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TITLE: Politics, Epistemology and the Problems of Rationalism in *La pesquisa*

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ABSTRACT: This article analyzes how Juan José Saer's noir detective novel, *La pesquisa*, exposes the fundamental contradictions of Kantian rationalism. The novel, like Kantian theory, realizes a critique of reason by positing its own human, epistemological limits. Of course, the philosophical problems we see in Saer's novel don't simply exist in a vacuum, but respond to the politics of rationalism within Argentina, namely the 1976-83 dictatorship. I demonstrate how the contradictions within the 'rationalist' politics of the *Proceso* springboards into a discussion of the epistemological problems underpinning rationalism itself. Just as Kant posits that rationalism must repress the darker side of reason (the thing-in-itself) in order to have a functional system, so too the dictatorship repressed its dark, violent side in order to present itself as the only hope for order for Argentina. Thus, the novel pairs politics with philosophy by delving into what can and can't be known as well as the socio-political structures that impose such limits.

KEYWORDS: Argentina, Juan José Saer, philosophy, dictatorial literature, noir

RESUMEN: Este artículo analiza cómo *La pesquisa*, novela negra de Juan José Saer, expone las contradicciones principales del racionalismo kantiano. De acuerdo con la teoría kantiana, la novela realiza una crítica de la razón al plantear sus límites humanos y epistemológicos. Como es de suponer, estos problemas filosóficos no existen en aislamiento, sino que responden al racionalismo político de la dictadura de los años setenta y ochenta. Demuestro cómo las contradicciones de la política racionalista del Proceso de Reorganización Nacional sirve como punto de partida para una discusión en torno a los problemas epistemológicos del racionalismo en sí. Tal como Kant asevera que el racionalismo ha de reprimir el lado oscuro de la razón (la cosa en sí) para tener un sistema funcional, así también la dictadura se vio obligada a reprimir su lado oscuro y violento para presentarse como el guardián del orden. De este modo, la novela combina la política con la filosofía para investigar los límites del saber, amén de las estructuras sociales que imponen dichos límites.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Novela negra, filosofía, literatura de la dictadura, racionalismo, teoría crítica

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Politics, Epistemology and the Problems of Rationalism in *La pesquisa*

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Of the many characteristics of the *roman noir*—the darker, more tragic, and psychologically profound vein of crime literature—anxiety plays a key role. Anxiety seemingly floats throughout the city streets and curls around the detective's head like rings of smoke from his cigarette. While anxiety may stem from many sources: gender, sexuality, race, and nationalism, to name a few,¹ one source that deserves more attention is the problems within rationality. Given the more nihilistic bent of crime novels by the likes of Chandler, Hammett, or in the more contemporary period, James Ellroy, one can't help but notice a certain insecurity underlying the detective's ability to solve the case or decipher the enigma that is society. Even if a Philip Marlowe or a Sam Spade is able to get to the bottom of a particular crime, we as readers are still left wondering if we truly understand the characters' psychotic neuroses or the broader societal structures which have engendered them. Noir literature makes us question to what extent concepts like rationality and order are actually compatible with a dystopian modern society.

Such unease concerning rationality and order pervades the contemporary *novela negra* within Argentina, especially Juan José Saer's *La pesquisa*. The novel exudes an obvious insecurity about the possibility for pure, unmediated knowledge while simultaneously engaging in a methodical interrogation of Kantian rationalism. It appropriates a philosophical register in order to explore this disquietude surrounding thought and the social order. This theoretical take on crime literature is consistent with a good deal of Saer's other novels and essays that deal precisely with problems of truth, fiction, reality,

and epistemology.² What is distinct about the novel, however, is its use of Freudian anxiety as a reaction to problems within rationalism.³ This essay aims to explore how, in the novel, rationalism, both in philosophical and political terms, must necessarily dissimulate some darker, more irrational counterpart in order to be a functional system. As is always the case with noir literature, such repression actually leaves a remainder of unease that translates onto the written page.

