the sense that "The narrative doesn't 'unfold'" (p. 35). She always revises and updates her list to come closer to completion: "I dug out my list: Stressors and Precipitants. Yeah, tell me about it. I crossed out 2 (Money?). And I crossed out 6 (*Deep Secret?* Trauma? Childhood?). This doesn't leave me with much. Today I'm doing 3 (Job?). And tonight I'm doing Mr. Seven" (pp. 37-8), yet she is unable to cover and fill the holes in her narrative. But Mike is not daunted by this lack of organization because she believes that she "had an agenda – to win, to prevail" (p. 60). Therefore, she does not want to stick to lack of organization of her list but Amis bestows energy upon her to conclude Jennifer's case; what she endeavours to achieve is that she wants at least to learn the main cause behind Jennifer's suicide and close her case right away by putting things in order, so that she immediately starts from scratch once again over Trader's letters to Jennifer and other documents:

I popped the blue trunk. It contained nine photo albums and nine ribboned bundles of letters-all of them from Trader. This is their history, illustrated and annotated. *And of course ordered. Ordered especially or ordered anyway?* With a premeditated suicide there is generally some kind of half-assed attempt "to put things in order": *To attempt completion. To try for completion.* But I didn't get that vibe here, and figured that the Trader "shrine" had been up and running since year one. I hauled it all out and got myself down there on the rug. Starting at the beginning: His first letter, or note, is dated June 1988:

Dear Ms. Rockwell: Forgive me, but I couldn't help noticing you on Court Two this afternoon. What a beautiful all-court game you have-and what a toreador backhand! I wonder if sometime I could prevail upon you to give me a game, or a lesson. I was the dark-haired, bow-legged hacker on Court One. (p. 34; emphasis added).

As seen in the quotation, Mike does not give up putting things into order as in a traditional detective story "to attempt completion", even though she seems ambivalent and constantly oscillates between her own frustration of inability to organize evidences about Jennifer's death and her strong desires to bring the case to completion – "a sense of ending" - because there is a huge psychological and physical pressure on her and thus "still the handwritten letters keep coming, the words keep coming, the words a woman wants to hear" (pp. 35, 34). Later on, Mike also listens to Jennifer's her boss Bax Denziger concerning her condition at the work place by asking the following questions: how was her psychology? How did she act towards him and her colleagues? Was she on any medication? Did she show any abnormal attitudes or behaviours? Besides, Mike also questions Arn Debs, Jennifer's another friend, who used to meet her once a month and Phyllida Trounce, Jennifer's room-mate at the university, yet she is unable to get considerable information for her help. Furthermore, Mike has also "followed up all the names in Jennifer's address book. I have been through the phone records and the credit-card accounts. And there's only one gap: No hit on the lithium" (p. 46). Finally, she even checks if Jennifer has given any warnings and clues to the people around about her suicidal intention or if she has left suicide-notes which the people normally leave before they commit suicide, giving hints of possible reasons behind why they commit suicide. It helps detectives to straighten out easily the act of suicide, yet there is no such thing Jennifer leaves behind, and thus "the clues were all

blinds”: “Bax Denziger’s mangled algorithm? A blind (and a joke, saying something like: Don’t grind your axe against the universe. I grind mine against mother earth). The paintings she bought? A blind-an indolent afterthought. The lithium was a blind. Arn Debs was a blind” (p. 63).

At the end of these re-collections, recoding, talks, checking, questioning and reflections, however, Mike revises once again her previous list of Stressors and Precipitants and then makes a new one with the intention of finalizing Jennifer’s case:

That list headed Stressors and Precipitants-there’s not much left of it now. To keep myself quietly amused, I think about compiling another list, one that would go something like:

Astrophysics	Asset Forfeiture
Trader	Tobe
Colonel Tom	Pop
Beautiful	

But where’s the point in that? *Zugts afen mir*, right? We should all be so lucky. And even though we aren’t, we’re still here.

Stressors and Precipitants. What remains? We have: 7. *Other Significant Other?* And we have: 5. *Mental Health? Nature of disorder: a) psychological? b) ideational 'organic? c) metaphysical?*

Now I cross out 7.1 cross out Arn Debs.

