



The Classical Origins of Detective Fiction: Sophocles's *Oedipus the King* and Ross Macdonald's *The Goodbye Look*

LES ORIGINES DES CLASSIQUES DU ROMAN POLIER: ŒDIPUS EST LE ROIS DE SOPHOCLES ET LA VUE D'ADIEU DE ROSS MACDONALD

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Abstract

Macdonald's presentation of the crime and its detection in *The Goodbye Look* shows how he finds in detective fiction a logical genre that will enable him to study human motivations and actions in general. Instead of imitating the hard-boiled detective writers who precede him, Macdonald uses the Oedipus theme in this novel to explore the American psyche and to transform detective fiction into a new kind of fiction which is not only about exposing criminals but also about redeeming the innocent.

Key words: Classical literature; American literature; American society; American family; Detective fiction; Literature; Fiction; Culture; Psychology

Résumé

Cet article discute la présentation de Macdonald de l'infraction et sa détection dans *The Look Goodbye*, montre comment il trouve dans le roman policier un genre logiques qui vont lui permettre d'étudier les motivations et des actions humaines en général. Au lieu d'imiter les auteurs de détective durs qui le précèdent, Macdonald utilise le thème d'Oedipe dans ce roman pour explorer la psyché américaine et à transformer la fiction policière dans un nouveau genre de fiction qui n'est pas seulement d'exposer des criminels, mais aussi sur l'échange de l'innocence.

Mots clés: Littérature classique; Littérature américaine; La société Américaine; Famille américaine; Detective de fiction; Littérature, Fiction; Culture; Psychologie

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This paper discusses Macdonald's presentation of the crime and its detection in *The Goodbye Look*, shows how he finds in detective fiction a logical genre that will enable him to study human motivations and actions in general. Instead of imitating the hard-boiled detective writers who precede him, Macdonald uses the Oedipus theme in this novel to explore the American psyche and to transform detective fiction into a new kind of fiction which is not only about exposing criminals but also about redeeming the innocent.

Detective fiction is that kind of fiction in which a mystery, often involving a murder, is solved by a detective. Though a recent genre, the interest in detective fiction in general, and in mystery stories in particular, is as old as human kind. There is not a single period in the history of man when he has not been interested in the mysterious and unknown. The term 'detective fiction' describes only one form in the wide spectrum and long history of crime fiction. The origins of this kind of fiction can be traced back to the Greek civilization in the fifth century B.C., when both art and literature were flourishing. Through the work of the Greek philosophers and dramatists at that time, one can notice a change in the values of the Greek society. Man no longer believed that evil is caused by gods and demons; he himself became responsible for his good or evil deeds. So, it became possible to investigate man's guilt and crime. The citizen of the Greek city had become the focal point of most artistic expression, especially in the plays of the famous Greek dramatists Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides.

The present study will concentrate only on one

representative work from the classical period; Sophocles's *Oedipus the King* (420s B.C). This work is usually considered as the first detective story in western literature. This play, which contains a lot of the elements of modern detective fiction, inspired many modern detective writers in the twentieth century. The present study concentrates on Ross Macdonald (1915-1983) as one representative writer of these detective fiction writers, and in particular on his famous novel *The Goodbye Look* (1969). It is a novel that model itself on the Oedipus story.

Oedipus the King opens with Oedipus, the king of Thebes, asking his citizens to tell him what is troubling them. The priest, who is the oldest, speaks on their behalf:

Priest: Your eyes see the truth: Thebes is drowning in a deadly sea, is sink-ing beneath the waves of death.

.....

A deadly plague consumes our city.

(Rudall, 2000: 28-34)

As the King, Oedipus has to save the city, and its citizens, from its old pollution. There is a murder that 'blew the deadly plague breath' on the city. Oedipus starts his investigations to know the murderer of king Laius who was king before he came to rule over Thebes; he says:

Once again I must bring the darkness into the light-----

----- I will avenge this country's loss

It is my duty.

(Rudall, 2000: 154-60)

Through his own investigations, Oedipus unmasks himself as the murderer of king Laius, his father. He finds also that he marries Jocasta, his mother, ignorant of his true relationship to her. So, he adds incest to the crime of parricide. Realizing these horrible crimes, he blinds himself and asks the people of Thebes to send him into exile:

Oedipus: Light of the sun, let me never look on you again. I Stand here, the most cursed of men. Cursed in my birth. Cursed in an incestuous marriage. Cursed in the murder of my father.