Let us begin with a brief synopsis of the crime narrative within the novel. Morvan, a police detective, is investigating the crimes of a serial killer in Paris. The killer has left a trail of some twenty seven victims, all of them elderly widows, and has consequently placed the city into a state of paranoia. On one level, the killer is an imprecise yet constant threat lurking beneath the normal flow of city life. On another, more personal level, he haunts Morvan. The detective spends excessive amounts of time gazing out his window, trying to divine where the next crime will occur and constructing a coherent narrative that could explain away the beastly and yet carefully executed murders. In more ways than one, Morvan is an obsessive Kantian subject who, from a seemingly objective distance, attempts to put together the clues to arrive at enlightenment. The novel's narrator actually draws a comparison between Morvan and Immanuel Kant, claiming that the detective's colleagues easily could have mocked his excessive rationality as did Nietzsche with Kant:

No había, en su capacidad de trabajo, ningún elemento estoico ni ninguna fantasía de redención, sino la facultad orgánica, que parecía natural, de olvidarse de sí mismo para concentrarse,

metódico, en lo exterior. De haberlo conocido, sus colegas hubiesen podido aplicar a su persona el sarcasmo de Nietzsche a propósito de Emanuel Kant—¡Esa existencia de araña! (24)

As is to be expected, the detective has carefully charted out a map of all the crime scenes, trying to distill some sort of geometric method⁴ to the madness of the killer. While the crimes are becoming more and more circumscribed within the space immediately surrounding the police station, they are continually unpredictable. It is as if the shadowy psychopath's unnerving proximity to Morvan were a personal challenge or an effort to taunt the detective.

In the penultimate crime scene, Morvan stumbles upon a tell-tale clue. A tiny, uncanny shred of paper reminds him of an outwardly innocent meeting between him and his colleagues Lautret, Combes and Juin. In the meeting, Lautret mockingly reads an official letter sent to the precinct from the headquarters of the criminal brigade, chastising them for their failure to make significant progress in the investigation. He defiantly tears up the letter. Morvan can't help but wonder if this tiny piece of paper found in the crime scene isn't from the same document. After piecing together the letter from the shreds left in his garbage pail, a gesture which itself reiterates the detective's obsessively Kantian traits, Morvan is able to confirm that there is, indeed, one piece missing. The shred he finds at the crime scene is, in fact, that very missing piece.

Morvan deduces that his colleague, Lautret, must be secretly committing the crimes. He decides to keep close tabs on him, all the while waiting for him to incriminate himself. When he learns that Lautret is scheduled to meet that evening with an elderly widow, Madame Mouton, he beats him to the apartment in order to forestall a further murder. However, while visiting the widow, Morvan blacks out, only to awaken in her bathroom naked and bloody, promptly coming to the disquieting

solution that he himself is the murderer and that he has been committing all of the crimes unconsciously. His intuition of the killer's proximity, which he had previously projected onto his colleagues, in fact, turns out to have emanated from his own buried *id*. This noir novel thus criticizes the traditional detective model, and discloses the awful truth which may lie beneath the apparently rational surface of the detective figure. More profoundly, however, Sauer's novel questions rationality itself, and shows what it must repress in order to establish a coherent thought system. As we see with the novel, repression is never complete, but rather leaves a trace of anxiety which is only faintly legible.

Such anxiety remits to the more fundamental problems of Kantian ratiocinative philosophy⁵ which must inevitably create an epistemological barrier or limit in order to 'make sense.' In other words, *something* must be dissimulated. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant calls attention to this particular epistemological blind spot which is necessarily omitted from any form of judgment: the "thing-in-itself." While the subject wishes to "know" the world, all knowledge is inevitably created internally. The actual "thing-in-itself," as something separated from the subject by laws of time and space thus, cannot be accessed:

We should know, indeed know completely, our manner of intuition, i.e., our sensibility, but always under the conditions adhering to the subject originally, i.e., the conditions of space and time. What the objects may be in themselves would never become known to us even through the most enlightened knowledge of that which alone is given to us, namely, their appearance. (75-76)

Without this necessary omission, rationalism cannot function, as it falls into an obtuse philosophical ignorance as demonstrated by Descartes' *Discourse on Method*. Kant's ongoing affirmation of the subject's place as the

creator of knowledge is, in a sense, haunted by the reality of something that has been suppressed.

