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**"My claim is on the ground of justice, not legality:"
P.D. James's Equitable Perspective On Crime**

P.D. James's distinctive contribution to the genre of detective fiction developed throughout the 20th century (since her first novel, *Cover Her Face*, published in 1962) and well into the first decade of the 21st (until her last detective novel, *The Private Patient*, published in 2008). Her novels follow an impeccably Golden Age traditional narrative structure: they develop through a murder (which usually takes place in an enclosed community), the ensuing disruption of the social fabric, the invocation of the detective as the representative of law and order, a second murder and a series of red herrings, the emergence of truth and the dramatic final revelation (see Brownson 2014, 153). The genre's tenets, however, are subtly revised in the light of postmodern literary and cultural trends; in particular, her novels are characterized by a deep engagement with specific legal issues which are strictly intertwined with the portrayed crime cases and which are further expanded into wider intellectual investigations after the final solution. The detective Adam Dalgliesh represents the reader's *alter ego*, inasmuch as he voices critical reflections upon the tenets of the legal system, their implications and consequences. In particular, he often faces the gap between his own idea and ideal of justice and its enactment in and by legal institutions and regulations. P.D. James's innovation of the genre consists in her shaping of it as a legal forum which addresses the individual as a legal persona and puts at its centre relevant ethical and human questions. Significantly, her last novel *The Private Patient*, which can be considered her literary testament, concludes with a powerful and provocative ethical question: "Would you be willing to break the law if by doing so you could right a wrong [...]?" (James 2009a, 466; henceforth *PP*).

Detective Fiction and the Law: The Jurist Detective

Detective fiction has been connected with legal issues since its first inception; the genre was born parallel to the development of the police force and the creation of the bureaucratic state in the 19th century. Within this context, it performed a cultural function as it mirrored and exorcised society's fears and anxieties and, at the same time, it reflected law's enforcement (see Thomas 1999, 4). At the end of the narrative plot, the established social order and tenets prevailed and everything was reconducted into the the framework of the established rules. P.D. James herself, talking about the narrative process, stated:

The [traditional] detective story deals with the most dramatic and tragic manifestations of man's nature and the ultimate disruption of murder, yet the form itself is orderly, controlled, formulaic, providing a secure structure within which the imaginations of writer and reader alike can confront the unthinkable. (James 2009b, 144)

The process was led by a figure of legal and moral authority, the detective, who voiced and established a single version of reality (see Reddy 1986, 8). Truth was always accessible, and finally always evident; characters and readers were "guided

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from the challenge or threat of nonsense to the security of determinate sense and [...] comforted by the complete subsuming of interpretive possibilities under one sure and stable interpretation" (Malmgren 2001, 25).

P.D. James's novels, however, affected by the postmodern context of the crisis of *metarécits*, subvert the genre's grounding element, its final and fulfilling link, inasmuch as the solution puts faith into the legal order under discussion. In the contemporary decentered universe, the discovery of truth is not enough for the restoration of order and the detective is frequently unable to bring about justice on an individual scale:

[P]erhaps this was part of the attraction of [the] job, that the process of detection dignified the individual death [...] mirroring in its obsessive interest in clues and motives man's perennial fascination with the mystery of his own mortality, providing, too, a comforting illusion of a moral universe in which innocence could be avenged, right vindicated, order restored. But nothing was restored, certainly not life, and the only justice vindicated was the uncertain justice of men. (James 1989, 188)

Detective fiction is the literary genre *par excellence* which uses law as a trope; the genre gives expression to legal perceptions and representations, in particular it "re-works legal prescriptions, rewrites legal procedures and gives life to legal abstractions" (Jeannerod 2007, 23). These characteristics evolved over time and gave rise to the contemporary legal thriller, in which the lawyer turns into an investigator in the course of his inquiries in order to succeed in his case. P.D. James's novels subvert this perspective and originate a new kind of legal thriller in which the detective turns into a jurist and faces legal dilemmas. The detective's aspirations and ideals clash with a feeling of powerlessness in the face of flawed human institutions; as the plot no longer leads to a satisfactory resolution, the figure of the detective assumes greater importance as a moral centre, wanting and able to discover the truth, although unable to dispense justice. The narratives become sites of negotiation, a term which, in Greenblatt's tradition, implies a tension and an exchange between opposite and co-present stances; new interpretative perspectives on legal concerns, new "social energies," arise out of competing frames of reference, motivation and experience. Legal thrillers can be seen as performing a Foucaultian "reverse discourse," that is "the process by which a representation in the external world is subjectively assumed, reworked through fantasy in the internal world and then returned to the external world resignified, rearticulated discursively and/or performatively in the subject's self-representation" (Mueller 2003, 117). This conception liaises with the concept of "legal imagination," that is "the legitimacy of the law, the extent to which we accept it as valid, whether it be rational, providential, or simply effective" (Ward 2001, 1). The legal thriller stages "a narrative understanding of our political self, narratives by which we make sense of the world and our condition" (2001, 5) both on a collective and individual level.