(Rudall, 2000: 1337-1341)

So, once a king, Oedipus now becomes the weakest among all the Thebans.

Though *Oedipus the King* does not literally take the form of a modern detective story, it is nonetheless centered on the revelation of the identity of a murderer, and its detective hero solves the mystery through an adaptation of the question-and-answer technique, which makes some critics, like Waltrand Woeller and Bruce Cassidy (1988), consider him "the ancestor of the detective hero" (10). As soon as he learns of a crime, Oedipus begins his investigations - leading to the shocking discovery that *he* is the guilty man. John Belton (1991) observes in "Language, Oedipus, and Chinatown," two similarities between Oedipus and the detective hero. First, both of them are "led step by step to an acknowledgement of the essential irrationality that governs human existence." (937). Second, both of them struggle under the weight of their knowledge, "denying

it by means of an arbitrary restitution of the symbols of order- that is, by 'seeing seeing justice done'" (Belton, 1991: 937). As mentioned earlier, Oedipus blinds himself and casts himself into exile. The detective hero, on the other hand, provides a summary speech at the end of the work in which he explains everything about the mystery; who-did-what, how it was done, and how he solved the mystery. So, the detective work usually ends with the triumph of the detective hero and the forces of reason. The reader, then, will be satisfied to see justice done and the criminal exposed.

One main affinity between *Oedipus the King* and the Aristotelian tragedy, which makes it a true classical example of a detective story, is that both of them have the same structure; a beginning, middle and an end. The detective story as we know it today, argues Timothy Steel (1981), has a recent origin but wears a distinctly 'un-modern' aspect, especially in its elevation of plot over character (556). Nowadays, many detective fiction writers tend to regard plot as an end in itself. Another important aspect in this regard is what Aristotle calls 'reversal.' Through this 'reversal,' the identity of the criminal is revealed to the reader, or the audience. The 'reversal' usually comes at the end of the plot in order to surprise the reader and to provide the suspense that forms so much of the detective story's appeal. Max Byrd (1974) points out that there are only two possibilities for a significant variation in this reversal. First, the detective discovers the criminal in a group of suspects, "someone the reader knows about but does not finally suspect" (72). Second, the detective himself turns out to be the criminal. In both cases, there is an unmasking that must always surprise the reader. The second possibility applies to *Oedipus the King* when Oedipus exposes himself as not only the criminal of his own father, but also the husband of his own mother. It is worth mentioning here, however, that Sophocles's audience was quite familiar with this resolution because it is already there in the Oedipus myth, he only "perceived its working out ironically" (Belton, 1991: 934). Despite the fact that the story is familiar to the audience at that time, argues Charles Segal, in Sophocles's hands, it becomes "a profound meditation on the questions of guilt and responsibility, the order (or disorder) of our world, and the nature of man" (Segal, 1993: 12). Compared to Sophocles's audience, however, the reader of contemporary detective fiction remains in the dark till the end when everything about the mystery is revealed by the detective. The writer's primary purpose in such fiction is to puzzle his readers and make them think.

In his article "Oedipus - Type Tales in Oceania," William A. Lessa (1956) summarizes six essential motifs in the Oedipus story (63-73). These motifs are as follows:

A prophecy that a youth will (B) kill his father and (C) marry his mother. He is (D) saved from being exposed to die and is (E) reared by another King, (F) the prophecy being fulfilled with tragic consequences (63).

For Lessa, the most essential of these six motifs is prophecy, parricide and incest. The others are minor ones. We will see later in the present paper that most of these motifs can be found in Ross Macdonald's novel *The Goodbye Look*. Lessa argues convincingly that despite what seem to be serious differences between Oedipus story and other tales that model themselves on it, they are essentially of one type (1956: 64-66). He adds that in such tales, "there are various types of substitutions that are quite reasonable in light of local cultural conditions" (1956: 64). For example, the prophecy motif is so important for Greek stories, but there is no such concept in modern ones. Other substitutions include the *dramatis personae*, the gravity and nature of the act of incest - sometimes altogether omitted - and the exposure of the child. So, in *Oedipus the King*, one can see a source for narrative patterns and thematic concerns that inspire many modern detective fiction writers. These patterns and concerns, however, might be different in their configuration because of different cultural connotations.