The narrative anxiety alludes to this blind spot. Once again, the unease Morvan experiences within the urban space tells him that there is something that escapes his purview—something he cannot know, which, given his Cartesian traits, is disturbing. In an expressionistic gesture, the city acts as a screen onto which are projected his own epistemological uncertainties about the killer:

Desde hacía meses no ocupaba un solo minuto de la vigilia a otra cosa que no fuese la sombra extrañamente cercana y sin embargo inasible que salía, en el anochecer, vertiginosa y metódica, a golpear. Parado cerca de la ventana, en la tarde de diciembre, de vuelta del restaurante, miraba, con cierta ansiedad, el día gris que declinaba rápido, a través de los vidrios helados de su oficina. (43)

This expressionistic⁶ passage posits the problematic relation between the subject and the outside object world, or in this case, Morvan and the city. While the city is typically one of those places that he knows quite well, as he has carefully explored and investigated all of its different nooks and crannies, the more oneiric vision of the city at night is hazy and encloses a shadowy secret.

Insofar as Paris is a “hazy” city, it cannot be totally grasped. We can easily venture a symbolic interpretation of this haze as something which resists form and category, which are the modes of knowledge and judgment for the Kantian system: “The categories, on the part of the understanding, contain the grounds of the possibility of all experience in general” (Kant 168). If for Kant form and category are everything, here they are negated. The killer is likewise thought of as a shadow—something which constantly escapes the categorical, more rationalistic interpretations which are applied to this monster “o lo que fuese.” The criminal is referred to as “la distorsión sin nombre que

pulula en el reverso mismo de lo claro” (40). In this sense, we can posit both the dark, hazy city, as well as the evanescent killer it houses, as allusions to a sort of “thing-in-itself” which is the underlying limit to Morvan’s comprehension. It is the dark irrational territory which serves as a necessary byproduct to the Kantian *a priori* categories and forms.

Knowledge created within one’s own personal Cartesian theatre, thus, implies an outside, inaccessible sphere, which, while unknowable, still crops up unexpectedly within rationalism. This is most evident when the narrator, in probably his most metaphysical turn in the story, refers to the crimes “como si todo hubiese ocurrido en un universo contiguo al de las apariencias, al que ni la voluntad, ni la causalidad, ni la razón, ni el espacio, ni el tiempo, ni los sentidos tienen acceso” (45). Of course, the fact that Morvan is denied access to such a realm, and that there is in fact a limit to rationality itself, is the principal cause for his disquietude.

This anxiety, in addition to being epistemological, is political. In fact, the Parisian crime narrative is only one half of the novel, while the other half takes place within the Argentine context. The noir story is being told by the reoccurring Saerian protagonist Pichón Garay, to his friends Tomatis and Soldi. Pichón has just returned to Argentina from Paris in order to finish selling off the family estate. During his tableside discussions with Tomatis and Soldi, he relates the crime story with Morvan, which has become a spectacular media phenomenon in Paris. As is to be expected, Pichón and his friends engage in some enjoyable, pretentious discussion about the story, all the while ignoring more weighty matters. Pichón’s twin brother, Gato, is in fact one of the *desaparecidos*—a victim during the dictatorship. While Pichón may have come to settle certain familial issues in Argentina, he fails to deal with this more pending issue. Even when he and Tomatis pass by the house where Gato was purported to be at the time of his disappearance, they are unable to dialogue about this political history that ceaselessly haunts them.

