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## THE HARD-BOILED MODE

Behind the buildings, behind the lights, were the streets.  
There was garbage in the streets.

(McBain 2003: 1)

### MURDER FOR A REASON: ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

Dashiell Hammett's Continental Op in *Red Harvest* (1929) is described as a 'hard-boiled, pig-headed guy' (Hammett 1992: 85), and the term 'hard-boiled', meaning 'tough' or 'shrewd', came to describe the hero of a type of detective fiction that developed in the United States in the inter-war period. The private detective had already appeared in the shape of the New York detective Nick Carter, a character originally created by John R. Coryell in the 1880s, but it is John Daly's Race Williams who is generally acknowledged as the first hard-boiled detective hero. Williams is a large, tough, violent man, and is clearly the prototype for many hard-boiled heroes, from Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe to Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer, although as a model he was quickly superseded, and has been all but forgotten. It was Hammett, more than any other author, who set the foundation for a type of fiction that was characterised, among other things, by the 'hard-boiled' and 'pig-headed' figure of the private investigator around which the sub-genre developed, a threatening

and alienating urban setting, frequent violence, and fast-paced dialogue that attempted to capture the language of 'the streets'. These are the same streets that Chandler refers to in his famous description of the hard-boiled private eye in *The Simple Art of Murder*:

But down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero; he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honour.

(Chandler 1988: 18)

Both Chandler and Hammett, whom Chandler consciously emulated, began their careers in the pulp magazines by publishing short stories in *Black Mask* magazine, the most influential and successful of the pulps, before publishing novels. The 'pulp', as they were pejoratively termed because of the cheap paper on which they were printed, were inexpensive, weekly publications with lurid and garish covers intended to catch the attention of a reading public weaned on the sensational stories typical of the 'dime novel'. The dime novel, which first began to appear during the American Civil War, and which, like its literary descendant the pulp magazine, played an enormous part in creating popular literary tastes in the United States, printed sensational stories targeted at a large and rapidly growing reading audience. John Coryell's New York detective Nick Carter first appeared in the dime novel, anticipating the pattern of relocating the frontier hero of the Western into an urban environment that is generally credited to Hammett.

In Britain, there is a similar relationship between the earlier 'penny dreadfuls' and 'shilling shockers', which printed sensational stories in the same vein as the dime novel, and magazines such as the *Strand*, in which Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes appeared in short story form in 1891. Revealingly, the split form of Conan Doyle's early novels, such as *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of Four*, contains within it the sort of adventure story that was common in the dime novel, and it is significant for hard-boiled fiction that the Western adventure story began with the dime novel, and was also a staple of pulp magazines such as *Black Mask*. The 'mask' of the title, in this way, can be read as a reference to the tradition out of

which hard-boiled fiction developed, from the disguises of champions of the weak, such as Zorro, to the raised neckerchief of the Wild West outlaw (Priestman 1998: 52). Hard-boiled fiction translated the romanticism of the Western into a modern urban setting, and this movement from the Western frontier to a hostile urban environment was accompanied by an abrupt shift from the artificial gentility of the classical detective story to the creation of a fictional world of social corruption and 'real' crime (Mandel 1984: 35).

It is for these reasons that hard-boiled fiction is typically identified as a distinctively American sub-genre, and such an identification is reinforced by three elements that characterise most of the early fiction. First, the Californian setting of most of the early hard-boiled novels, and many of the later ones, is a direct extension of the frontier stories of the Western genre, and underlines the identification of the private eye as a quick-fisted urban cowboy, who, when he speaks at all, speaks in the tough, laconic American vernacular. The American vernacular, the second of these characteristics, is the same language of the 'mean streets' identified by Chandler, 'the kind of lingo', he says of the American reading audience, that 'they imagined they spoke themselves' (Chandler 1988: 15). The third distinctly American characteristic is the portrayal of crimes that were increasingly becoming part of the everyday world of early twentieth-century America.

Ernest Mandel notes that the pulp magazines 'developed more or less simultaneously with the rise of organized crime' in the United States (Mandel 1984: 34), and identifies the rapid encroachment of crime during Prohibition, from 1919 to 1933, from the fringes to the very centre of bourgeois society and existence. The Great Depression, in turn, lent impetus to crime of all sorts, but it was organised crime, in particular the violent and systematic takeover of bootlegging, prostitution, and gambling that depended on the sort of capital investment that went hand in glove with the political and police corruption which features in most early hard-boiled fiction (Mandel 1984: 31). W.R. Burnett's *Little Caesar*, published in the same year as *Red Harvest*, dealt with the reality of gangsterism and gangland violence in a cautionary tale redolent of the *Newgate Calendar* stories, but by the time of Chandler's first novel, *The Big Sleep* (1939), published just ten years after *Little Caesar*, bootlegging had already become a romanticised backdrop in the pasts of characters such as Rusty Regan.

Chandler, however, was writing in the shadow of Hammett, whose first novel, *Red Harvest*, appeared in the same year as the Wall Street Crash and firmly established many of the defining characteristics of the genre. These include the centrality of the character of the private eye, the existence of a client, along with the detective's evident distrust of the client, an urban setting, routine police corruption, the *femme fatale*, an apparently 'neutral' narrative method, and the extensive use of vernacular dialogue. But it was Hammett's casting of the genre in the realist mode that Chandler most admired, and in *The Simple Art of Murder* Chandler links this realism to Hammett's use of American vernacular dialogue. According to Chandler:

Hammett gave murder back to the kind of people that commit it for reasons, not just to provide a corpse; and with the means at hand, not hand-wrought duelling pistols, curare and tropical fish. He put these people down on paper as they were, and he made them talk and think in the language they customarily used for these purposes.

(Chandler 1988: 14)

Chandler's insistence on the realism of the genre is not unique, but despite the various claims for the realism of hard-boiled fiction, the shift from the analytical certainties and reassuringly stable social order of classical detective fiction to the gritty realism of the 'mean streets' of hard-boiled fiction disguised a certain continuity, in Chandler, at any rate, with the idealistic quest for truth and justice characteristic of romance, and its reincarnation in the indigenous American tradition in the Western. At the centre of this quest for truth and justice is the figure of the private investigator, whose wisecracking cynicism, besides providing an outlet for vernacular dialogue, often hides an inner compassion and sentimentalism quite at odds with his tough, taciturn exterior. However, as the word 'private' in the term 'private investigator' suggests, this combination of cynicism and romanticism, which Chandler discusses in *The Simple Art of Murder*, characterises many hard-boiled private eye heroes.