There are numerous nineteenth- and twentieth-century versions of *Oedipus the King*. Such versions are more concerned with personal and philosophical themes. Among many others, these include: "the meaning of existence, the individual's alienation from the world and himself, the mystery of individual destiny, [and] the incestuous attraction" (Segal, 1993: 25). Critics usually agree that the Golden age of detective fiction is the period between the two World Wars. Modern detective works, as we know them today, are born in this period. The works become to be more literate and believable. There is also much more emphasis on period and character. In addition, detectives and criminals, argues Peter Haining, "functioned in a more realistic world of human frailty, error and miscalculation" (1977: 143).

The United States witnessed in the 1920s a reaction against the traditional detective fiction, and the 'hard-boiled' school emerged. One major representative of this school is Ross Macdonald. The present paper chooses Macdonald in particular as its major concern because he is the writer in whose novels one can see the Oedipus theme in its utmost. It is true that he is not the only writer who uses this theme (so does Agatha Christie, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Paul Auster and others) but he is the one who uses this theme in most of his novels, especially the later ones, to turn the detective novel into a new, and distinctly modern, species of the Aristotelian tragedy. By doing so, he succeeded, at least to some extent, in elevating the modern detective novel to the level of 'serious literature.'

In his article "The Rise and Fall of the Detective Novel," A. Craig Bell argues convincingly that a detective novel is 'literature' when it fulfils certain vital criteria:

[W]hen it has style, intellect, individuality; when its characters live and the narrative does not date; when (even if its theme is detection and crime) it can be enjoyed apart from its theme; can be read again and again with pleasure (200).

At the end of his essay, Bell quotes Conan Doyle who adds another criterion to these; "the best literary work is that which leaves the reader better for having read it" (202). The present paper claims that all these criteria are applicable to most novels by Macdonald, especially those that model themselves on the Oedipus story.

The best representative novel of such novels by Macdonald is *The Goodbye Look*. It is on the national best-seller lists for more than three months. It stands in the highest rank of the American detective novel. For Bernard A. Schopen (1990), the novel illustrates the "flexibility, strength and precision of Macdonald's mature art" (99). Schopen likens it to classical literature and says that in its "narrative economy and formal elegance, as well as its use of revelation and reversal, it suggests the emotional rhythms of Greek drama" (1990: 99). In more than one occasion, Macdonald himself says that he thinks of his stories as tragedies, especially in Aristotle's version of tragedy as presented in his *Poetics*, which provides Macdonald with an ancient and serious foundation for his new perspective of detective fiction and how it could be raised to the level of 'serious art.'

The novel opens with the detective Lew Archer in Attorney John Truttwell's office. Archer is contracted by Truttwell on behalf of his neighbors and clients, Lawrence and Irene Chalmers. Truttwell asks Archer to handle them with great care because they are "personally valuable" people to him. He describes Lawrence - or Larry - as a wealthy war hero and "[i]n our instant society that makes him the closest thing we have to an aristocrat" (Macdonald, 1969: 5). He describes Mrs. Chalmers as "a hell of a good-looking woman" (Macdonald, 1969: 5). Both of them are "accustomed to leading a very quite life" (Macdonald, 1969: 7). Their quite life, however, is disturbed by the theft of a gold Florentine box containing the letters that Larry wrote to his mother during the war. Both Mr. and Mrs. Chalmers want to keep things quite and don't want to tell the authorities about this. From Mrs. Chalmers, Archer learns that her husband doesn't even like the idea of using a private detective. Also, from his meeting with Mrs. Chalmers Archer perceives that the main suspect is the Chalmerses' son, Nick, a college student with a history of emotional problems. Mrs. Chalmers says that Nick "turned against Lawrence and [her] for no good reason. He ran away when he was nineteen. It took the Pinkertons months to find him. It costs us thousands of dollars" (Macdonald, 1969: 13). So, one can see from the very beginning of the novel that there is a problem between the son and his parents, especially his father. Mrs. Chalmers intends to protect Nick from the scrutiny of the authorities.

Only a short while after he begins his search for the gold box, Archer finds it in a motel room where Jean Trask used to live. On the painted lid of the box, he can see the sentence: "a man and a woman in skimpy antique clothes disported themselves" (Macdonald, 1969: 28).