We can therefore read the police story as a displaced allegory for the political reality of Argentina. Florinda Goldberg has written a thorough study of the crime narrative's allusions to the dictatorship, specifically to the issue of the disappeared. In her article, "*La pesquisa* de Juan José Saer: alambradas de la ficción" she states that

Juan José Saer utiliza el modelo de la novela policial como mediación semiótica para medirse con un tema central de la reciente experiencia histórica y moral argentina: la imposibilidad de saber qué ocurrió a (cada uno de) los desaparecidos durante el período de la represión. (89)

This connection between the noir story and Argentina's political context makes it possible to draw parallels between the critique of epistemology within the crime story, and a similar critique of political rationalism, which must likewise dissimulate its darker side in order to prop itself up as a natural stage in the evolution of civilization. As a practitioner of the Latin American *novela negra*, Saer's work maintains its political relevance.⁷

Like Morvan, rationalist politics within Argentina have labored to keep their more irrational side out of view. The legacy of the civilization/barbarism debate exemplifies some of these problems. In order for civilization to triumph, it needed to hide its own barbaric political practice. In the case of Sarmiento, this would be the unenlightened violence of civilization itself and the eradication campaigns aiming to civilize the *pampa*. While *La pesquisa* obviously remits to this entire genealogy of rationalism within Argentina, it responds more directly to its own immediate, contemporary context—that of dictatorship and post-dictatorship. It is at this historical juncture that the contradictions between civilization and barbarism arrive at their apotheosis, thoroughly converging and thus demonstrating how rationality has always conveniently hid its more truculent side.

The military coup in 1976 and initiation of the *Proceso*, wherein the military sought to "save" the nation from the threat of the militant left by initiating a campaign of terror against "subversives," was and continues to be lauded by certain sectors as the logical step in stabilizing and modernizing the country. Leftist militants were branded as terrorists and seen as a sickness that was a constant hindrance to "order" and the nation's insertion into the global economy. Not only did the *proceso* respond to the logic of capitalism itself, but its accompanying campaign of terror embodied a very systematic eradication of those diseased sectors of society which sympathized wholeheartedly or were only loosely contaminated by their association with the *montoneros* or other leftist activists. The "rationalistic order" imposed by the military thus implied a very sinister form of violence which is more nonsensical than sensical, more comparable to the dark irruptions of the *id* into society than the *ego*. When we consider that such violence was actually carried out in clandestine fashion (the term for victims is actually *los desaparecidos*) we see how a purportedly "logical" operation actually shrouds its more illogical counterpart.

While obvious differences abound between the Argentine dictatorship and Kantian rationalism, one thing is for sure—both imply a certain blind spot, or absence within the field of knowledge or ideology. For Kant, this is the "thing-in-itself," which by definition cannot be perceived. For the political context of Argentina, this is the violent side of the *Proceso* which is strategically hidden from view, but continually haunts the nation as a kind of Lacanian real underpinning the social order. *La pesquisa* bridges the gap between the political and the philosophical by exhuming the similar contradictions latent within each. The contradictions within a politics of rationalism leads us to dig deeper into the epistemological problems underpinning rationalism itself—to delve into what can and can't be known, as well as the socio-political structures which impose such limits.

As we see in *La pesquisa*, the central crux of noir is that moment when this very blind spot itself becomes apparent. As Žižek states, “This then is the noir that defines the noir universe: that crack in the half open window that shakes our sense of reality” (220). In other words, noir grants us that supplement of irrationality that creeps into the epistemological field in order to destabilize knowledge and, thus, let us know that such a threat has always been a definitive part of thought. It gives us the disturbing news of irrationality’s permanent alliance with the rational as they mutually determine one another. The delirious killer is thus a necessary by-product of Morvan’s overly ebullient affirmation of reason, and his own Kantian “forms” of thought which by definition leave a remainder. He is so rational, that it is ultimately to his detriment. His obsessive methods, rather than embodying the ideals of the enlightenment, end up being pathological.