Legal thrillers investigate the contemporary legal system from specific viewpoints, and thus become part of the collective juridical consciousness of society; novels embody the construction of the juridical subject and put "the public/legal and private/literary discourses [...] into dialogue with each other" (Dolin 1999, 6) through the confrontation of their protagonists with the private and public dimension of their lives. The cultural status of the law enables the conjunction between legal procedures and fictional storytelling, two spheres which share "the study of individual cases and the canons of (poetic) justice" (1999, 4). Therefore, in order "[t]o understand the pow-

er of Law, we must stop looking so much at the commands of legal institutions and start looking at the legal imagination" (Kahn 2000, 135; see also Dolin 1999, 4).

The Private Patient: Dalglish's Quest for Truth

P.D. James's *The Private Patient* (2008) revolves around two murders which are interconnected with issues related to the possible forgery of a will. The first victim is Rhoda Gradwyn, an investigative journalist who goes to a private clinic in order to have a scar removed from her face through aesthetic surgery and is found dead the following morning. Her friend Robin Boyton belongs to the family (the Westhalls) who owned the manor before it became a clinic, but has been excluded from family life and inheritance due to the disapproval of his mother's marriage. The whole patrimony was inherited by his uncle who died shortly after his own father and left the property to his son and daughter. The latter both work at the clinic and receive occasional visits by their dispossessed cousin, who hopes to obtain some money due to familial consideration: "on the ground of justice, not legality" (*PP*, 30).¹ During one of their conversations, Rhoda calls his attention to the legal requirement of a survival of 28 days after the death of the testator for the designed heir to actually inherit and says she has read a novel about a similar story, where the testator's time of death had been feigned. Although Robin initially dismisses the idea, he later becomes obsessed with this hypothesis and pursues it throughout the whole narrative (in a peculiar intersection of fact and fiction on a metafictional level), until he is also found dead at the clinic.

During the investigation, Dalglish discovers that a first version of the testament had destined to Robin half of the estate "in recognition that his parents and he had been unfairly treated by the family; [while] the remaining half [was] to be divided equally between Marcus and Candace" (*PP*, 426), his cousins. The case thus intertwines with the hypothesis of a legal fraud and the forgery of old Westhall's will (albeit not the forgery of the man's date of death as Robin hypothesized). However, as both witnesses to the new version of the will are dead and cannot be called to account for it, this whole theory remains based on circumstantial evidence and cannot be prosecuted.

Towards the end of the narrative, Candace kills herself and leaves a tape for Dalglish in which she confesses to the murder of Rhoda, committed for personal reasons,² as well as to the murder of Robin, initially only planned as an act that should terrify him and make him stop blackmailing her. She also acknowledges that there were facts regarding her father's death which could make Robin's charge believable, although she does not specify them (see *PP*, 450) and the reference thereof remains ambiguous.

The retrieval of the suicide tape signals the official conclusion of the murder investigation but the motive remains unclear: as the police squad comments, "physical evidence, hard facts not motive, prove the case. Motive will always remain mysteri-

1 The full passage relating Robin Boyton's words reads: "I haven't seen the will, but when I rang the family solicitor [...] he told me he wouldn't give me a copy of it. He said I would get a copy once the probate is granted. I don't think I'll bother. The Westhalls would leave money to a cats' home before they left a penny to a Boyton. My claim is on the grounds of justice not legality. I'm their cousin. I've kept in touch. They've got more than enough cash to spare and they'll be very rich once probate is granted. It wouldn't hurt them to show a little generosity now. That's why I visit. I like to remind them that I exist" (*PP*, 30).