#### A SHOP-SOILED GALAHAD: THE PRIVATE EYE HERO

In *The Simple Art of Murder*, Chandler argues that the classic detective story is characterised by a primacy of plot over character, claiming that

'[i]f it started out to be about real people [. . .] they must very soon do unreal things in order to form the artificial pattern required by the plot' (Chandler 1988: 12). While Hammett's lean prose and emphasis on colloquial dialogue had the effect of seeming neutral and objective, Chandler's adoption of Hammett's tough-guy tone is tempered by a romantic individualism constructed around the viewpoint of his private eye hero, Philip Marlowe. In Chandler's words, 'He is the hero; he is everything' (Chandler 1988: 18). By making Marlowe's own responses and judgements the key to unlocking the narrative, the plot, which Chandler always admitted was difficult for him to construct, is decentred. As the term 'private eye' suggests, it is the viewpoint of the detective that forms the focus of the narrative, and Chandler's plots are often nothing more than frameworks upon which to hang Marlowe's values and through which to emphasise his viewpoint (Knight 1980: 140–1).

As the term 'private eye' illustrates, the various terms used to refer to the hard-boiled detective reveal significant details about the sub-genre that grew up around this figure. The term 'private detective', as the word 'detective' suggests, identifies the hard-boiled hero as the linear descendant of the Golden Age detective. Unlike classical detective fiction, however, in the hard-boiled model that Hammett laid down in *Red Harvest* there is little or no analysis of clues and associated analytic deduction. Rather, the hard-boiled detective's investigations, involving direct questioning and movement from place to place, parallel the sort of tracking down of a quarry that is characteristic of frontier romance and the Western (Mandel 1984: 36). Similarly, the term 'private investigator', or 'PI', is also significant. The word 'private' is an indicator of the PI's most obvious trait: his private nature. This private nature is further indicated in the first-person 'I' of the term 'PI'. The hard-boiled private eye is a private 'I', a loner, an alienated individual who exists outside or beyond the socio-economic order of family, friends, work, and home. Hammett's nameless 'Operative' for the Continental Detective Agency 'has no commitment, personal or social, beyond the accomplishment of his job' (Willett 1992: 11), and Chandler's Marlowe is perhaps the best example of the alienated, 'outsider' status of the PI:

He lives alone, in rented flats or houses. He works alone, in a cheap, comfortless office. He drinks and smokes a lot: a single, masculine

lifestyle. He is choosy about his work, never showing much interest in money. In general, he has dropped right out of the normal family and financial patterns of modern culture.

(Knight 1988: 78)

The decision to 'drop out of' normal family and financial patterns is emphasised by the self-employed status of the private eye, which both links and sets him or her apart from Golden Age detectives. Unlike the Miss Marples, Hercule Poirots, Peter Wimseys, and Gideon Fells of classic detective fiction, the hard-boiled private eye is no longer an eccentric or wealthy amateur. The private eye is a professional investigator who works for a living, and, more significantly, who works for him- or herself. Even Hammett's Continental Op, who is nominally an operative for the Continental Detective Agency, sets his own rules and follows his own agenda, claiming that '[i]t's right enough for the Agency to have rules and regulations, but when you're out on a job you've got to do it the best way you can' (Hammett 1992: 117). The private eye answers to nobody but him- or herself, and it is this independence and self-sufficiency, inherited from the frontier hero, that contributes to the hostility that the private eye typically displays for the forces of law and order.

The most common term used to refer to the hard-boiled detective, however, is potentially the most revealing. The term 'private eye', a development of the term 'PI', is primarily suggestive of covert surveillance, and, in this respect, the term calls to mind the staring eye logo of the Pinkerton detective agency, for whom Hammett worked as an agent. The notion of covert surveillance, besides emphasising the private, or secretive, nature of the private eye, is a decidedly passive one. Hammett's Op, for example, is presented as a 'direct, neutral observer', who provides 'minimal interpretation and analysis for the reader' (Willett 1992: 10). The Op employs a curiously passive investigative procedure that involves 'stirring things up', and then, significantly, keeping his eyes open 'so you'll see what you want when it comes to the top' (Hammett 1992: 85). Marlowe, similarly, does little or no active detection, such as gathering facts, and takes a more passive approach. He talks to suspects, witnesses, and clients, often 'stirring them up' in a manner similar to the Op, and then, again like the Op, he watches and listens, waiting for the truth to come to him rather than actively seeking it out (Knight 1988: 84).

Such investigative methods have the effect of decentring the plot, and emphasising the centrality of the private eye, and this is emphasised further in Chandler's novels by his use of first-person narration. Marlowe's first-person narrative voice makes him the ideological and narrative centre of the novels, but as Knight observes, it is a centre that is fundamentally divided by Marlowe's two distinct voices. According to Knight, 'the voice of Marlowe's reverie, both subtle and ironic, is quite different from the voice he uses to other characters', which, as Knight further comments, 'is uniformly tough and insensitive' (Knight 1988: 81). Later critics have expanded on Knight's insight by drawing a distinction between tough talk and wisecracks on the one hand, and the 'hard-boiled conceit' on the other (Christianson 1989: 156). Tough talk 'is fairly terse, always colloquial, and often vulgar'. More importantly, '[o]ne can only crack wise – be a wise guy – for an audience' (Christianson 1989: 152, 156). The hard-boiled conceit, on the other hand, is part of the narrative voice used by the detective when communicating directly with the reader in order to reveal his 'complex sensibility' (Christianson 1989: 157), and in this way functions to emphasise the 'private' identity of the private eye.

Such arguments, of course, only serve to reinforce the view of the private eye as a fundamentally divided figure. He (since in the majority of hard-boiled texts until the 1980s the private eye is male) has two voices, and each voice reveals a side to the private eye that is incompatible with the other. He is tough, but sensitive. He is intelligent, but resorts to physical violence and coercion to achieve his goals. He is conspicuously hostile to the forces of law and order, but yet, nominally, at any rate, he shares their aim to restore and maintain the social order. The famous opening of Chandler's first novel, *The Big Sleep*, emphasises the paradoxical combination of tough-talking cynicism and romantic sensibility by ironically identifying Marlowe with the heroes of romance narratives. Marlowe is calling to the Sternwood mansion, whose stained-glass window over the entrance doors forms the focus of his description:

Over the entrance doors [. . .] there was a broad stained-glass panel showing a knight in dark armour rescuing a lady who was tied to a tree and didn't have any clothes on but some very long and convenient hair. The knight had pushed the vizor of his helmet back to be sociable, and he was fiddling with the knots of the ropes that tied the lady to the tree

and not getting anywhere. I stood there and thought that if I lived in the house, I would sooner or later have to climb up there and help him. He didn't seem to be really trying.

(Chandler 1993: 3)

The tone – ironic, acerbic, and laconic – is characteristic of the hard-boiled mode, but it is the ironic identification between the figure of the knight and the private eye, who imagines himself 'climb[ing] up' into the knight's position to do his job for him, and in this way literally putting himself in the knight's position, that reveals most about Chandler's fiction.