This internal Freudian tension between the lucid ego and the darkly absurd id signals a certain inability for the detective subject to know even himself. Of course, the detective has completely repressed his more sordid actions. In the moment the repressed returns, when, naked and bloodied, he must come to terms with his killer-self, he is unable to recognize his own reflection:

Pero cuando con movimientos inhábiles y lentos cerró la canilla y limpió el espejo con la palma de la mano, a pesar de que el espejo reflejaba su propia imagen, no la reconoció como suya. Él sabía que él era él, Morvan, y sabía que estaba mirando la imagen de un hombre en el espejo, pero esa imagen era la de un desconocido con el que se encontraba por primera vez en su vida. (174)

While the novel may, in a very Saerian fashion, claim that psychoanalysis is just one discourse among many used to explain Morvan’s behavior, we mustn’t totally discard the valence of such theory. We definitely see a blind

spot within his *ego*—a darker side which is difficult to account for. The anxiety of the city space is, thus, merely an external projection of Morvan’s more internal turmoil. Just as the city encloses the inaccessible secret of the killer, so too does his own *ego*:

Por primera vez desde que tenía ese sueño, Morvan comprendió que esa ciudad se erigía en lo más hondo de sí mismo, y que desde el primer instante en que había aparecido en el aire de este mundo, nunca había transpuesto sus murallas para salir a un improbable exterior. (173)

Thus, expressionism illustrates one of the more central problems or concerns of Kantian rationalism. If the subject’s knowledge is always somewhat limited by its own internal constraints, then it cannot even come to a complete knowledge of itself:

What underlies this whole difficulty here is how a subject can internally intuit itself; and this difficulty is common to every theory...for this capacity then does not intuit itself as it would represent itself immediately and self actively, but according to the manner in which it is affected from within, and consequently intuit itself as it appears to itself, not as it is. (80-81)

In other words, if one can’t totally know the object world—which is the central premise of Kant’s critique—then neither is self comprehension possible, since the self is contemplated as an object. Morvan’s self understanding is limited to the concepts or forms which he himself creates—an autonomous, methodical, and very enlightened detective—which, as we see, have left a bloody remainder.

Paradoxically, while the dark, incoherent elements of the human psyche are left out in order for the enlightened cogito to take center stage, the latter still depends upon them, if only to define itself against them. In a very contradictory manner, self knowledge turns

into a dialectic between rational and irrational. Freud himself states that we can't have one without the other, and that the boundary between *ego*, *super-ego* and *id* is rather fluid: "When you think of this dividing up of the personality into ego, super-ego and id, you must not imagine sharp dividing lines such as are artificially drawn in the field of political geography" (110). Likewise, Morvan's unconscious barbarism is shown to be the product of a very carefully planned system, painstakingly executed in an effort to uphold his own twisted sense of "order":

El hombre solitario que cometía esos crímenes chapaleaba sin la menor duda en el fango de la demencia, pero para su realización práctica era capaz de desplegar las sutilezas más variadas de la astucia, de la psicología, y de la lógica, sin abstenerse de observar una pericia exacta en su manipulación del plano material, como lo probaba la ausencia total de pruebas que podía verificarse de sus crímenes y de sus desplazamientos. (31)

Of course, this precarious interdependence of rationality and irrationality doesn't merely exist within a philosophical/literary vacuum, but actually responds to concrete historical circumstances within Argentina. If we delve a bit further into the Argentine military's history, we see that, more than being a mere byproduct, its primitive, brutish side was actually a concomitant part of its vision of order. In order to legitimate their occasional interventions throughout the 60s, the military had to project an image of stability amidst the chaos of Argentine civil society. When they were not in power, during the Frondizi and Illia administrations, the military strategically distanced themselves from politics in order to prop themselves up as a more "professional" entity. This "professionalization," however, is paradoxical in that its ultimate goal was always political intervention. By temporarily distancing themselves from politics, the military could be the most

qualified authority when intervention and suspension of democracy were "inevitably necessary." The Argentine political scientist Guillermo O'Donnell sees this ultimate coup as the "second stage" within the military's process of professionalization:

In a second stage, that same motivation [professionalization] contributes toward the execution of a new coup d'état, which inaugurates a "bureaucratic" type of political authoritarianism. This coup d'état implies a level of political participation by the military and militarization of social problems that greatly exceed what could have been attempted by officers of a less professionalized institution. Therefore in conditions of high modernization, a relatively high level of military professionalization is achieved that in short induces the most intense and comprehensive type of military politicization. (418)

As we see, the military's goals, though seeming to safeguard a rational order in the interim, are ultimately over-determined by an irrational, antidemocratic and anti-enlightenment impulse—authoritarianism. In a paradoxical sense, rationalism is at the same time, irrational. Saer himself has called attention to this double bind within the so called "enlightened" politics of Argentina claiming that said notions of "order" are blatantly contradictory. In his essay "Literatura y crisis argentina" the author addresses specifically the military's uncivilized intervention into civilian government in order to quell popular political movements. Saer refers to these contradictions within the military as:

todas las incongruencias teóricas, políticas y morales, tales como actuar en nombre del orden anulando la Constitución, invocar la patria a cada momento y plegarse a los designios de las potencias mundiales, decirse los campeones de la libertad y encarcelar a los particulares por sus opiniones políticas,

pretenderse occidentales y cristianos y mostrar un refinamiento oriental en el ejercicio de la tortura, etc., etc. (115)

Saer's analysis of the military's contradictory *raison d'être* is a plausible context for *La pesquisa*, where we see similar conflicts. The killer is a direct corollary to the Argentine military—he is an authority within Paris, regulating the activities, indirectly imposing a curfew, and governing through paranoia. The very contradiction within the military's politics of professionalization finds itself condensed within the shadowy killer in the novel, who likewise possesses his own system of unenlightened, preposterous "logic."

These problems of philosophical and political nature constitute the core of Morvan's disquietude. As guardian of Paris, a supposed bastion of enlightenment, the detective can't help but sense some other, more deplorable underside to rationalist thought and politics.⁸ However, in spite of its critique, the novel does not amount to an all out rejection of rationalism, as has been now the common interpretation of similar "postmodern," "antidetective" novels.⁹ Rather than flat-out discarding rationalism, Saer goes to painstaking lengths to show why it is flawed—to flesh out the many problems of an isolated, thinking subject. If indeed Saer demonstrates the problems underlying Kantian thought (and Cartesian, for that matter), we must remember that these are problems that Kant himself recognized and grappled with. The philosopher's works are likewise *critiques* of reason and judgment which, while exposing problems, still attempt to work through them and rescue notions of enlightenment. In light of Kant's stance, we must wonder if Saer's critique isn't as well a desire to "work through" the problems of rationality. His careful deconstructive exposition within *La pesquisa* is, after all, an effort to *understand* the nuances and problems of ratiocinative practice. Paradoxically, by contesting rationalism, the novel embodies it, and further reinforces the need for a genuine "pesquisa" into thought and politics.

Notes

¹In their study *Noir Anxiety* Kelly Oliver and Benigno Trigo maintain that there is a certain insecurity underpinning issues of gender and race in classic film and novel noir. Notwithstanding the hard-boiled private eye's vision of himself as a potent white male, who is fully secure in his sexuality and identity, there is always a disperse remainder of disquietude Oliver and Trigo see this remainder, or free-floating-anxiety, as a discrete questioning of white American male identity: "The existential angst, moral ambiguity, and style of noir produce a sense of free-floating anxiety that we anchor to a complex constellation of concrete anxieties over race, sex, and maternity" (XIV).