2 By killing Rhoda, Candace avenged the death of her secret daughter, who had committed suicide after a supposed act of literary plagiarism on her part had been exposed in an article by the journalist.

ous. We can't see into another's mind. Candace Westhall has given us hers. It may seem inadequate, but a motive for murder always is" (PP, 452). Actually, the task of the detective is to find out which member of the community has transgressed the legal and ethical boundaries for its harmonious life in order to enact his individual desires, and in this function he acts as a guardian of the collective conscience of the community itself. The crime signals the intention of the criminal to avoid the general observance of the law, therefore the punishment tries to reconstruct not the order of intersubjective relationships (which, as in this case, have been irreparably disrupted by murder) but rather an order of attitude, which enables peaceful coexistence in the community. The rupture in the social order thus leads to deeper reflections on the principles ruling society and posits the detective's psychology, as well as human and social issues, at its core.

Dalglish is not going to question the tape's reliable evidence because, as he says, "[w]e may have our suspicions, our own theories about motive, and they may be rational, but it's all circumstantial evidence and none of it can be proved. You can't interrogate or charge the dead. Perhaps it's arrogant, this need to know the truth" (PP, 453). However, this becomes his legal and existential quest. Dalglish asserts he needs "to know the truth insofar as it can be known," to know "if [he] was right and if possible to *understand*" (PP, 466, my emphasis), therefore he steps beyond his role as detective and goes to see the Westhall's family lawyer in order to question him about the hypothesis of the forged will.

The old lawyer is staying in a nursing home located at a certain distance from the village, where Dalglish follows a ceremonial of admittance (which requires the inscription of his name in the book of visitors) and is then led to Mr Kershaw through the impersonal and sterile cleanliness of the place. P.D. James transfigures the architecture of the law, where the building usually epitomizes and represents the law itself and its legitimization, by showing how the presence of the lawyer 'pres-entifies' its aura and power and renders the nursing home a metaphorical *ecclesia*, the site of its enunciation (see Carpi 2009, 30; Costantini 2013). The door to the lawyer's room, the sacred dimension of the judicial space, is open, so Dalglish is allowed to cross the threshold; in so doing, he differentiates himself from the protagonist of Kafka's parable "Before the Law" (1915); the latter accepted the authority of the law by remaining outside the door and in so doing he enacted the "foundation of the subject in the recognition of the law" (Douzinas 2003, 43), which implies self-prohibition and self-denial. Dalglish instead is admitted into the room and is characterized by an active attitude of legal investigation; he believes he "can know the law through the eyes and through vision, through *theoria*" (2003, 44).

Significantly, the only personal piece of furniture in the room is "a long oak bookcase, the volumes so tightly packed that they looked glued together" (PP, 460), which is the symbol of the old man's profession and assumedly contains all the acts issued by his law firm which he keeps filed and seems to sanction as the ultimate authority in the legal procedure. This aspect renders him also a sort of repository of the book of revelation, the librarian in possession of the legal Arch-text which contains the answers to the detective's questions, in a re-reading of the Borgesian library of Babel (here reduced to a single bookcase). Dalglish seems to enter the temple of the law and interrogate its prophet; actually, the mansion is located upon a hill and enjoys a beautiful view, a symbolic view on human life. As the lawyer says: "Human life is

below me, out of reach [...] almost invisible figures" (*PP*, 461). He is approaching death, therefore he is in a liminal position, which suggests he might possess a second sight; as he says to Dalgliesh, "it's as well before we talk to know where we stand. Inevitably, you and I [...] will see things differently" (*PP*, 461).

The old lawyer confirms the validity of the will which had been found three days after Westhall's death:

a holograph will is as valid as any other, provided it's signed, dated and witnessed [...] The provisions are precisely those made in a previous will, not the one immediately preceding this, but one which was typed in my office in 1995, taken by me to the house in which he was then living and witnessed by two of my staff who came with me for that purpose. (*PP*, 463)

He also shows him the will that is immediately previous to the one under consideration, in which Robin had been destined half the estate, for the comparison of the signatures which he both regards as valid. However, as he tells Dalgliesh, according to the letter of the law, "this will could only have been challenged by Robin Boyton, and Boyton is dead. Neither you nor the Metropolitan Police have any *locus standi* in this matter. You have your confession. You have your murderess. The case is closed" (*PP*, 466). To Dalgliesh's insistence to know the truth – "I know the truth insofar as it can be known, and I think I understand why she did it. Or is it too arrogant a claim?" (*PP*, 466) – the man answers with the following words: "To know the truth and to understand it? Yes, with respect, Commander, I think it is. An arrogance and perhaps an impertinence" (*PP*, 466). The lawyer's words delimit the boundaries of the detective's action: the possibility of the will's forgery has not been proved to be related to the murders, therefore the investigation cannot extend to include such matter in the absence of a formal issue. The lawyer grounds his answer on factual truth, that is, the empirical evidence related to the case, as well as on legal truth, which follows the abstract concepts and principles of law (always in relation to the case), while Dalgliesh insists on his position and aims at reaching symbolic truth, which transcends the former as it relates to people's deepest cultural beliefs, values and aspirations (see Sherwin 2000, 50).

