

Abstract

This dissertation aims at establishing the genealogy of a literary genre called the metacognitive mystery tale. Its main goal is to delineate a corpus of texts presenting "unreadable" mysteries which, under the deceptively monolithic appearance of subverting "traditional" detective story conventions, offer a multiplicity of motifs – the overwhelming presence of chance, the unfulfilled quest for knowledge, the urban stroller lost in a labyrinthine text – that generate a vast array of epistemological and ontological uncertainties explored by the genre. The selected corpus, composed of some of the genre's most emblematic avatars as well as of less usual suspects, accounts for the specificity and heterogeneity of authors who, in different but related ways, have addressed a certain number of issues underlying the acquisition of knowledge. Following three major intertextual matrices based on the concepts of the "unreadable" city, the "dark" grotesque and the sublime, respectively, this project brings together texts by writers as diverse as Percy Bysshe Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Henry James, Horacio Quiroga, Jorge Luis Borges, Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett, Paul Auster, Iain Sinclair and Roberto Bolaño under the banner of the metacognitive mystery tale. This approach represents an opportunity to gather canonical and barely academically studied works and provide new perspectives on stories dealing with the darker, more anxious aspects of investigations led by defective sleuths.