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## **Modernity and Fraternity in Dick Francis's Novel *Straight***

The presence of crime and mystery in a novel does not automatically lead to its inclusion in the formulaic categories of crime/mystery/adventure/suspense fiction. Although many writers, from Dickens to Beryl Bainbridge, frequently find inspiration for their novels in crime, these novels are not placed under this heading for the simple reason that they do not conform to the conventions of popular formulaic genres. Conversely, however, it is fairly common that popular formulaic fiction is included in the general category of the novel. When this happens, it is because a work is read as something other than it ostensibly is, or, more commonly, is seen as having “more” to offer beyond the thrill, suspense, and entertainment of popular fiction.

Dick Francis is a case in point. In contrast to Julian Symons's early classification of Francis's novels as simply enjoyable adventure stories,<sup>1</sup> Melvyn Barnes, for instance, claims that Francis should be regarded “as a general novelist of quality,”<sup>2</sup> and many agree with him. Critics comment favourably on style, variation, multi-levelled plotting, deviation from genre, and sustained themes of general relevance.<sup>3</sup> In the latter category,

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<sup>1</sup> Julian Symons: *Bloody Murder*. London: 1992, 288–289.

<sup>2</sup> Melvyn Barnes: *Dick Francis*. New York: 1986, x.

<sup>3</sup> See Joan B. Fiscella: “A Sense of the Under Toad: Play in Mystery Fiction”. *Clues* 1.2 (1980): 1–7; Michael N. Stanton: “Dick Francis: The Worth of Human Love”. *The Armchair Detective* 15.2 (1982): 137–143; Paul Bishop: “The Sport of Sleuths”. *The Armchair Detective* 17.2 (1984): 144–149; Marty S. Knepper. “Dick Francis”. Earl F. Bargainnier (ed.): *Twelve Englishmen of Mystery*. Bowling Green, OH: 1984, 223–248; Charles E. Gould, Jr.: “The Reigning Phoenix”. *The Armchair Detective* 17.4 (1984): 407–410; Albert E. Wilhelm: “Finding the True Self: Rites of Passage in Dick Francis's Flying Finish”. *Clues* 9.2 (1988): 1–8; J. Madison Davis: “Women in Dick Francis”.

Zalewski and Rosenfeld, for instance, argue that Francis, in his artistic presentation of “the game of life [...], offers the reader a process to view and learn from.”<sup>4</sup> What they suggest, in other words, is that Francis’s artistic quality lies in his ability to present and combine the conventions of genre in a way that reveals relevancy beyond the thrills of the story.

In his study *Mystery Fiction and Modern Life*, Gordon Kelly explores the issue of relevancy in various types of crime fiction, arguing that the “stable elements of mystery fiction [...] are systematically linked to constitutive features of modernity.”<sup>5</sup> With reference to sociological theories of modernity, he examines a selection of works, finding that there is a “fit” between the typical elements of mystery fiction and the features of modernity that are the result of the emergence of technology and bureaucracy. He expects other scholars to verify his claim that this thesis applies to mystery fiction in general. This article is an attempt to accept his challenge. Drawing on Kelly’s view of “knowledge, trust, risk and power” as issues of fundamental bearing on the conditions of modern life and mystery fiction alike in my reading of Dick Francis’s novel *Straight*,<sup>6</sup> I hope to verify his claim of generality. In the process, I will also point to elements in the novel that modify the priority given in modernity to rational principles, and to the ideological moves that attempt to dissolve the dichotomy between individuality and sociality.

The most salient effects of the features of modernity are, as Kelly points out, “insecurity and uncertainty.”<sup>7</sup> There is no popular thriller story-line more suitable for addressing this particular state of affairs than the common theme of the innocent protagonist caught in an unfamiliar situation. Facing the unknown accentuates a state of vulnerability.<sup>8</sup> In *Straight*, the formulaic

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*Clues* 11.1 (1990): 95–105; Albert E. Wilhelm: “Fathers and Sons in Dick Francis’s *Proof*”. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 32.3 (1991): 169–178; Elaine Bander: “The Least Likely Victim in Dick Francis’s *Banker*”. *Clues* 13.1 (1992): 11–19; Rachel Schaffer: “The Pain: The Trials by Fire in the Novels of Dick Francis”. *The Armchair Detective* 27.3 (1994): 348–357; Rachel Schaffer: “Dick Francis”. *Mystery and Suspense Writers: The Literature of Crime, Detection, and Espionage*. New York: 1998, 383–398; Rachel Schaffer: “Dick Francis’s Six-Gun Mystique”. *Clues* 21.2 (2000): 17–26; Elaine Wagner: “The Theme of Parental Rejection in the Novels of Dick Francis”. *Clues* 18.1 (1997): 7–13.