The lawyer concludes with a question: "And now I have a question for you. Would you be willing to break the law if by doing so you could right a wrong or benefit a person you loved?" (*PP*, 466). In a shifting of planes, Dalgliesh himself is now questioned upon legal matters and he thus steps beyond his function of representative of the law, of his investigation and the solution of the crime in order to enforce the legal system. He is called to investigate the possible motives for a crime, to enter the mind of the culprit and share its thoughts; in this way, the lawyer provocatively, albeit obliquely (as typical of oracular tradition, cf. Fiorato 2003, 67-80), fulfills Dalgliesh's request to "understand" (see *PP*, 466, and p. 50 of the present article).

Actually, the reader has no clear image of the physical Dalgliesh, but perceives his mindset and his mood: "Adam Dalgliesh is almost unrecognizable except for his inner feelings" (Benstock 1982, 112). He represents "a mediating figure between the authority of the law (and the social order it upholds) and an emphasis on an individual or alternative sense of moral responsibility, social justice and the freedom of expression" (Messent 2012, 46) which leads him to probe the possibility of questioning the system. The role of the detective thus intersects with the one of the lawyer and of the judge.

The Detective as a Legal Persona

Adam Dalgliesh is questioned in his position as a legal persona; he is made to experience his own commitment to the legal system and proves himself capable of subjecting it to critical scrutiny. It is as if the legal persona of Dalgliesh took off his mask, which created him as a legal subject and allowed him to speak within ordered society once he recognized and accepted its structure (symbolized by the mask itself he implicitly accepts to wear). Once he divests himself of it, however, he resorts to a neutral position from which he can consider the matter at issue and subject the legal system to a 'fragstemic' analysis (based on a fragmented epistemic). He thus puts under discussion the legal order he embodies (or has embodied up to that point) and becomes capable of subverting the legal system and contravening to its tenets, albeit hypothetically.

Dalgliesh wanders through a legal labyrinth by structuring the different clues and trying to construct his way to its centre, where the *secretum* of the law, its most intimate sense and reason lie. His quest develops within the labyrinth of the legal imagination, its perspectives and possibilities; in this process, he is not anchored to the outside world by Ariadne's thread but has to build his own thread after this sublime encounter.³ Within this context, he relies on the *logos*, that is, reasonable consideration, but discovers that it does not guarantee knowledge that is certain. Dalgliesh, however, remains grounded in his faith in reason and his ability to search for the meaning (the *logos*) of reality by means of dialogue (*dialogos*), the dialectical confrontation with the motives of others (see Palazzani 1996, 13). Actually, he is renowned for his skills in interviewing witnesses and possible suspects through patient and probing questions which allow him to read them and reach their inner dimension. This now applies to himself, as he is led to plunge into his legal subjectivity and become aware of his perception of the contours of legal order (see Sarat, Anderson, and Frank 2010, 29).

To the provocative question of the lawyer he answers: "It must depend on the importance and reasonableness of the law I would be breaking and whether the good to the mythical loved person, or indeed the public good, would in my judgement be greater than the harm of breaking the law" (*PP*, 466). The reasonableness of the law is value-oriented and is concerned with the right way of living, with what is thought good or bad for man, in contrast to rationality, which is goal-oriented and focuses on the efficiency of means to an end, the confirmation of testing and beliefs (Axley 2009, 6). This stages a double conception of and engagement with the law; on the one hand there is official doctrine, the "seamless web of rules and principles constituting the law of the land" (Kaptein 1995, 95), on the other hand, there are general considerations in terms like reasonableness and equity (which, however, are grounded in principled argumentations and decisions). The concept of reasonableness "requires, first, that all factors that might be relevant in answering a practical question be considered and, second, that they be assembled in a correct relation to each other in order to justify the judgment that provides the answer" (Axley 2009, 7). In Dalgliesh's first answer, this element intersects with the idea of somebody in a position in which he/she feels he/she has suffered a wrong and for some reason is unable to obtain redress under the