Marlowe is an idealised figure, a questing knight of romance transplanted into the mean streets of mid-twentieth-century Los Angeles. Like the questing knight, Marlowe's is a quest to restore justice and order motivated by his own personal code of honour, and in this respect, Marlowe's credentials are water-tight: in an earlier incarnation, in the short story 'Blackmailers Don't Shoot', he is called 'Mallory', in this way identifying Sir Thomas Mallory's *La Morte d'Arthur* (1470) as the text from which the inspiration for the character of Marlowe was drawn. The parallels with the grail quest and with knights of legend are alluded to throughout Chandler's novels in names such as 'Grayle' and 'Quest', and even in the title of the novel *The Lady in the Lake* (1944). At one point in *The High Window* (1943) Marlowe is referred to as a 'shop-soiled Galahad' (Chandler 1951: 174), and the description encapsulates the conflict between romance and realism that characterises Chandler's fiction in particular, and the hard-boiled mode in general. Marlowe might be a knight, but his armour, far from being shining, is 'shop-soiled', and his honour, it is implied, is equally compromised.

Hammett's private eye heroes, however, are more obviously compromised, and Sam Spade, in *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), and the Continental Op, who features in both *Red Harvest* and *The Dain Curse* (1929), have been described as 'rough people doing dirty work' with their own 'crude code of ethics' (Symons 1993: 153). The difference between Chandler and Hammett lies in the literary heritages that they drew upon to create their detective heroes. Hammett is generally credited with bringing the independence and self-sufficient morality of the old frontier hero of the Western into the urban criminal environment of modern America (Knight 1980: 135), and the shadow of the Western is most evident in *Red Harvest*.



The novel begins, like a stereotypical Western, with the arrival of a tough loner to a frontier town corrupted by crime and violence. In Hammett's novel, the anonymous Continental Op arrives in Personville ('Poisonville' to the Op and to many of its inhabitants), an ugly mining-town as polluted by the smelting chimneys that helped to found it as it is by the gunmen and gangsters who control it. The Op soon takes on the task of cleaning up the 'pig-sty of a Poisonville' (Hammett 1992: 42) by turning the criminal and corrupt elements of the city against each other.

While the Op's intention of 'opening Poisonville up from Adam's Apple to ankles' (Hammett 1992: 64) has superficial parallels with the moral righteousness and the desire for justice that characterise the frontier hero, he is as guilty and amoral as the gangsters and corrupt city officials that he exposes and helps to murder. The justice that he seeks is a vigilante justice, and he defends his personal vendetta against the city by claiming that 'there's [no] law in Poisonville except what you make for yourself' (Hammett 1992: 119). This denial of laws and regulations in favour of a personal code of justice reveals an important parallel between Jacobean revenge tragedy, with its examination of the idea of the revenger as heaven's 'scourge and minister' (*Hamlet* III.iv.176), and hard-boiled fiction. Significantly, it is the theme of vigilante justice that has been most readily borrowed in cinematic and comic book appropriations of the hard-boiled mode. Graphic novels like Frank Miller's *Sin City* series feature characters who, in their personal crusades for justice, have, like Hammett's Continental Op, 'arranged a killing or two in [their] time' (Hammett 1992: 154), and in this way have upset the balance of justice and social order that they claim to be attempting to restore. Furthermore, since the client (theoretically) pays for the detective's loyalty, hard-boiled fiction highlights the injustice of a society in which money is perceived to buy justice, further emphasising the inequities of both the dominant social order and the private eye's attempts to maintain it.

Hammett's Continental Op, however, is aware of the limitations of the vigilante justice that he brings about, and acknowledges that any victories against the crime and corruption of the modern city are short-lived. When he tells his client, Elihu Willsson, that he will have his city back 'all nice and clean and ready to go to the dogs again' (Hammett 1992: 203), the Op highlights the fact that, unlike the tidy resolutions of Golden Age detective fiction, small, local, and temporary victories are all that the

hard-boiled private eye can ever hope to achieve in a corrupt world. There is, as Mandel notes, a certain naivety in the idea of a tough 'hard-boiled' individual fighting single-handedly against gangsterism, organised crime, and political and police corruption (Mandel 1984: 36). Whatever their methods, however, it is this naivety that Chandler's Marlowe and Hammett's detectives have in common, and it is the figure of the tough loner on a crusade against social corruption, above all else, that characterises the hard-boiled mode.

#### LAST CHANCES AND NEW BEGINNINGS: THE MYTH OF THE FRONTIER

The figure of the tough loner on a crusade against social corruption is an acknowledgement of earlier American literature and culture, in particular the stoicism and self-reliance of frontier adventure heroes like James Fenimore Cooper's Hawkeye in *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826). The identification of the frontier hero as the archetype of the private eye is well established, and the two figures share a number of characteristics that are central to the hard-boiled mode. These include 'professional skills, physical courage affirmed as masculine potency, fortitude, moral strength, a fierce desire for justice, social marginality and a degree of anti-intellectualism' (Willett 1992: 6), although this list is not prescriptive, as various of these characteristics undergo some degree of transformation in the works of different authors. The 'moral strength' associated with the frontier hero, for example, is not lightly carried by characters like the Op or Sam Spade, despite their fierce adherence to a personal code of honour. However, their professional skills are never in question, and in Hammett the central focus is the detective at his job. In particular, the Op's prime motivation is always to finish the job, come what may, even when his client attempts to call him off the case, as Elihu Willsson does in *Red Harvest*.

Physical courage and fortitude are central to the figure of the private eye, who, in many ways, is defined by his ability to both inflict, and stoically endure, physical punishment. The violence associated with the tough-guy private eye is often associated, in turn, with the anti-intellectual stance that seems to characterise certain private eye heroes. Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer, the most violent, right-wing, misogynistic, and anti-intellectual of the private eye successors to Chandler and Hammett,

is the most obvious example, although less extreme examples provide more interesting reading. The novels of James Crumley, featuring the private detectives Milo Milodragovitch and C.W. Sughrue, are set in Montana, and the setting is just one of the ways in which they acknowledge their debt to the frontier tradition. Sughrue, in *The Last Good Kiss* (1978), makes explicit the link between violence and anti-intellectualism in the American West when he declares, with typical tough-guy aplomb, that '[i]ntellectual discourse is great, man, but in my business, violence and pain is where it's at' (Crumley 1993: 303).

The violence of the world in which the private eye finds him- or herself echoes that of the great American West, 'where', according to Crumley's Milo, 'men came to get away from the laws' (Crumley 1993: 12). The American Frontier, however, was more than just a place of lawlessness and violence, and this is reflected in the hard-boiled fiction of Hammett and Chandler, as well as in the novels of writers who consciously emulate them, like Crumley. The American West, and specifically, by the beginning of the twentieth century, California, offered the promise of a new life that was the legacy of a pattern of settlement in America that is also the history of the westward movement of pioneers and new arrivals to the continent. For some, such as Leila Quest and Dolores Gonzales in *The Little Sister*, the attraction is the fame and fortune offered by Hollywood; for others, it is the promise of anonymity; while for Helen Grayle in *Farewell, My Lovely*, and Crystal Kingsley in *The Lady in the Lake*, it is the possibility of creating a new identity and beginning a new life. Significantly, almost all of Chandler's novels pivot on 'a case of mistaken, disguised, or altered identity. His characters discard their old selves, and invent new ones' (Babener 1995: 128).