<sup>4</sup> James W. Zalewski, Lawrence B. Rosenfeld: “Rules for the Game of Life: The Mysteries of Robert B. Parker and Dick Francis”. *Clues* 5.2 (1984): 72–81 (81).

<sup>5</sup> R. Gordon Kelly: *Mystery Fiction and Modern Life*. Jackson: 1998, xi.

<sup>6</sup> Dick Francis: *Straight*. London: 1990, (first published in 1989).

<sup>7</sup> Kelly: *Mystery Fiction and Modern Life*, 3.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Rubin: *Thrillers*. Cambridge: 1999, 9.

element of vulnerability is literally made integral to the narrative structure of coping with the unfamiliar. The protagonist/hero, Derek Franklin, a professional jockey, is from the first to the last page physically incapacitated due to a broken ankle, which causes him constant pain, restricts his mobility, makes him both dependent on others and vulnerable to physical attacks from others. We are, in fact, reminded of his disability and reliance on crutches to such a degree that these aspects assume symbolic meaning in an existential sense. His physical vulnerability also indicates a hero reliant on wits rather than muscles. He is not, then, the Bond-like “wonderful machine” of *Casino Royale* but the struggling individual, rising to the occasion and developing the essential heroic attributes of self-reliance and capacity for learning. As a hero he is “one of us” rather than a superhero,<sup>9</sup> which facilitates reader identification with the general situation of insecurity, lack of knowledge, risk and powerlessness, and also our readiness to follow the problem-solving process and to take note of the skills and capacities that are required to meet the unfamiliar.

While witnessing his capacity for dealing with crisis situations, we are also reminded that biology is part of his humanity. In the course of the novel he is bodily assaulted on no less than five occasions by three different people. Each time his injury is aggravated, seriously jeopardizing his chances of being fit for an important race. On the personal level he is thus racing against the clock as the process of natural healing is constantly impeded. The race against time finds its parallel on the social level since he, as his dead brother Greville’s inheritor and executor, has to find some missing diamonds to save his brother’s business, Saxony Franklin Ltd. The hunt for the diamonds is linked to the desire to know his dead brother, as he regrets the missed opportunities of knowing him in life. The global and social mobility characteristic of modernity is thus represented as the dispersion of families and the severing of ties. This is further emphasised by the failure of his two sisters, who live in different parts of the world, to recognize his voice when he calls them, as well as his own failure to feel sorrow at his brother’s death. It takes the sound of an unknown mother’s grief to bridge the estrangement and to introduce the theme of existential fellowship:

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<sup>9</sup> John G. Cawelti: *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture*. Chicago: 1976. Cawelti suggests that the “ordinary” hero, “marked by flawed abilities” appeals more to “sophisticated adults” than does the super-hero (40).

I heard the rising wail of the mother's agonized loss. I felt my own tears prickle for her, a stranger. A dead baby, a dying brother, a universal uniting misery. I grieved for Greville most intensely then because of the death of the child, and realized I had been wrong about the sorrow level. I would miss him very much. (*Straight*, 15)

The personal quests for healing and knowledge and the social obligation to save the business are compounded by a series of "missing" things, which create an atmosphere of mystery and the threat of conspiracy.<sup>10</sup> In addition there are, among other things, mysterious phone calls, a seemingly pointless mugging, burglaries where nothing of significance is taken, the strange behaviour of Greville's trainer, and Derek's lack of mastery of all the electronic gadgets that Greville seemed to take pleasure in using for various purposes, not to mention the attempted and actual killings. There are also a great number of keys that literally do not fit anywhere. The many strands of mystery have, as we eventually find out, different sources. There is, in other words, more than one sign of disruption in the modern world, or conspiracy to avert.