Archer doesn't bother himself with the box, for he has begun to sense that its theft "was just a physical accident of the case. Any magic it possessed, black or white or gold, was soaked up from the people who handled it" (Macdonald, 1969: 28).

In the rest of the novel, Archer traces the elaborate pattern of relationships among the characters connected with the box. As he proceeds, he does less 'detecting' than simply listening to the characters and to their stories. The theft of the gold box seems to be the unifying element of everything. Archer discovers that the theft of the box from Chalmers' home is connected with the burglary of the same house twenty years ago, which resulted in the hit-and-run killing of Truttwell's wife by the fleeting burglars. There are other four murders in the novel; one of them is Nick's murder of his real father, Eldon Swain, fifteen years ago. At that time, he didn't know that this person, Eldon, is his real father. Archer finds out that Larry is responsible for all the killings.

Everything in the novel connects because everything arises from the same source, the same past, a past to which the characters can never return but from which they can never escape. Even Archer himself remembers his own past:

My brief dip into Sidney Harrow's life had left a strain on my nerves. Perhaps it reminded me too strongly of my own life. Depression threatened me like a sour smoke drifting in behind my eyes.

The ocean wind blew it away, as it nearly always could The walls were collapsing like walls there, and I felt like a man escaping from his life. You can't, of course . . . (Macdonald, 1969: 34).

So, even the detective cannot escape "from his life."

Macdonald's emphasis on the past in this novel reminds the reader of Greek tragedies in general, and of *Oedipus the King* in particular. In these tragedies, the past plays a very important role in determining the characters' present, and even their future. In *The Goodbye Look*, Archer solves the mystery of the gold box and of the four killings by going back twenty years or more in the history of the Chalmers' family. This is what Truttwell emphasizes to Archer when they were talking about Nick, "I think he idolizes his father, but feels he can't measure up, which is exactly how Chalmers felt about his own father, the judge. I suppose these patterns have to go on repeating themselves" (Macdonald, 1969: 60). Truttwell adds that the root of Nick's trouble "goes much further back, fourteen or fifteen years." There are numerous other examples from the novel that show how the past influences, or even determines, the characters' behavior in the present time. The same thing could be found in *Oedipus the King* when the Chorus emphasizes to Oedipus that:

The past weighs heavy on the present (Rudall, 2000: 1470)

Instead of fate or the will of the gods that one finds

in *Oedipus the King*, Macdonald substitutes family psychology. Michael D. Sharp describes this family psychology as "the inexorable force of the story, impelling it toward its tragic end" (2003: 412). Sharp argues convincingly that in order for Lew Archer to succeed in unraveling the mystery, he has to take on as part of his job the role of amateur psychologist (Sharp, 2003: 412). This role becomes more important because the main subject of *The Goodbye Look*, and many other novels by Macdonald, is the relationship between the children and their parents. As we will see later in this paper, this special role of Archer is played in *Oedipus the King* by the chorus, as Macdonald himself emphasized in a letter to Bill Rueblman in March 23, 1988 (qtd Sharp 2003: 411). Macdonald was not talking here about *The Goodbye Look* in particular; he was talking about his novels in general.

In terms of themes, one can find many similarities between *Oedipus the King* and *The Goodbye Look*. In both of them, there is a murder that happened in the past and someone has to unravel its mystery. In *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus asks:

A murder? Whose? Did the god not name the man?

.....
one thing may be the key that unlocks this whole mystery (Rudall, 2000: 120-41)

Like Archer, Oedipus cannot solve the mystery alone:

Oedipus: I knew nothing of this story of Laius's death, knew nothing of the deed itself. How could I therefore solve a crime alone? (Rudall, 2000: 240-42)

As mentioned earlier, another important theme in both works is the curse that parents impose on their children. Teiresias says to Oedipus:

But the curse of your parents one day will drive you wounded from this land (Rudall, 2000: 465-66)

In *The Goodbye Look*, Archer says to Mrs. Chalmers: "I think you and your husband have been giving him a bad break in trying to overprotect him" (Macdonald, 1969: 141). Also, Nick knew from the letters that Larry Chalmers has written to his mother that he is not his real father. He doesn't know his real father. Similarly, Oedipus asks Teiresias:

My parents? Who were they? Speak (Rudall, 2000: 488)

Both Nick and Oedipus live in suspicion. Oedipus says to Jocasta:

A man got drunk and shouted to the world that I was not my father's son.