Now I cross out 5 a). After some thought I cross out 5 c). And then my head gives a sudden nod

And I cross out 5 b). *That, too, I excise. Now there’s nothing* (p. 57).

The quotation suggest that her new list is not too different from the previous one but full of gaps and erasures; there are also many holes and blind points, and thus “the truth would never occur to anyone sane” (p. 49). In the end, Mike, instead of speaking face to face, makes a phone date with Colonel Tom “For several reasons. One of them being that Colonel Tom always knows when I’m not telling the truth. He’ll say, “Meet my eye, Mike”-like a parent. And I wouldn’t be able to do that” (p. 62):

Ten o’clock. I will record and then transcribe.

I have nothing to tell Colonel Tom except lies: Jennifer’s lies.

What else can I tell him?

Sir, your daughter didn’t have motives. *She just had standards. High ones. Which we didn’t meet.* In the Decoy Room, with Paulie No, when I ordered the second seltzer—that was a sweet moment. The moment of deferral. Tasting far sweeter than what I’m tasting now.

I will record and then transcribe. Oh, Father...

Colonel Tom? Mike.

Yeah, Mike. Listen. You’re sure you want to do it this way?

Colonel Tom, *what can I tell you. People point themselves at the world. People show a life to the world. Then you look past that and you see it ain’t so. One minute it’s a clear blue sky. Then you look again and there’s thunderheads all around.*

Slow this down, Mike. Can we slow this down?

It measures up, Colonel Tom. It all measures up. Your little girl was on a break. No doctor was giving her that stuff she was taking. She was getting it on the street. On the - (pp. 64-5; emphasis added).

As it is obviously seen in the quotations above, *Night Train* ends as it started without a solution; mystery about Jennifer's death continues, and it even becomes more complicated when other factors such as Mike's own emotional attached, ruminations, reflections and interpretation become part of the case. With this inconclusiveness, distortions, gaps, holes and blinds in all the evidences about Jennifer's death, which really makes Colonel Tom very angry and frustrated, Mike reduces everything "to a mess of loose ends. And why would I see it like that if it wasn't so? It's the last thing I want. This way, I don't win. This way, I don't prevail. But let's ride with the ketchup—with the procedural ketchup of questions and numbers and expert testimony. Then we can do the *noir* [as *Longman English Dictionary* defines, *noir* is "a film that deals with subjects such as evil, moral problems etc., often using a story about people involved in a crime and filmed in a way that seems dark or filled with shadows"]. *I may still be prov-ably wrong. This is where we came in*" (p. 61; emphasis added).

In conclusion, as seen in the quotations and discussions above, Martin Amis obviously resists in *Night Train* the definition and classification or the main idea of totality of meaning in what Lyotard called the "metanarrative" of the classical detective through his representation of Mike's inability to collect and organize all the evidences about Jennifer's death in a linear way for the sake of social order, as well as of her emotional, subjective and reflective involvement in her investigation and interpretation which is obviously against the empirical and rational reasoning and conclusion in the metanarrative. Instead, there are what Lyotard terms "little narrative" in the novel, in which there are various views about Jennifer's death, which are never interrelated with each other throughout the novel – there are many personal interpretations, evidence-concealment, hidden secrets, unspoken or half-told life stories, blind points, dark holes and three dots in the plot-structure of the novel's story and so on: Amis hides the story of Jennifer's death rather than he solves it. In order to achieve this end, Amis employs traditional detective novel genre as pastiche but plays with it in a way that the genre does not meet the expectation of the reader as in the traditional sense. In this case, Jennifer's life and suicide become the journey of "the night train, *speeding your way to darkness*. You won't get there so quick, not by natural means. You buy your ticket and you climb on board. That ticket costs everything you have. *But it's just a one-way. This train takes you into the night, and leaves you there. It's the night train* (p. 29). In this respect, the meaning of night train is obviously connected with Amis's anti-detective aspects of his novel when night train may imply "darkness" and unknowability of human life as opposed to Enlightenment and realist world view.

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