In Martin Rubin's genre definition, *Straight*, in spite of its title, does not have a straightforward *centripetal* whodunit structure, but has the *centrifugal* structure of the thriller, which "takes in more territory, spreads its focus more wildly" favouring "labyrinthine, mazelike plot structures, filled with twists and tangles."<sup>11</sup> The many dead ends are manifestations of modernity in the era of access codes and electronic complexity: "How would I ever find anything he had hidden? I liked straight paths. He'd had a mind like a labyrinth." (*Straight*, 87) According to Rubin, the labyrinth is a key figure in the thriller, and part of the pleasure lies in following the maze design.<sup>12</sup> The invitation in *Straight* to read in terms of process (i. e. how to cope with uncertainties) rather than outcome supports Kelly's claim of the isomorphic relationship between mystery fiction and the experience of modernity. His argument of the fit between the two rests on his assumption that "works of fiction 'are answers to questions posed by the situation in which they arose.'"<sup>13</sup> The question to which this novel provides an answer is not only

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<sup>10</sup> As Jerry Palmer points out "conspiracy and hero – constitute the most fundamental layer of the thriller." *Thrillers: Genesis and Structure of a Popular Genre*. London: 1978, 53.

<sup>11</sup> Rubin: *Thrillers*, 198–199.

<sup>12</sup> Rubin: *Thrillers*, 22–25.

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Burke: *The Philosophy of Literary Forms: Studies in Symbolic Action*. New York: 1957, as quoted by Kelly: *Mystery Fiction and Modern Life*, xv.

Kelly's implied: What does it take to survive in modernity? It is also: What does it take to retain humanity in modern existence? Although Kelly touches on the inherent moral dimension in mystery fiction, he mainly limits his discussion of the match in the moral sense between the features of modernity and those of mystery fiction to the problem of justice and retribution. Francis's narrative, on the other hand, as has been indicated, evokes an existential dimension and the significance of the conceptions of the natural and the social orders in human affairs.

The first question above involves the underlying issue of the distinction between the uncontrollable conditions of modernity, such as the increased and potentially risky social interactions with strangers, and those of the randomness of life. One of several ironic twists in the story is the circumstances of Greville's death, which happens to be accidental and not the result of foul play as the genre would lead us to suspect. Crushed by falling scaffolding, he has "simply been in the wrong place at the wrong time." (*Straight*, 11) The irony is reinforced with every detail disclosed about his skills in risk-management, and his "semi-secretive ultra-security-conscious" strategies. (*Straight*, 59) Greville's house is a virtual fortress, the key code to the office is changed every week, and his employees are expected to refrain from discussing business outside work as "the best security [is] a still tongue." (*Straight*, 58) His security measures extend to others. Wishing to offer his mistress, Clarissa, protection against possible assault, he gives her a kiyoga, and he refuses to own steeple-chase horses on the grounds that Derek might risk his neck riding them. The risk-management required in a "security mad" trade (*Straight*, 58), is evoked as a necessary stance in all areas of life, but it does not guarantee survival, or protection against the uncontrollable forces of life. Also Derek's initial lack of protective measures against villainy serves to underline the difference between the consequences of human designs and the randomness of life. As a contrast to accidental death through being "in the wrong place at the wrong time," we are offered an episode in which Derek unsuspectingly walks into a trap: "'Those phone calls you took,' I said, 'were designed to make sure I turned up in the right place at the right time. So I walked straight into an ambush and, if you want to know, I feel a fool'." (*Straight*, 178) Derek has to *learn* to be security-conscious, just as Greville's security measures stem from painful experience and his encounters with "the jungle" in the court where he serves as a magistrate. The emphasis in the novel on risk as contingent upon the increasing encounters with strangers or interaction with others, characteristic of modernity, supports Kelly's argument that the issue of risk is an element in mystery fiction that appeals to the reader's sense of relevance. And so do the inclusions of existential

commentary, which skirt the absence of meaningful explanations to the mystery of life in secular modernity by normalizing its uncertainties. Sharing the waiting room at the hospital with a young couple whose “baby was hanging on to life by threads not much stronger than Greville’s,” Derek reflects: “Life has a way of kicking one along like a football, or so I’ve found. Fate had never dealt me personally a particularly easy time, but that was OK, that was normal. Most people, it seemed to me, took their turn to be football. Most survived. Some didn’t.” (*Straight*, 11)