3 For this image of the labyrinth I am indebted to Hoffman (2013), who refers to the labyrinth of clues and traces the detective finds himself confronted with in his attempt to reach the criminal at the centre and afterwards to find his way back to society. I have adapted the image to the legal thriller as it seems to me particularly respondent to its characteristics of legal enquiry.

law; this would bring about a complicit attitude in breaking the law in the name of a no-better-defined "greater good." The two elements, however, create a legal oxymoron and at this point Dalglish's reflection/investigation opens up to the dimension of equity and ethical issues; as he himself states, "[t]he question can't be considered in the abstract" (*PP*, 466). Actually, "[e]quity is reasonableness and the art of applying equity is reasoned" (Watt 2009, 19). However "equity does not break the rules, it merely bends them" (2009, 2). This attitude distances itself from considering life merely in terms of law, but allows for its complexities and nuances. The case cannot be reduced to an abstract hypothesis and calls personal judgment to the forefront, that is, personal conscience, a key term in the field of equity.

In a sort of a re-reading of the Faustian pact, the old lawyer tempts Dalglish to comply with the hypothesis of breaking the letter of the law, offering him the knowledge of the book of the law itself as a guarantee for this unconventional procedure. The lawyer vests himself with "the image of the law which he participates in and with its characteristics of exclusiveness and symbolic sacrality" and tries to avail himself of the "jurist's autonomy as sacred body and embodiment of the law" (Costantini 2007, 34; 39, my translation). The lawyer's tempting perspective, however, sides with a form of private action which he presents as a recourse to a form of equitable justice, but which in the absence of clear foundations and a clear procedural structure would give way to social and legal anarchy, despite the possible nobility of the motivations behind it.

The lawyer further specifies his hypothetical case by asking "are there any circumstances in which you would break the law to benefit another? [...] To satisfy a need. To protect. To right a wrong [...]?" and Dalglish answers

[...] I can see myself breaking the law to advantage someone I loved.⁴ I am not so sure about righting a wrong. That supposes I would have the wisdom to decide what is in fact right and what is wrong, and the humility to consider whether any action I could take would make things better or worse. (*PP*, 467)

The concept of righting a wrong is explicitly an equity issue and also reflects the public perception of the law and its connection to perceived justice. In its quality as a narrative of legal experiences, at the end P.D. James's novel hints at a conception of justice which "is deprived of its rationality, its abstraction and its blindness" (Jeannerod 2007, 28), at a wish for a kind of restorative justice more than a retributive one. Dalglish's position, however, seems to recognize that both the rule of law and the rule of men are necessary in the attempt to achieve justice; the rule of law lessens the possibility of an arbitrary and unjust use of discretion, while discretion lessens the severity of the written law. His equitable attitude allows him to experience the attempt to reconcile the demands of justice with man's ability to be just (see McDowell 1982, 17-18): "it is a human art to judge when and to what extent it is desirable and possible to depart from the right road without leaving it utterly" (Watt 2009, i).

4 It must be mentioned that here Dalglish makes reference to euthanasia, not to any personal material profit for the benefited person: "I could, for example, see myself helping someone I loved to a merciful death if she were being stretched out on Shakespeare's rack of this tough world, and every breath was drawn in agony. I hope I wouldn't need to. But since you are posing the question, yes, I can see myself breaking the law to advantage someone I loved" (*PP*, 467).

Dalgliesh actually proves to have understood the whole case when he asks the old lawyer: "Now I could put a question to you. Forgive me if you find it impertinent. Would the loved person, for you, be Candace Westhall?" (*PP*, 467). The lawyer does not answer directly but through a confession to Dalgliesh the poet, not the detective; he reveals that Candace had had his child, and given up the baby for adoption due to her family situation, as she was suffering from the hostile and sexist attitude of her father towards her. The lawyer makes Dalgliesh, in his quality as a poet, experience law's rule through a thick description of the legal case (see Kahn 2000, 2), which is at the same time redolent of the legal worldview he embodies as a detective, and which he approaches through his legal imagination. The case exits its strict legal dimension but retains the analogy to trial procedures as it is shaped as a narrative which attempts to make an argument and to persuade of its own truth, through story-telling: "How stories are told, listened to, received, interpreted [...] enacted [...] is] part of law's daily living reality" (Brooks, 1996, 22).