The extent of such disguise and reinvention in hard-boiled fiction varies. In *The Little Sister*, Orfamay Quest, after her arrival in Los Angeles to hire a detective to search for her missing brother, soon sheds her glasses, which Marlowe appropriately calls 'cheaters', and reveals her true self-serving nature beneath the disguise. Earl, a bodyguard in *The Long Goodbye*, wears a series of costumes, including a cowboy suit and patent-leather boots which Marlowe compares to 'a Roy Rogers outfit' (Chandler 1993: 477), in this way alluding to both the influence of the Western genre on hard-boiled fiction and the fakery of Hollywood. Also in *The Long Goodbye*, Terry Lennox undergoes plastic surgery, taking the process of disguise one

step further. A new identity is created to replace the old one, and a new background is created to fill the blank space of a hidden past.

In *The Lady in the Lake*, Mildred Haviland follows a similar pattern of escape from the past through reinvention in the present. The past, in Mildred Haviland's case, is a criminal past, which she escapes by renaming herself Muriel Chess, who then transforms into Crystal Kingsley, and finally, Mrs Fallbrook, and each character shift 'provokes a murder and another transmutation' (Babener 1995: 243). Similar patterns appear in other Chandler novels, as well as in Hammett's novels. In *The Dain Curse*, Maurice de Mayenne follows the same pattern by re-enacting the westward movement of the Old World immigrants from Europe to America, and specifically, San Francisco. De Mayenne, who is French, assumes various aliases, finally reinventing himself as Edgar Leggett and 'making a new place for himself in the world' (Hammett 2002: 55). However, as with most characters in hard-boiled fiction who flee from the past to the myth of the future that California offers, Leggett's past catches up with him, and he is murdered, apparently a victim of the eponymous Dain Curse. Terry Lennox, in *The Long Goodbye*, similarly attempts to erase his past, and assumes an increasing number of aliases and new identities in an attempt to stay one step ahead of a past that constantly threatens to overtake his new identity in the present. As Paul Marston, a British commando in the Second World War, Lennox also re-enacts the westward movement from Old World to New, becoming Terry Lennox, the elegant Los Angeles drunk, who quickly adopts still more assumed identities, finally becoming the Mexican Cisco Maioranos, apotheosis of a self without a centre or a past. When a disappointed Marlowe, at the close of the novel, tells him that he has 'nice clothes and perfume' and that he is 'as elegant as a fifty-dollar whore', Lennox's reply emphasises the theme of emptiness that is, ironically, the centre of Chandler's novels. "That's just an act [. . .] An act is all there is. There isn't anything else. In here" – he tapped his chest with his lighter – "there isn't anything" (Chandler 1993: 659).

More than simply abandoning their pasts, these characters actively seek to destroy, hide, or bury their past lives, and in hard-boiled fiction, the return of a character's past threatens their existence in the present. It has been noted that in this respect, 'hard-boiled stories are about hauntings', in which circumstances in the present 'make evident the powerful

intervention of past experiences' (Skenazy 1995: 114). Based on this identification of the theme of 'haunting' in hard-boiled fiction, Paul Skenazy makes a comparison between hard-boiled fiction and the Gothic novel that is of particular significance in relation to the early origins of crime fiction. According to Skenazy:

The two forms share common assumptions: that there is an undisclosed event, a secret from the past; that the secret represents an occurrence or desire antithetical to the principles and position of the house (or family); that to know the secret is to understand the inexplicable and seemingly irrational events that occur in the present.

(Skenazy 1995: 114)

Although the private eye's initial brief seems to be to unearth secrets, the detective in the novels of Chandler and Macdonald is often hired to prevent a secret from becoming known. In *The Big Sleep*, Marlowe is hired to deal with a blackmailer, and to prevent a dark secret from becoming public knowledge. In *The High Window*, it is gambling debts, a bad marriage, and the discreet recovery of a stolen coin. In those novels in which revelation, rather than concealment, is Marlowe's brief, he is often 'unable to make full use of the truths he has exposed' (Willett 1992: 19), and is instead forced to suppress the information, as he does with Carmen Sternwood in *The Big Sleep*, and Terry Lennox in *The Long Goodbye*. Often, the attempt to maintain secrecy leads unwittingly to the metaphorical (although sometimes literal) unearthing of a skeleton in the closet. The influence of the Gothic, with its narrative structure centred on the family with a guilty past, is evident in Chandler, in *The Big Sleep* and *The High Window*, and in Hammett, in *The Dain Curse*. This theme of the guilty past of a family resurfacing to threaten familial stability in the present, more than any other, came to occupy the fiction of Kenneth Millar, writing under the pseudonym Ross Macdonald. Macdonald began his writing career just as the hard-boiled heyday was beginning to wane, but drew on the thematic template set down by Chandler. Furthermore, by choosing a variation of the name of Sam Spade's murdered partner from *The Maltese Falcon*, Miles Archer, Macdonald also acknowledged his debt to Hammett. The Lew Archer novels, like Chandler's Marlowe novels, are characterised by their Californian setting, and investigate a

common theme, specifically, the notion of California as a Promised Land, offering the opportunity to escape the past and begin a new life (Spir 1995: 153).

These attempts to escape something in the past in the novels of Chandler and Macdonald are encouraged by the California Myth, where:

[O]ne's right to create a personal identity free from social circumstances is encouraged by the new, migratory nature of the society, the open class structure, and the expanding opportunities for advancement that are found in and near Los Angeles.

(Skenazy 1995: 116)

In this respect, the California Myth is a variation of the American Dream, albeit one that is sullied in early hard-boiled fiction by greed and corruption. F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), like the novels of Hammett and Chandler of which it is a contemporary, deals with a similar theme of personal reinvention beyond the Western Frontier. In the early twentieth century, however, there was nothing left of the American frontier which Frederick Jackson Turner argued, in his essay 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History' (1893), was responsible for the democratic American spirit. California, with its gold-rushes, the discovery of oil, and the arrival of the movies, was all that was left of the West, which, Jackson argued, held the democratic promise of freedom for all.

Chandler's novels, in particular, make explicit reference to the oil industry, which forms the backdrop to *The Big Sleep*, and also to Hollywood and the movies. The condemnation of the artificiality of the Hollywood movie industry, in particular, forms a recurring motif in Chandler's novels. His most damning indictment of the movies is *The Little Sister* (1949), in which the indistinction between reality and artifice and fact and fiction is a major theme, and which prompts Marlowe's cynical evaluation of the industry:

Wonderful what Hollywood will do to a nobody. It will make a radiant glamour queen out of a drab little wench who ought to be ironing a truck driver's shorts, a he-man hero [. . .] reeking sexual charm out of some overgrown kid who was meant to go to work with a lunchbox.

(Chandler 1955: 155)

This passage, in addition to identifying the frontier promise that Hollywood offered, in which 'a nobody' could reinvent themselves as a 'radiant glamour queen' or a 'he-man hero', is also a cynical identification of the important relationship between hard-boiled fiction and cinema which is responsible, in part, for the continuing vitality of the mode.