If safeguarding against the loss of property or life is the essence of risk-management in modern society, then anticipation of pleasurable gain is the essence of risk-taking in an existential sense.<sup>14</sup> Riding horses at thirty miles an hour involves “a complete lack of financial security along with a constant risk of disablement” (*Straight*, 71), as Derek’s father points out. Taking risks is what Derek does for a living, however: “Jump jockeys were paid not to take care, on the whole. Not too much care.” (*Straight*, 53) It is, indeed, as Derek reflects, “ironic that it was [Greville] who should meet death by chance when it was I who actively risked it half the days of the year.” (*Straight*, 14) When Derek “inherits” Greville’s world, it is tantamount to a dramatization of the pre-modern innocent, for whom life itself equals risk, transported into an unknown world, forced to discover the risky conditions of modernity, and learning to survive in it. The opening paragraph reads: “I inherited my brother’s life. Inherited his desk, his business, his gadgets, his enemies, his horses and his mistress. I inherited my brother’s life, and it nearly killed me.” (*Straight*, 7) In terms of modernity this constitutes a symbolic reversal of chronology. Greville, being the elder brother, is aligned with sophisticated urban culture as well as advanced technology, and dissociated from nature: He has a gadget that scares dogs away and he only watches his horses run on television. In contrast, Derek is more at home in nature “out on the windy Downs and in stable yards and on the raucous racetracks” (*Straight*, 21):

We had been brought up in different environments, Greville in the Regency London house which went with our father’s job as manager of one of the great land-owning estates, I in the comfortable country cottage of his retirement. Greville had been taken by our mother to museums, art galleries and the theatre: I had been given ponies. (*Straight*, 12)

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<sup>14</sup> See Knepper: “Dick Francis” for an examination of the theme of risk-taking in Francis’s works and life.

Entering the modern world of global trading, artistry and technological tools, Derek has a “feeling of being sucked feet first into quicksand” (*Straight*, 30), a graphic illustration not only of the plight of the existential individual,<sup>15</sup> but of an encounter with a situation which is in line with Kelly’s claim that “[I]n the modern world, we are all lay persons, save in our own narrowly limited area of expertise.”<sup>16</sup> Neither knowing “the questions, let alone the answers” (*Straight*, 48), Derek has a vision of the complexity and powerlessness of the modern predicament, which is reinforced by the state of his body and mind:

My ankle heavily ached; the result, I dare say, of general depression as much as aggrieved bones and muscle. Depression because whatever decision I’d made to that point had been merely commonsense, but there would come a stage ahead when I could make awful mistakes through ignorance. I’d never before handled finances bigger than my own bank balance and the only business I knew anything about was the training of racehorses, and that only from observation, not from hands-on experience. I knew what I was doing around horses: I could tell the spinel from the ruby. In Greville’s world, I could be taken for a ride and never know it. I could lose badly before I’d learned even the elementary rules of the game. (*Straight*, 60–61)

His lack of knowledge makes him “a push-over” (*Straight*, 19) in more senses than the physical one. This anticipation of risk involves another ironic twist since the real threat to his life, for which he is totally unprepared, turns out to come from his own world. Conversely, he is highly successful in dealing with the puzzles, professional challenges and betrayals in Greville’s world, and, as the formula demands, capable of exercising the cognitive style of problem-solving, analysis and synthesis that make up the logic of technology, and the systematic, classifying style of bureaucracy.<sup>17</sup> Not knowing one stone from another, or the rules of a specific game, is subordinated to having a set of particular cognitive skills and mastering the rules of the game of social interaction in general. Derek has no financial or electronic skills, and no knowledge of stones, but he is “a pretty fast learner” (*Straight*, 64) and his prestigious academic degree in Independent Studies explains his cognitive skills.

Surviving in modernity also means learning the risk and value of trust (the word trust occurs 29 times in the novel). Kelly defines trust as

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<sup>15</sup> For an interpretation of the thriller in terms of existential philosophy, see Ralph Harper: *The World of the Thriller*. Cleveland: 1969.

<sup>16</sup> Kelly: *Mystery Fiction and Modern Life*, 3.

<sup>17</sup> Kelly: *Mystery Fiction and Modern Life*, 8–9.

“confidence in the reliability of another person, or in the reliability of an expert system [...] confidence is a function of knowledge – of how well we (think) we know another [person] or the workings of an expert system.”<sup>18</sup> Although there are many examples of trust/distrust in the form of knowledge/lack of knowledge in the novel, the more pertinent instances are related to trust as a function of instinct, or a form of natural knowledge. Although Derek, for instance, implicitly trusts his doctor’s expertise, he does not follow his advice: “What worked on horses should work on me, I reckoned.” (*Straight*, 174) Speaking on the phone to Nicholas Loder, Greville’s trainer, who is “automatically held to be reliable because of his rock-solid success,” Derek realizes that he for no other reason than the absence of lower vibrations in Loder’s voice, doesn’t “totally trust him.” (*Straight*, 47) Similarly, Greville is said to have the “gift” of seeing “the truth of things by instinct” (*Straight*, 121), as well as an instinctive gift for selecting promising stones. On the level of narrative structures, the different worlds of the two brothers thus converge in the realm of all that is not technology or bureaucracy, but pervasive residues of pre-modernity, or the insistence that previous conceptions of nature as model and explanation are still valid. Put differently, there is a suggestion that the technological advances of civilisation have not led to a similar evolution in world-view paradigms.