.....
But the suspicion lay there. Always. In my mind. (Rudall, 2000: 871-80).

Nick told Archer about Eldon Swain, his real father, "he said I was his darling boy He started to paw me and kiss me, and that was when I shot him" (Macdonald, 1969: 223). Nick discovers also that Jean Trask, the

woman he was in love with, is his own sister!

There are many other examples that illustrate the thematic similarity between the two works. It is worth mentioning a final one about the tragic ending of both works. At the end of *Oedipus the King*, Oedipus blinds himself and asks Creon to send him into exile. Jocasta commits suicide. Similarly, Larry Chalmers, who is responsible for all the killings in *The Goodbye Look*, commits suicide at the end of the novel: "Blood from his cut throat had run down over his row of battle ribbons, making them all one color. An old straight razor lay open beside his dangling hand" (Macdonald, 1969: 241). So, justice prevails at the end of both works. Though Archer has a secret passion for mercy, he emphasizes to Mrs. Smitheram that "justice is what keeps happening to people" (Macdonald, 1969: 127). In *Oedipus the King*, the Chorus says:

But the proud man,

The man who spits in the face of justice,

That man will lose his empty dreams in the whirl-wind of god's fire. (Rudall, 2000: 993-97)

This ending of both works is the usual ending of most detective works. The criminal is identified in order to be punished. The detective succeeds to put things back in the correct order. His ultimate aim, and the reader's as well, is to see "justice done."

All the examples mentioned above illustrate how Macdonald adopts Aristotle's theory of tragedy to his novel and succeeds in turning it into "a new, and distinctly modern, species of tragedy" (Sharp, 2003: 406). The other writers who use the same theme of Oedipus did not go so far. In Agatha Christie's works, for example, there is much more stress on the role of the detective in unraveling a crime that seems to be insoluble. In Macdonald's works, on the other hand, Archer is not as much a detective as a psychologist. He tries throughout *The Goodbye Look* to probe into the inner psyche of all the characters in order to help them, not to expose them, as other detectives do. Archer, as mentioned earlier, has "more passion for mercy," but justice is what "keeps happening to people." While the real mystery in most detective works is the identity of the criminal, in Macdonald's works it is Man himself as a human being, whether he is a victim or a murderer. It is interesting that "Man" is also Oedipus's answer to the riddle of the sphinx.

Macdonald's view of crime fiction is different from that of many other writers. He depends on this kind of fiction in particular because of its comprehensiveness. Ray B. Browne quotes him saying that crime fiction "recreates at some distance the fall of man, his death and his survival" (qtd. in Browne 1990: 106). He believes in man's ultimate triumph over himself. He can solve the problem if he recognizes it. The real value of crime fiction for Macdonald lies in two things. First, it lies in its "style and strength as a story - then in its revelation of

the shapes and meanings of life in all their subtlety and surprise" (Browne, 1990: 106). Also, it lies in the fact that crime fiction carries the theme of private and public evil to "a mass audience." Because of this appeal to a mass audience, Macdonald wants to return mystery fiction to mainstream literature "where it began." He tries to put into his novels "a whole version of life in our society and in our time" (Browne, 1990: 106). This version can be seen clearly in *The Goodbye Look* where he depicts the life of the Chalmers family, and other families as well, at a particular point of time. Archer discovers that the present life of these families is very much connected with their past, especially with regard to the mystery of the gold box and all the other killings related to it. Through his attempts to solve this mystery we know a lot about the life of these people in the past, present, and even their future. Finally, crime fiction for Macdonald involves "the most basic and fundamental of human motivations" (Browne, 1990: 108). In crime fiction, Macdonald finds a logical genre in which he can study these human motivations and actions. Because of this peculiar view about crime fiction and the themes it can tackle, Macdonald has a peculiar style as well. It is a style in which he tries to offer new suggestions for what might be a more useful approach to the genre of detective fiction. As we have seen in *The Goodbye Look*, he finds in the Oedipus theme and in Aristotle's theory of tragedy, both of which concentrate on human motivations and actions, a good model for his new approach.