Hollywood, at the time that Chandler was writing, did not just attract those people eager to reinvent themselves in the new frontier of southern California. It is estimated that almost 20 per cent of *film noir* thrillers produced between 1941 and 1948 were adaptations of hard-boiled fiction (Krutnik 1994: 33), and this wholesale adaptation, and the money it offered, attracted many hard-boiled writers to the Hollywood movie industry. In 1943 Chandler went to Hollywood, and worked there for the movies off and on for the next five years. He worked on movies such as the adaptation of James M. Cain's *Double Indemnity* (1936), and wrote the screenplay for *The Blue Dahlia* (1946), but his distaste for Hollywood, and the five years he spent there, is clear to see in the vitriolic attack on the industry that is the foundation for *The Little Sister*.

The term '*film noir*' is derived from the French term '*roman noir*', which was used to describe the American hard-boiled fiction that was popular in France in translation, and which became an enormous influence on French writing. The word 'noir', meaning 'black', codifies the dark, shadowy atmosphere and setting of hard-boiled fiction, which is a clear indicator of the Gothic heritage of crime fiction, and *film noir* emphasised this 'darkness' both thematically and through the use of lighting techniques that emphasised or created shadows on the screen. However, the similarities between hard-boiled fiction and *film noir* go far beyond the terms used to describe them. A narrative centre of crime, often associated with desire or seduction, is typical of the *noir* film, and is a major structuring device in both hard-boiled fiction and the early crime-thrillers of James M. Cain. Cinematic flashback techniques are a visual, as well as narrative, device that recreates the relationship between the past and the present that structures hard-boiled fiction and which allows the private eye to solve the crime by uncovering the hidden relationship between past events and present circumstances. Finally, although not exhaustively, the voice-over technique that characterises much *film noir* is a direct cinematic adaptation of the first-person narrative voice of the majority of hard-boiled texts, and both techniques emphasise the alienated individual and his or

her position in a threatening urban environment. This threatening urban environment is frequently alluded to in *film noir* titles (Krutnik 1994: 18) such as *Street of Chance* (1942), *Night and the City* (1950), and *Cry of the City* (1948), and it is the 'mean streets' of the threatening city that form the characteristic environment of the hard-boiled private eye.

### MEAN STREETS AND URBAN DECAY: MODERNITY AND THE CITY

The modern city of hard-boiled fiction is 'a wasteland devastated by drugs, violence, pollution, garbage and a decaying physical infrastructure', and it is down the mean streets of this urban wasteland that the private eye must go in his quest to 'temporarily check the enfolding chaos' (Willett 1992: 5). The image of the modern city as a polluted wasteland emphasises the notion of a more general corruption in modern society that threatens to poison and corrupt even the private eye, and such a threat explains Chandler's insistence, in 'The Simple Art of Murder', that down these mean streets a man must go 'who is not himself mean'. The threat, however, is a powerful one. In *Red Harvest*, the Continental Op reveals to Dinah Brand his fears that the violence and corruption of the appropriately named Poisonville are beginning to infect him. 'If I don't get away soon I'll be going blood-simple like the natives', he tells her. 'It's this damned town. Poisonville is right. It's poisoned me' (Hammett 1992: 154, 157). His fears seem to be confirmed when, the next morning, he wakes to find his right hand around the handle of an ice-pick, with the 'six-inch needle-sharp blade [. . .] buried in Dinah Brand's left breast' (Hammett 1992: 164). Similarly, Marlowe, after his involvement with the Sternwood family and his decision to cover up Carmen Sternwood's murder of Rusty Regan, at the close of *The Big Sleep* acknowledges that 'Me, I was part of the nastiness now' (Chandler 1993: 164).

What is significant about the fiction of Hammett, Chandler, and Ross Macdonald is that the urban environment they depict is similar to that of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) and the earlier 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1915). In *The Waste Land*, the modern industrial city is depicted as a hell whose inhabitants have been 'undone' by a kind of death that is not physical, but spiritual and emotional. They are 'human



engines' leading empty lives without meaning or significance, trapped in a city that is both London in 1922, and all modern cities. Eliot's fascination with detective fiction has been well documented (Priestman 1990: 204), and his depiction of the 'Unreal City' of modern existence clearly parallels the 'unreality' of Chandler's Los Angeles and Hammett's San Francisco, which are characterised by imitation, artifice, insubstantiality, fakery, and façades.

Chandler's Los Angeles, in particular, is a city characterised, above all else, by its 'unreality', and Marlowe's sustained commentary on, and analysis of, the details of architectural décor spring from his probing of the surface of this unreality. The frontier myth of California as a place of abundance and opportunity has created 'an empire built on a spurious foundation, decked in tinsel, and beguiled by its own illusory promise' (Babener 1995: 128), and this vision of Los Angeles is central to Chandler's novels. His Los Angeles has been described as 'a metropolis of lies' (Babener 1995: 128), and the description is equally appropriate for both the city's architecture and its denizens, who gravitate there in response to the city's gilded promise of forging a new identity, and leaving the past, and past identities, far behind. Marlowe's Los Angeles is a city of façades, of stucco and fake marble. It is the home of Hollywood, 'the kingdom of illusion' (Babener 1995: 127).

In this kingdom of illusion, Chandler focuses on architecture to expose the city's preoccupation with fakery and artifice. In *The Little Sister*, Mavis Weld, a B-list actress, lives in an apartment block with a mock-marble foyer, a false fireplace, and an aquatic garden made to look like the sea floor. The Grayle house in *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940) contains an imitation sunken garden 'built to look like a ruin' (Chandler 1993: 249), and doorbells that ring like church-bells. Social climbers attempt to imitate the expensive bad taste of the wealthy, evident in the Grayle house and also in the Sternwood mansion in *The Big Sleep*, which, in addition to the medieval-looking stained-glass window over the entrance, also boasts French doors, Turkish rugs, and baroque fireplaces. Such a social climber is Lindsey Marriott, who, in *Farewell, My Lovely*, 'transforms his dwelling into a tacky version of a high society saloon' (Babener 1995: 136), with pink velvet furniture, rococo decorative frills, and an unused grand piano. However, Marlowe's eyes pierce these insubstantial façades with no great difficulty, because, as he sourly notes after attempting to break down a

door in *The Big Sleep*, '[a]bout the only part of a California house that you can't put your foot through is the front door' (Chandler 1993: 24–5).