The structural opposition between technology and nature is also dissolved by the similarities of the brothers’ occupational situations and work motivations. Both brothers work in businesses “without trust” since horses as well as stones are not only subject to cultivation for human purposes of enjoyment but can also be tampered with for the sake of money. Greville’s work motivation, however, is not primarily to make money efficiently in the modern world, but to add beauty to it. Greville, who would not touch glass or plastic, “says stones are the only things the human race can take from the earth and make more beautiful.” (*Straight*, 40) Likewise, Derek rides races “from a different impetus than making money.” (*Straight*, 179) The competitiveness typical of modernity as well as of the thriller hero is here justified by being linked to the sociality involved in giving pleasure to others (the owners) and to nature through the instinctual will to win as an end in itself for horses and men alike:

The will to win was born and bred in them all [horses], but some cared more than others: it was those with the implacable impulse to lead a wild herd who fought hardest and oftenest won. Sports writers tended to call it courage but it went

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<sup>18</sup> Kelly: *Mystery Fiction and Modern Life*, 2.



deeper than that, right down into the gene pool, into instinct, into the primordial soup on the same evolutionary level as the belligerence so easily aroused in *Homo sapiens*, that was the root of war.

I was no stranger to the thought that I sought battle on the turf because though the instinct to fight and conquer ran strong I was averse to guns. Sublimation, the pundits would no doubt call it. Datepalm and I both, on the same primitive plane, wanted to win. (*Straight*, 149)

The superiority of ratiocination typically favoured in mystery fiction and modernity is here modified by the references to the irrational dimension of human existence and its alignment with nature. Not only does Derek react “instinctively” on a number of occasions, but the attentive reader is given a clue to the real villain of the piece when the horse, Dozen Roses, “knocked him to his knees.” (*Straight*, 156) Ratiocination works well in this novel when applied to rationally motivated crimes, but not to villainy in the sense of psychopathic evil that is part of someone’s “nature”. (*Straight*, 295) This kind of formulaic evil is in fact marginalized in the novel, which instead focuses on the wilful betrayal of trust. Close to the end of the novel the opening paragraph is repeated and expanded in the fashion of a summing-up of the vital ingredients that have gone into completing the hero’s learning process and his triumph:

He’d left me his business, his desk, his gadgets, his enemies, his horses, his mistress. Left me Saxony Franklin, the Wizard [a gadget that stored the secrets of Greville’s mind], the shaving cream cans [in which the diamonds were hidden], Prospero Jenks [the betraying friend] and Nicholas Loder [the betraying trainer], Dozen Roses, Clarissa. (*Straight*, 302)

The marginalization of the kind of crime that is usually treated as the worst offence against morality, namely murder, is signalled by the significant absence in the list of Rollway, the pathological villain who kills two people and tries to shoot Derek on two occasions. The absence is charged with irony: “I hadn’t specifically been keeping myself safe from Rollway, whatever he might believe, but from an unidentified enemy, someone *there* and dangerous, but unrecognized. Irony everywhere.” (*Straight*, 295) The centre of attention is not, then, Derek’s unknown enemy, Rollway, but the betrayals that Greville suffers by being trusting enough to *entrust* something valuable to others, valuable not primarily in terms of the symbolic tokens

of money,<sup>19</sup> but as symbolic tokens of a different order. The diamonds he entrusts to Prospero Jenks represent natural beauty, but some of these are stolen and replaced by fakes. Dozen Roses (name derived from the flowers he presents Clarissa when they meet) represents passion. The success of the horse is less important than its connotations, which is why he refuses to have it gelded (i.e. deprive it of natural passion) so that it will run better and win more money. But the horse is not only gelded without his permission but also doped. The values of nature, or the genuine, as represented by the stones and the horse have been corrupted by money values. In the moral perspective of the hero this corruption is labelled “wrong”, but it does not, as we shall see, constitute the moral core of the novel.