To Dalgliesh's direct question, "[i]f I asked you whether Candace Westhall [...] discussed the truth about her father's will, would you answer me?," Mr Kershaw answers, "[n]o, and I don't suppose you'd expect me to" (*PP*, 474). The lawyer concludes the visit retreating into silence and leaves Dalgliesh with the evocative suggestions of his tale. As he gives his hand to Dalgliesh, "[t]he grasp was still firm but the blaze in his eyes had died" (*PP*, 474); the moment of revelation has ended and the lawyer in his symbolic function of prophet or seer (a Tyresias-like figure) is last described as "sitting in his chair, staring in silence at the empty grate" (*PP*, 475), further evoking the sacred fire of prophets.

Equitable Acts of Literature

On his way back, Dalgliesh reflects on the case and seems defeated by the encounter with the lawyer: "Perhaps Philip Kershaw had been right: there was an arrogance in wanting always to know the truth, particularly the truth about human motives, the mysterious working of another's mind" (*PP*, 477). Therefore, "[t]he case would be closed and his responsibilities over. There was nothing further he could do, or wanted to do" (*PP*, 477). However, his poetic nature emerges, demonstrating he finally understands the lawyer's oracle:

Like every investigation, this one would leave him with memories, people who would, without any particular wish on his part, establish themselves as silent presences in his mind and thoughts for years but who could be brought to life by a place, a stranger's face, a voice. [...] During the past years, how many lives had briefly affected his, often in horror and tragedy, in terror and anguish? Without knowing it they had inspired some of his best poetry. (*PP*, 477-478)

Dalgliesh is both a detective (part of the institutionalized order created to contain crime) and a poet, and as such he embodies some of the characteristics of the law-and-literature school of criticism. Actually, it can be said that he transfigures himself into P.D. James and her *œuvre*:⁵ through her serial character the author managed to create an overarching narrative that spans all the novels and which focuses on the

⁵ See Anon., "Obituary for P.D. James: Murder Most Intricate" in *The Economist*, 6 December 2014, which is imaginatively written by Dalgliesh himself who at the end comments, "they inhabited each other's minds; and as much as she had created him, he had also, perhaps, created her" (2014, n.p).

investigation of the legal system. At the same time, she fleshes out her characters with complex motives and particular features. Literature thus compensates at least in spirit for the generality of the law through the nuances of the humane; narrative knowledge can help us integrate experience and see 'the other,' in its quality of repository of legal and moral stances (see Gaakeer 2008, 72-73). This process resembles Aristotle's concept of *epieikeia*, which Nussbaum defines as "a gentle art of particular perception" and "a temper of mind" consistent with understanding the whole story (see Nussbaum 1993, 92). Equity, as presented by P.D. James's literary works, reads beyond the letter of the law and opens up new dimensions through an action of ethical supervision and attention to the particularities of the case and the contours of life; in this way, it dynamically and constantly maintains tension between the extremes (see Watt 2009, 31; iv) which inform the dimension of social beings: "to exist is to exist, to move beyond of myself, in ceaseless motion" (Douzinas and Gearey 2005, 16).

In particular, P.D. James's legal thrillers share the characteristics of jurisprudence, intended as "the prudence, the phronesis of jus (law), law's consciousness and conscience" (Douzinas and Gearey 2005, 3) and stage an exploration of law's justice from a point of view which includes the individual's legal dimension and the self as the protagonist of a life's tale (see Benhabib 1992, 162). Nussbaum's concept of "situational judgment" allows us to understand the circumstances of human life, the complexity of the human condition, human imperfection and fallibility in contingent situations, that is, its "complex particularity" (see Nussbaum 1990; Antor 2007). However, this sympathetic understanding, which is connected to imagination and story-telling, is not uncritical, but fosters ethical reflections. Literature allows us admittance to the idiosyncratic features of a specific case, insofar as "the objective yields to the subjective, the meta-narrative to the smaller contextual truth, judgment to mercy, law to love" (Estryn, Freedman, and Weisberg 2007; see also Carpi 2007, 7) and, in an equitable act, allows us also to approach human motives.

Reading texts composed by other minds in other worlds can help us see more clearly (what is otherwise nearly invisible) the force and meaning of the habits of mind and language in which we shall in all likelihood remain unconscious unless led to perceive or imagine other worlds. (Boyd White 1989, 2014; 2022)

P.D. James's *œuvre* therefore, in its articulation, provides a supplement to the letter of the law, to legal textual constraint: "it is the stories themselves that come to comprise the reality of our experience. In this sense, legal stories mediate our engagement in the world and with others: they provide the possibilities and parameters of our own self-definition and understanding" (Hutchinson 1988, 14).

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