One of Macdonald's great achievements in this new approach is the character of the detective Lew Archer. In *The Goodbye Look* and the later novels we find a different Archer from the one we find in the earlier ones. Archer, says Sharp, is usually, "a street-wise-detective-narrator working in Southern California setting" (2003: 405). He is an ex-cop who has left the police force to get away from the threat of corruption. In the earlier novels, from 1947 onward, he is tough and acts in a hard-boiled manner using revolvers and fists. In the novels that Macdonald has written in the 1960s and early 1970s, including *The Goodbye Look*, Archer becomes quieter and more reflective. Unlike the detectives who belong usually to the upper class, Archer - as Macdonald himself describes him - is "the classless, restless man of American democracy, who spoke the language of the street" (qtd. in Belton 1991: 942). The detective for Macdonald is an "underground man," who sees a sense of "interdependence among men," and has "a certain modesty" in his attitude and behavior. He is a "representative figure" who moves easily among all classes. Because crime and evil knows no specific class, the detective can visit all levels of society. In *The Goodbye Look*, Archer is a man without family connections or friends and without a place to live in. The only thing he has is a small office and a car. While dealing with all other people, he has to "stand aloof," as Macdonald says (qtd. in Sharp 2003: 411). By keeping himself aloof from the relationships of the people he

encounters, Archer is like a psychologist who distances himself in a personal way. It is his duty to unmask the evil and let it show in all its horror. This will be the starting point for his clients on the road to recovery. Sometimes he comments on things that he doesn't like. In this sense, he has a role just similar to that of the chorus in *Oedipus the King*. They have the role of narrating and commenting on the main action of the story. After they know that Oedipus is the real murderer, they say:

Oh Zeus! His was the greatest mind of all.
He defeated the riddling sharp-clawed Sphinx
.....
He saved us, was our tower and strength.
We made him our lord, our king of Thebes.
Now who is more abased, more lost than he?
(Rudall, 2000: 1348-53)

Similarly, in *The Goodbye Look* Archer is the objective narrator of the story. Sometimes he comments on things that he finds unacceptable. In the final scene of the novel, Truttwell - knowing that Larry kills his wife with the help of Mrs. Chalmers - struck Mrs. Chalmers's face with the back of his hand and a little blood spilled from her mouth. Archer, who was present, stepped between them so that Truttwell couldn't hit her again and comments that this "wasn't the sort of thing that Turtwell should be doing" (Macdonald, 1969: 242). By doing so, both Archer and the Chorus help in preserving the unity and coherence of the main action of both stories.

So, in order to carry out his role successfully, Archer should be an outsider. Max Byrd (1974) argues that he is as much an outsider as the criminal himself. The criminal, Byrd says, is obviously an outsider even if he appears to be a solid part of the community or even of the victim's family, his secret knowledge of the crime makes him an outsider (1974: 78-79). This applies to Larry in *The Goodbye Look*. Right from the very beginning of the novel, one can clearly feel Larry's privacy and loneliness. He likes to be always alone. When he knows about Archer, he becomes angry and asks him to leave, "we won't keep you further. . . I'm sorry your time has been wasted" (Macdonald, 1969: 16). When Larry is exposed towards the end of the novel, he commits suicide, just like Oedipus who blinds and banishes himself when his guilt is disclosed and he feels that he no longer belongs to the city of Thebes. In both cases, we see a movement from disorder to order, which cannot be achieved without the active role of the detective. This movement, argues Byrd, is in some way a movement from guilt to innocence (1974: 77-78). By exposing the criminal, Lew Archer "redeems the innocent suspects, and one man's guilt confirms everyone else's innocence" (1974: 78). After exposing Oedipus as the criminal in *Oedipus the King*, the city of Thebes will be cleared; it will no longer suffer from the plague that caused a lot of troubles to the Theban citizens. Similarly, in *The Goodbye Look*, Archer describes the atmosphere of Turtwell's office right

from the very beginning of the novel, as "teeming with social pressures" (Macdonald, 1969: 5). At this point, he was talking about the Chalmers family, which is a clear indication that they, and other families like them, are the cause of such "social pressures." Archer adds that he will try to "dispel one or two of them" (Macdonald, 1969: 5). This is actually what he achieved at the end when he unravels the mystery of the gold box and the four killings associated with it. Finally, California, the setting of the novel, is back into order.