The modern city of hard-boiled fiction is an insubstantial environment, lacking in depth, and populated by various fakers, frauds, and charlatans as hollow as the city in which they live. Joseph Haldorn, in Hammett's *The Dain Curse*, is an actor who has reinvented himself as the leader of a cult called, significantly, The Temple of the Holy Grail. The Temple, housed in a six-storey apartment block, uses stage magic and illusionist's tricks to con its wealthy members of their money. The fraudulent cult prefigures similar groups in later novels, such as Ross Macdonald's *The Moving Target* (1949), and is a recurring motif in contemporary hard-boiled fiction, such as James Crumley's *Dancing Bear* (1983). Similarly, Chandler's fiction is populated by charlatans, quacks, and frauds, many of whom are linked, like Joseph Haldorn in *The Dain Curse*, to the acting profession, either through their pasts or through Marlowe's descriptions of them. In *Farewell, My Lovely*, Jules Amthor, a sham psychic who preys on the wealthy, has 'as good a profile as Barrymore ever had' (Chandler 1993: 267). His sidekick, a Native American called Second Planting, speaks like an extra in a Western, until Marlowe tells him to 'Cut out the pig Latin' (Chandler 1993: 262). The eponymous Maltese Falcon, in particular, forms the most significant motif of fraud and insubstantiality in Hammett's fiction. The falcon generates the entirety of the violent action in the novel as the *femme fatale* Brigid O'Shaughnessy, 'the Fat Man' Casper Gutman, and the homosexual dandy Joel Cairo all battle for possession of what they believe to be a priceless statue. However, there is no jewelled golden statue beneath the black paint, merely a worthless lead imitation.

The fakery and artifice that characterise the modern city of hard-boiled fiction drive a wedge between what is seen and what is known, and in this way the private eye's quest to restore order becomes a quest to make sense of a fragmented, disjointed, and largely unintelligible world by understanding its connections, or, more often, its lack of connections. The various connections that the private eye makes between appearance and reality, surface and depth, past and present, and truth or falsehood, offer the possibility of making meaning, and the structure of detective fiction is a manifestation of this. The hard-boiled story is structured by a plot with a double-rhythm, advancing inevitably forward in time while

simultaneously moving backward, against the narrative flow, to resolve the violence and disruption that have prompted the client to seek out the detective in the present (Skenazy 1995: 113). The private eye, in this respect, has obvious parallels with characters in *The Waste Land* like the Thames Daughter who 'can connect/Nothing with nothing', and the Fisher King with 'These fragments I have shored against my ruins'. These fragments, for the private eye, are the scattered facts and pieces of information that he brings together, or connects, in an attempt to construct a narrative that 'makes sense' as the detective 'imposes form and causality on events, and makes the meaningless significant' (Skenazy 1995: 121). This 'form and causality' is narrative in nature as, according to Steven Marcus in his introduction to Dashiell Hammett's collection of short stories *The Continental Op* (1974), the private eye has to 'deconstruct, decompose, deplot and defictionalise [. . .] "reality" and to construct or reconstruct out of it a true fiction, i.e. an account of what "really" happened' (Marcus 1983: 202).

Viewing the private eye's explanation of events as a kind of narrative, as Marcus does, reveals important parallels between detection and the act of writing. Like the private eye, an author attempts to construct a narrative that is intelligible, or 'makes sense', by imposing a narrative structure of cause and effect that can be traced from a beginning, through the middle, to an end. Such a causal structure foregrounds the act of 'making sense' through making connections, and Roger Wade, in *The Long Goodbye*, extends the making of connections from the purely structural to the linguistic and stylistic. Wade complains that with writers 'Everything has to be like something else' (Chandler 1993: 523), and by making connections through likeness, similes become an important weapon in the writer's arsenal in making sense of the world. The appearance of writers as characters in much detective fiction, such as Hammett's *The Dain Curse*, Chandler's *The Long Goodbye*, and Crumley's *The Last Good Kiss*, reinforces the parallels between writing and detection, and Paul Auster in particular makes explicit this identification of writing as a quest for meaning in *The New York Trilogy* (1987). The *Trilogy* knowingly appropriates the conventions of detective fiction, and turns them on their head, although in the postmodern world that Auster depicts the central realisation of his characters is that no world, either the real world or the fictional one, makes any sense (Priestman 1990: 178).

Perhaps more than any genre, detective fiction foregrounds the related view of *reading* as a quest for meaning, or a form of detection, and the relationship is an important one for various ideological reasons. Primary among these is that the first-person narrator of the private eye story is easily identifiable with the private 'I' of the solitary reader (Priestman 1998: 57), making the hard-boiled novel a powerful ideological tool. The ideological power of the hard-boiled mode is almost certainly one of the reasons for its appropriation on political grounds, and it is curious to note that the defining text of this most American of forms, *Red Harvest*, is, as the title suggests, a powerful socialist criticism of the relationship between capitalism and gangsterism. Hammett's imprisonment during the McCarthy period for his suspected involvement with the Communist Party only serves to reinforce such a reading. The political agendas, either overt or covert, that are evident in hard-boiled fiction range from the more right-wing paranoia and misogyny of Mickey Spillane to the increasingly liberal-reformist agenda of Ross Macdonald, and many later writers, and it is the political adaptability of the hard-boiled that accounts for its feminist appropriation in the creation of the figure of the female PI, particularly in the texts of such authors as Sara Paretsky and Sue Grafton.

Roland Barthes's identification of two kinds of text sheds some light on the openness of the hard-boiled mode to various forms of appropriation. These texts are the 'readerly' text and the 'writerly' text, and in Barthes's schema the two types of text invite distinct reading practices, with the 'readerly' text inviting a passive reader who tends to accept the text's meanings as predetermined and already made, '[p]lung[ing] him into a kind of idleness' and leaving him 'with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text' (Barthes 1975: 4). Such a text tends to reaffirm the ideology encoded in it at the same time that it attempts to pass off that ideology as natural and commonsensical. In contrast with the 'readerly' text there is the 'writerly' text, whose goal, according to Barthes, 'is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text' (Barthes 1975: 4). The 'writerly' text constantly challenges the reader to rewrite and revise it, and, in this rewriting and revision, to make sense of it. To this end, it foregrounds its own methods of construction, and invites the reader to become a participant in the construction of meaning.

While the whodunnit or mystery novel, with its drive towards narrative closure in the solution of the crime, does have certain of the characteristics

of the 'readerly' text, it is more difficult to apply this label to the hard-boiled novel. In the hard-boiled novel the private eye achieves only partial understanding or limited and temporary success. Furthermore, the characteristic first-person narrative of the hard-boiled novel is constructed around the divided, fragmented figure of the private eye, resulting in a multivalent text that 'undermines efforts at control and closure' (Willett 1992: 9). In this way, the hard-boiled text can be identified as a 'writerly' text, whose gaps and fissures encourage the reader to enter into the production of meaning. The 'writerly' text, significantly, is usually a modernist one, plural, diffuse, and fragmented, with no determinate meaning (Eagleton 1996: 119).

Scott R. Christianson argues that the fragments of *The Waste Land*, the archetypal modernist text, 'are analogous to the episodes in hardboiled detective fiction', with the 'isolated modern hero sitting before a spectacle of modern chaos and trying to make sense of it all' corresponding to 'the posture of the autonomous and lonely hardboiled detective' (Christianson 1990: 142). The poet's attempts to order experience, mirrored in the actions of the Fisher King and Tiresias in Eliot's poem, also describe the narrative efforts of the hard-boiled private eye. 'Shall I at least set my lands in order?', pleads the Fisher King at the end of *The Waste Land*, drawing a clear link between 'making meaning' and restoring order that is central to the private eye's attempts to restore social order and justice by making sense of the crimes that have disrupted it.