The rules of the game of trust in modernity, as Kelly points out, are different in the private and public spheres. Whereas trust in public life hinges on knowing more than the other and calculating the risk, the private sphere of relationships requires openness and warmth.<sup>20</sup> There is no doubt about the ranking of the two betrayals in this novel. First, Greville dies unaware of his trainer’s betrayal; second, this betrayal of trust is set in the public sphere, where it is a risk to be expected. The case of Prospero Jenks, on the other hand, is a betrayal of friendship because he confuses the necessity of “being ahead of the game” (*Straight*, 243) in public life with the demands of the private sphere. The gravity of this violation of friendship is recorded in Greville’s secret diary: “Infinite sadness is not to trust an old friend.” (*Straight*, 125) If retaining humanity in risky and uncertain public modernity is to “deal with honour”, as Greville is reputed to do, the corresponding answer in existential, or social, terms is fraternity: “It was perceptive of him [Prospero], I thought, to see that it was betrayal and attacks on our *brother* that would anger both Greville and me the most.” (*Straight*, 265) The focus is not on the kind of crime committed but what it is seen to be an offence against. Having witnessed the cold-blooded murder of Loder, and waited his turn, Derek reflects rationally on the irony and injustice of Loder’s murder, and on “What makes the crooked crooked and the straight straight?” (*Straight*, 294–295) In contrast, when he finds out that Prospero not only witnessed Greville’s accident but stole his wallet and left him to die, his reaction is primordial:

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<sup>19</sup> As Kelly points out, “modernity is characterized by, and depends upon, the creation of ‘symbolic tokens’ and the establishment of ‘expert systems’. The symbolic token par excellence is money.” *Mystery Fiction and Modern Life*, 2.

<sup>20</sup> Kelly: *Mystery Fiction and Modern Life*, 6–7.

I wanted to yell and scream at the injustice of Greville's death and the wickedness of the world and call down the rage of angels [...] I stood blindly on the pavement oblivious to the passers-by finding me an obstacle in their way. The swamping tidal wave of fury and desolation swelled and broke and gradually ebbed, leaving me still shaking from its force, a tornado in the spirit. (*Straight*, 250)

The appeal to heaven and the allusion to the forces of nature, set in contrast to the rationality of the earlier reaction, serve to place betrayal of friendship in the category of the traditional *malum in se*, an offence against the immanent order of things, against natural, or divine law.<sup>21</sup> We are, in other words, invited to see a social construction (friendship) as natural and therefore inviolable. In this context, Palmer's argument that the specific ideological function of the thriller is to resolve the cultural contradiction between competitive individuality (the ideology of modernity) and sociality (the prerequisite of the "good" society) in favour of individuality is particularly pertinent. Palmer shows that although competitive individualism and fear of conspiracy find their counterpart in the world, it is only in the thriller that they are structurally related. The symbiotic relationship works, on the one hand, to justify individual competitiveness because the hero averts the conspiracy, and, on the other, to define conspiracy as something other than "an organizing principle of the world" which is why it is seen as a disruption of the "normal" social order and in need of individual intervention.<sup>22</sup> The dichotomy between individuality and sociality is, as indicated above, not only glossed over, but the contradiction is resolved as the two components are represented as belonging to the *same* order, that is, the natural order. This effect is also supported by the hero's incarnation of the perspectives of competitiveness (being the champion) and of sociality (being the champion of others), thus unifying the two components. He cannot, in fact, rest until he has rescued that which was entrusted to him.

The idea of fraternity as the highest moral order is thus developed in the treatment of the morally neutral activities of risking and trusting. The tension between risk-taking as an individual project and trusting as the ideal social order is resolved by the number of examples in which individual risk-taking is done for the benefit of others and at the risk of personal cost. It is the mark of heroic action, while the betrayal of trust for personal gain is the mark of disruptive action. Insofar as "[M]ystery novels – or, rather,

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<sup>21</sup> Palmer claims that a characteristic feature of the thriller is that it "presents the activities the hero opposes as a criminal conspiracy against natural laws, as *mala in se*." *Thrillers*, 200.

<sup>22</sup> Palmer: *Thrillers*, 202–204.

those who write them – model a way of being in the world,” as Kelly suggests,<sup>23</sup> this novel singles out trustworthiness as the existential key to retaining humanity in a world characterized by “disloyalty and the decay of friendship” (*Straight*, 229), while making it abundantly clear that “misdirection and deviousness” (*Straight*, 127, 207, 212, 300) and “Check, don’t trust” (*Straight*, 222) are the rules of the game in modernity.

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<sup>23</sup> Kelly: *Mystery Fiction and Modern Life*, 135.