Having said this, however, the contemporary society that Macdonald usually describes in his novels in general, and in *The Goodbye Look* in particular, is different from that of Oedipus's Thebes. The American society, says Byrd, "is by no means corrupt in the same way that Oedipus's Thebes is plague-ridden" (80). In Oedipus the King, adds Byrd, there is no clear suggestion that Thebes is in itself a wicked place, but Archer, as the "American-intellectual-outsider" sees things differently (1974: 81). For Macdonald, the contemporary American society is corrupt. Most of his novels are about familial disturbances between parents and their children. There is always something wrong in the American family. There is something wrong in Oedipus's family too, argues Byrd, but the difference here is that it is a story of a fated crime, not a willful one. In the play, Oedipus says:

It was Apollo, my friends, Apollo, He did this to me.
(Rudall, 2000: 1478-79)

As a counter argument to Byrd's, however, and as mentioned earlier in this paper, there was a change of values in the fifth century B.C. and Man began to see himself as responsible for his good or evil. His good or evil is no longer caused by the gods or the demons, but by his own deeds. Fate played a lesser role than it used to do. As a proof of this, Oedipus feels himself guilty, that's why he blinds himself:

But it was this hand, no other's, that struck my Eyes
(Rudall, 2000: 1480-81)

Also, fate is something peculiar to ancient cultures and civilizations. We don't expect to find such a thing in a modern novel that totally belongs to a totally different world. Instead, as mentioned earlier in this paper, Macdonald substitutes it with family psychology. Most of the characters in *The Goodbye Look*, especially the two main characters, Mr. and Mrs. Chalmers, seem to be doomed in a way or another, they are doomed because of their past that they cannot escape. They need someone to redeem them, and it is Archer who plays this role successfully in the novel. As a result, he helps to set order back to a previously disordered society. As Waltraud Woller and Bruce Cassiday say, Archer's job is difficult but he simply has to survive "to help uncover the morass of complicated motives lying beneath the integument of the laid-back and permissive society" (1988: 141). In the novel, Truttwell says that he relies completely on Archer's

“discretion” (Macdonald, 1969: 215). The only reason why Irene Chalmers was not pleased with him towards the end of the novel is that he was able to “dig up all the dirt” in her life (Macdonald, 1969: 216). This applies to her husband, Larry, as well. Through the characters of Irene and Larry Chalmers, one can see only two representatives of the “permissive society” that Woeller and Cassiday mentioned, they belong to the “complex degenerate world” that one finds in most novels by Macdonald.

For some critics, the fact that the detective puts things in order after being in disorder is still threatening. Kenneth S Calhoun, for example, argues that the detective restores certain immanence by connecting the dots of the mystery (1995: 326). By doing so, however, he is presenting “a decided threat, for what is decorum if not the most refined expression of non-immanence?” (1995: 326). Calhoun’s argument might be true, but it is applicable to works other than Macdonald’s where the emphasis is only on exposing the criminal without any attention to the other members of the society. In Macdonald’s *The Goodbye Look*, we have seen that Archer cares for both the criminal and the victim. In the novel, there is a clear movement from disorder to order, which is equivalent to that movement from guilt to innocence. It is true that the threat of disorder is always possible, but in a society that has undergone such movement, this possibility becomes fewer and fewer. In such society, happiness is more probable than sorrow. Similarly, in *Oedipus the King*, happiness is only possible when the criminal is exposed. In his speech towards the end of the play, Oedipus says,

Happiness lives only where sorrow cannot reach.
Cithaeron, why did you keep me safe . . . why did you not kill me? (Rudall, 2000: 1528-30)

So, Oedipus, who is both the criminal and the investigator, realized that in order to achieve the movement from guilt to innocence and to redeem the innocent Thebans, he should be killed. Being the criminal, he should banish himself without waiting for the Thebans to punish him. This is what he did when he punishes his evil deeds by blinding himself. In the same token, Larry Chalmers in *The Goodbye Look* commits suicide. In both cases, justice is done.