However, in both hard-boiled fiction and modernist literature there are other ways of restoring or maintaining order than merely making sense of its disruption. One method, characteristic of Eliot's poetry, is the containment of the 'other' that threatens the social order, and such a strategy of containment is evident in crime fiction. Crime fiction is characterised by a hope, or an idea, of controlling crime, and this control depends, ultimately, on the containment of the criminal other, through imprisonment, banishment, or death. Crime fiction, however, like Eliot's poetry, is in many ways a revealingly defensive and paranoid genre, and no sub-genre of it more so than hard-boiled detective fiction. Reading the defensiveness of hard-boiled fiction in general, and the private eye in particular, through the lens of the strategy of containment is a rewarding exercise, and makes sense of some of the peculiarities of early hard-boiled texts.

Despite the reality of a large immigrant population, in addition to black migration from rural communities, as Knight notes, 'Chandler's southern California contains very few blacks and no Mexicans at all' (Knight 1988: 79–80). Nor does it contain Asians. Knight elaborates by observing that in the novels 'collective concepts such as class and race are quite absent' (Knight 1988: 80), suggesting a personal, rather than a social, perspective. This personal perspective is focused on the white male figure of Philip Marlowe, and the prioritisation of this perspective in the novels, as Sean McCann comments, often 'reeks of prejudice'. In particular McCann refers to the opening scene of Chandler's second novel, *Farewell, My Lovely* (1940), in which Chandler's use of racial stereotypes confirms his 'reflex racism' (McCann 2000: 160–2).

The opening paragraph of the novel, even as it acknowledges the existence of an immigrant and black migrant population, either denies these inhabitants a presence in the narrative, or hints at Marlowe's racist fear of America being 'overrun' by this population. Marlowe has been hired to find a relief barber called Dimitrios Aleidis, and his search for Aleidis has taken him to 'one of the mixed blocks over on Central Avenue, the blocks that are not yet all negro' (Chandler 1993: 167), and the beleaguered racist tone of the description, in which the block is 'not *yet* all negro' (emphasis added), is later echoed in the description of Florian's bar and its customers. One of the black customers, who is thrown from the bar by Moose Molloy, a white man looking for his lost love Little Velma, is denied a human identity by being described using the neuter pronoun 'it'. According to Marlowe:

It landed on its hands and knees and made a high keening noise like a cornered rat. It got up slowly, retrieved a hat and stepped back on to the sidewalk. It was a thin, narrow-shouldered brown youth in a lilac-coloured suit and a carnation. It had slick black hair.

(Chandler 1993: 168)

When Marlowe and Molloy enter the bar, what Molloy calls a 'dinge joint' (Chandler 1993: 168), they find themselves in 'the dead alien silence of another race' (Chandler 1993: 170), and William Marling observes that the inhabitants of the Watts neighbourhood in Chandler's novel provide 'an emblem of the inscrutability of black society to the white detective'

(Marling 1986: 98). In contrast, Walter Mosley's *Easy Rawlins* cycle of novels depicts what Chandler chooses to omit in his portrayal of Los Angeles. Mosley's hero, the black private investigator Ezekiel 'Easy' Rawlins, 'is emblematic of the passage of African Americans to Los Angeles during and after World War II' (Muller 1995: 289). He is a returning soldier, eager for work, and like most of the residents in the black Watts community in which he lives, he is a migrant 'from the country around southern Texas and Louisiana' (Mosley 1993: 15).

Chandler's omission of the black community in his depiction of Los Angeles is just one example of the strategy of containment that characterises his fiction. However, it is his depiction of women as the threatening 'other' that also characterises hard-boiled fiction in general, and the figure of the *femme fatale* is the embodiment of this apparent threat. In many ways, the *femme fatale* is the antithesis to the hard-boiled private eye, in that she reverses the normal dialectic of tough surface and sensitive depth that characterises the private eye hero. The emotional, sensitive façade of the *femme fatale*, like Brigid O'Shaughnessy in *The Maltese Falcon*, or virtually every female character in Chandler, disguises a tough, self-serving identity. The *femme fatale* uses her apparent vulnerability by appealing to the private eye's chivalry and code of honour to get close to him and, in this way, when her true nature is revealed she is in a position to threaten him personally. The personal threat posed by women is linked to a more general division between surface and depth in the hard-boiled world, and in this way, it expands to become a more general social threat, resulting in the masculinism and misogyny that are typical of much hard-boiled fiction written by men.

#### FALLEN ANGELS: APPROPRIATION OF THE HARD-BOILED MODE

While the detective fiction of the Golden Age is dominated by women, with only a few exceptions the majority of the Golden Age detectives are men. Considering the paucity of heroine predecessors, the hard-boiled mode, the most misogynistic of the various sub-genres of crime fiction, would seem to be an unlikely candidate to support a feminist reworking. The hard-boiled novel, however, unlike the Golden Age mystery novel, as a 'writely' text is permeable and open-ended, and its meanings are not

fixed. Its attempts to contain various threatening 'others' ultimately deconstruct it, and the general tendency of hard-boiled fiction to replicate, explore, and even interrogate its own conventions allows the entire sub-genre to be appropriated for a variety of ideological, formal, and generic purposes (Willett 1992: 7). Foremost among the ideological appropriations of hard-boiled fiction is the feminist counter-tradition, which began in earnest with P.D. James's *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (1972).

While the tone and setting of *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* are not cast in the same mould as those of the hard-boiled fiction that preceded it, owing more to the country-house setting of classic detective fiction than they do to the mean streets of the American hard-boiled tradition, crucially the central figure in the novel, Cordelia Grey, is a private detective. The title of the novel both questions and, ultimately, endorses the male-dominated world of the private eye novel, although later writers such as Sara Paretsky and Sue Grafton were to take over the formula of the female private eye in more powerful, although not necessarily more successful, ways. Grey is an intriguing figure, literally 'inheriting' the male mantle of private eye from her late employer in the form of the private detective agency he established, and the gun that he taught her to use. A gun, of course, is an obvious metaphor for masculine potency, and it is significant that Grey never fires it, and her reluctance to do so might be read as a reaffirmation of the division between the masculine and feminine spheres of activity suggested by the title of the novel.