²If we look at Saer's broader view of knowledge, as posed in essays like "El concepto de la ficción," "La narración objeto," as well as novels like *El entenado* or *Nadie nada nunca*, we already see a certain tension regarding the formation of thought wherein we see a tense dialectic between brute experience and discursive knowledge. In this sense, epistemology and the possibility for knowledge would reside in this ongoing conflict between what is perceived on an empirical, and physical level, and what is interpreted on the level of discourse. Scavino defines Saerian epistemology as such:

De modo que existe una relación problemática entre las dos series: la descripción—las imágenes o las cosas invisibles—y el relato—la palabra—que invoca, sobre el fondo del acontecer invisible, un sentido, una relación (relatum) posible entre esos fragmentos materiales insignificantes. Por eso en la literatura de Saer la disyunción no es narrar o describir: la narración es este encuentro, o más bien esta superposición dispareja, problemática, de las series disjuntas de la descripción y el relato, lo sensible insensato y lo sensato insensible. (50-51)

³Jorgelina Corbatta likewise sees a connection between psychoanalysis and a kind of deconstruction of rationalism within the novel:

En resumen *La pesquisa* trata de aprehender la complejidad de lo real, en un momento histórico determinado, mediante un género—el policial cuyo núcleo es el crimen—y mediante un método preciso, el psicoanálisis, cuyo móvil es el inconsciente. En ese sentido

lo más importante sería aquello de lo que no se habla, en este caso por una doble censura interna y externa, que reprime el núcleo del relato. (93)

⁴Morvan's geometrical method is an indelible nod to Borges' "La muerte y la brújula" and the story's similarly rationalistic detective, Erik Lönnrot. Both Morvan and Lönnrot's use of geometrical shapes to solve the case remits to the use of forms and categories by rationalism in order to interpret the object world. And in both cases, such an affirmation eventually leads to the doom of both detectives—they lead Lönnrot to his death at the hands of Red Scharlack, and Morvan eventually discovers that he is the very killer he is searching for. This coincidence between Saer's novel and Borges' story begs us to reassess Borges' use of the detective genre and to ask ourselves if the writer wasn't inadvertently anticipating noir literature, despite his alleged antipathy for the genre. For an account of Borges stated views of noir and hard-boiled literature, see Jorge Lafforgue's *Asesinos de papel: ensayos sobre narrativa policial*.

⁵Interestingly enough, both Kant and Saer share a similar preoccupation for knowledge created by the subject. According to Jorgelina Corbatta, El mencionado principio de realidad es fundamental en Saer quien concibe al mundo como un objeto definido a partir de la percepción individual y por lo tanto intransferible y de difícil comunicación (de ahí la frecuencia de sus construcciones hipotéticas). El mundo entendido como una construcción del sujeto, única e intransferible. (67)

⁶By mentioning Expressionism, I am referring to an already well known aesthetic trend within noir literature. It is probably more obvious in film noir, which was historically influenced by German Expressionism and the Weimar tradition. Forster Hirsch, in his seminal study on film noir, references Fritz Lang's use of Expressionism in his film *M*. In this movie, we see a similar correlation between inner psychology and external ambience:

The Expressionist tendencies of Lang's mise en scene are emblematic of an internal reality; the dark streets, the abandoned storage area where the haunted man takes refuge, the frames within the frame that seem to box the character into corners, all reflect the child murderer's mounting agitation. (57)

⁷Amelia Simpson, in her indispensable study of Latin American detective fiction claims that even the more philosophically driven novels of "anti-detective" fiction, within Latin America, accuse an obvious social context:

What distinguishes the Latin American works from many others, especially those of the French nouveau roman school, is the stress on real-world socio political contexts over literary and philosophical considerations. (139)

⁸It is worth mentioning that this preoccupation with modern civilization and repression has a precedent within the Argentine *roman noir*, most notably with Mempo Giardinelli's *Luna caliente*. This novel tells the story of an Argentine doctor coming back to rural Chacó, after a sojourn in Paris. While he ostensibly represents the civilized portion of the civilization-barbarism debate in Argentina, he likewise fights to repress his darker side, which has driven him to a downward spiral of rape and murder. Both novels bring to the fore the contradictions in modernity as a central theme of the Argentine *novela negra*.

⁹For an account of this type of analysis, see Stefano Tani's *The Doomed Detective: The Contribution of the of the Detective Novel to Postmodern American and Italian fiction*.

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