In both *Oedipus the King* and *The Goodbye Look* one can see that the themes of sight and vision are highly functional. In the former, Oedipus blinds himself, and in the latter Larry’s mother - the owner of the gold box- lost her sight and never used the box. For Belton, the themes of sight and vision that one finds in *Oedipus the King* can be considered as metaphors for knowledge (1991: 940). Oedipus’s blinding is a ritualistic deed that “testifies to the horror which knowledge brings” (1991: 940). The present paper argues that this interpretation can also be applied to *The Goodbye Look*. The central symbol in the novel is the gold box. Everything in the novel is connected to it in a way or in another. What gives this box its importance is

not the gold or money that it might contain; it is simply the letters that are safeguarded in it. The opening of this box reveals crimes that are confined in it for more than twenty years. In itself, the box is not important; its importance comes from those people related to it. Archer says about this box: “[a]ny magic it possessed, black or white or gold, was soaked up from the people who handled it” (Macdonald, 1969: 28). It is significant that the owner of this box, Larry’s mother, is blind; she cannot read the letters safeguarded in it. It could be argued that her blindness is symbolic, it might be better for her not to know what is in these letters because such knowledge will be “horrificing,” she will know that everything that her son used to write to her is false. The theft of this box brings Archer into the case and reveals everything, not only about Larry, who is responsible for the four killings in the novel, but also about all the other characters.

One of the things that helped Macdonald a lot in achieving his goals is his peculiar plot. His plot is tight and well done. It contains also some nice twists. The lives of at least six families throughout a long period of time are all clearly linked together in one plot. Schopen describes the novel as “remarkably coherent,” despite the complexity of its action (1990: 112). He refers to T.R Steiner who considers the plot of *The Goodbye Look* as one of Macdonald’s most complex plots, but he adds that “the lines remain remarkably clear” (qtd. in Schopen 1990: 112-113). The reader has to reconstruct the relationships between all the characters, and by doing so, the true configuration is slowly revealed. There is what Steiner calls a ‘dance of the whole’ which makes literary and moral sense (113). In Macdonald’s plots, one can find suspense, revelation and reversal. Instead of the easy effects available to the detective genre, Macdonald “molds image and action, character and idea, into a structure that is the novel’s meaning” (Schopen, 1990: 113). Also, Macdonald’s plot in this novel is similar to that of the Aristotelian tragedy in having a beginning, middle and an end, which makes it more dramatic and illustrates the novel’s classical background. So, one can say that Macdonald’s plot in *The Goodbye Look* is one of the things that distinguish him from other writers of detective fiction who do not usually handle their plots in the same intricate way. Sharp emphasizes this point when he refers to the Newsweek review of *The Goodbye Look* in which it is stated clearly that the novel confirms Macdonald’s metamorphosis from an imitator of the hard-boiled detective writers who precede him, like Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, into “a novelist who uses the detective tradition to explore the American psyche” (qtd. in sharp 2003: 414).

Before coming to the conclusion of the present paper, it might be useful to raise the question, why do people like reading crime novels? First of all, no one can deny the popularity of the genre, especially in the twentieth century. At the beginning of this century, crime novels had

become an established favorite with the reading public. As this age is usually known as the scientific age, there is a need for empirical observations and formation of conclusions. People find in crime novels a good text for such an intellectual exercise. Also, crime novels provide suspense and a sense of adventure that will enable the reader to escape for a while from the anxieties of his everyday life, especially in our present world which is changing quickly and drastically. In addition, these novels satisfy the people's interest in the mysterious and unknown, especially when this involves a situation full of disorder that should be put back into order. Finally, crime novels will be more interesting if they are concerned not only with the criminal but also with the victim, a good example of which is Macdonald's *The Goodbye Look*.

To conclude, one can say that Ross Macdonald's *The Goodbye Look* is only one example of so many other examples of modern detective novels that illustrate the classical origins of the genre as a whole. So many detective writers use the classical tradition of detective and crime stories to explore new techniques for the genre as whole. Macdonald is unique among these writers. He has his own view of crime fiction which makes him unique among twentieth-century detective fiction writers is unique among detective writers. He transforms detective fiction into a new kind of fiction which is not only about crimes and criminals. Because of its comprehensiveness, detective fiction can address much broader themes. In his view, detective fiction can also address themes that are related to man's plight in this world, to both his evil and good deeds as well. For him, the detective's role is not only to expose the criminal; it is also to redeem the innocent people. By modeling his novels on the Oedipus theme he succeeds to elevate them to the level of 'literature,' where it began. Sophocles's Oedipus the King provides him with a lot of insights that help him to

achieve his goals. Despite the fact that he depends on an old story, one can find in *The Goodbye Look* "a whole version of life in our society and in time."

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