Sara Paretsky's V.I. Warshawski and Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone, in contrast, are far from reluctant to fire their guns, and Gill Plain has suggested that in Paretsky's case the attempt to mould the hard-boiled mode into a feminist narrative that still pays homage to tough-guy fiction is a project 'riven with contradictions' (Plain 2001: 142). V.I.'s name, as Plain notes, 'is important [. . .] for its calculated androgyny' (Plain 2001: 145), and this is the starting point for a number of revealing similarities to the tough-guy hero. By leaving her husband and putting her career first, she has, like Chandler's Marlowe, situated herself outside of 'the normal family and financial patterns of modern culture' (Knight 1988: 78), although she does have an alternative family structure diverse in age, gender, and ethnicity that consists of her friends, such as Lotty Herschel. Both of her parents, however, we learn in *Indemnity Only* (1982), are dead, further situating her in the sort of familial vacuum typical of the private



eye of the period between the wars. Like Marlowe and the Op, V.I. is tough, and endures almost as much physical punishment as, if not more than, she delivers to others. Even the figure of the *femme fatale* has its masculine inversion in the form of what Martin Priestman terms the *homme fatal*: a man 'with whom the heroine has a sexual fling before discovering him to be deeply implicated in the murder she is investigating' (Priestman 1998: 58). In a similar fashion, Plain argues about Paretsky that in many ways, and primarily through her choice of the hard-boiled novel as the vehicle for her contribution to the feminist counter-tradition, she is 'profoundly implicated' in the patriarchal system that she opposes (Plain 2001: 144, and see also Munt 1994: 45).

However, there are other forms of ideological appropriation other than the feminist. Walter Mosley's appropriation of hard-boiled fiction is one based on racial and historical issues, in which Marlowe's xenophobia is inverted and deconstructed to reconstruct the history of black migrant experience in Los Angeles that Chandler's fiction marginalises or omits. The first Easy Rawlins novel, *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1990), appropriates the hard-boiled tradition in a knowing inversion of the opening of Chandler's *Farewell, My Lovely*. In Chandler's novel, Marlowe enters a black bar with Moose Molloy, who is searching for his old sweetheart. In Mosley's novel, a white man, Dewitt Albright, enters a black bar in the black Watts community looking for somebody who can track down a white woman, Daphne Monet, known to associate with the musicians of the Watts nightclub scene that his excessive whiteness (as the name 'Albright' suggests) prevents him from entering. In Mosley's novel, the white perspective of Chandler's fiction is reversed and it is Easy's voice that describes and controls the scene:

I was surprised to see a white man walk into Joppy's bar. It's not just that he was white but he wore an off-white linen suit and shirt with a Panama straw hat and bone shoes over flashing white silk socks. His skin was smooth and pale with just a few freckles. One lick of strawberry-blond hair escaped the band of his hat.

(Mosley 1992: 9)

Gay and lesbian appropriation of the hard-boiled mode marks another form of the ideological appropriation to which the sub-genre is open, and

Joseph Hansen's private eye fiction has been described as a 'medium-boiled' transitional stage between the heritage of the hard-boiled mode and the various products of its future appropriation (Plain 2001: 97). The overt corporeality of hard-boiled fiction, particularly as it manifested itself in the physical fortitude of the 'tough-guy' hero, is appropriated in Hansen's fiction in order to position the specifically male body at the site of the deconstruction and re-evaluation of various concepts of masculinity. The figure of the middle-aged homosexual insurance investigator Dave Brandstetter, the series detective, offers unique possibilities to examine, and ultimately expose, the myth of white heterosexual family life, although in many ways this is less an appropriation than an extension of the undermining of the notion of the family that is central to the Lew Archer novels of Ross Macdonald.

The male body as object of desire, central to Hansen's fiction, is also a central, if unintended, component of one of the best-known formal appropriations of the hard-boiled mode, *Magnum P.I.* In many ways, to extend Plain's identification of the Brandstetter novels as examples of 'medium-boiled' fiction, it might be more accurate to define *Magnum P.I.* as an example of a 'soft-boiled' mode appropriated from its tougher, more existential ancestor as a more 'appropriate' form for prime-time television. Like other examples of the televisual form, such as *The Rockford Files*, private eye series such as *Magnum* are typically cast in a light-hearted comedy mode, quite at odds with the hard-boiled tradition in general, and with the tough, uncompromising sound of their private eyes' names: Rockford (strong and tough like a rock), and Magnum (big and dangerous like the pistol with the same name). Furthermore, in the case of *Magnum*, there are homoerotic undertones to the name that are reinforced by the various elements that conspire to present the figure of Magnum as the male object of desire. The series is set in Hawaii, and the P.I. lives close to the beach, both of which provide opportunities to present the male physique to the desiring gaze. He drives an open-top sports car (not his own), which again provides the opportunity to display the figure of the actor, Tom Selleck, whose casting in the role reinforces the objectification of the male body.

The presentation of the male body as object of desire in *Magnum P.I.* parallels an increasingly similar presentation of the male body on the big screen. While the cinematic gaze is generally identified as a 'male' gaze,

in which the female body is framed and presented as an object to be looked at and desired, there is a growing body of mainstream cinema in which the male body is similarly framed and presented. The *Die Hard* series, featuring the lone police detective John McClane, has many parallels with hard-boiled fiction. The first film, in a conscious acknowledgement of the hard-boiled tradition, is set in Los Angeles, and central to the series is an alienated detective hero characterised by his wisecracking, his antipathy towards the organised forces of law and order such as the Los Angeles Police Department and the FBI, and his physical toughness. It is McClane's physical toughness, clearly alluded to in the titles of the films in the series, that is central to the representation of the male body in the series, which offers 'an image of the male body as raw power and indestructibility' (Jarvis 1997: 227). The clearest example of such framing is towards the end of the first film in the series, *Die Hard* (1988), when McClane confronts the leader of the terrorists who have taken over the Nakatomi building. He appears, stripped to the waist, bloodied and bruised and with a single bullet left in his gun, back-lit by bright arc-lighting that frames his indestructible body in a halo of white light.

Christopher Nolan offers a similar presentation of the male body to the cinematic gaze in his knowing appropriation of the hard-boiled mode in *Memento* (2000). The detective hero of the film, Leonard Shelby, is an insurance investigator. In a break-in to his home, in which his wife is murdered, he is injured, resulting in the loss of his short-term memory. Unable to create new memories, and, therefore, to create the connections between past and present upon which the private eye's solution of the crime depends, Shelby tattoos his body with the information he needs to hunt down his wife's killer. In this way, through various cinematic devices that frame his body, Shelby's body also becomes a text that can be read, emphasising the relationship between detection and reading that is crucial to hard-boiled detective fiction. Furthermore, the narrative is ordered in short sections in reverse chronological order in order to recreate for the viewer the sort of temporal dislocation that the private eye is subject to in general, and which characterises Shelby's existence in particular. In this film, the living body becomes a text requiring decipherment, just as the dead body has traditionally been the catalyst for the narrative movement of detective fiction.

*Memento* is just one example of how cinema, primarily through the Hollywood tradition of *film noir*, has a long tradition of the adaptation and appropriation of hard-boiled texts. Direct cinematic adaptations of hard-boiled novels range from the novels of Chandler, with Howard Hawks's version of *The Big Sleep* (1946) normally being singled out for special praise, to adaptations of Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995) and Paretsky's *V.I. Warshawski* (1991). Lesser-known adaptations include Alan Parker's *Angel Heart* (1987), an adaptation of William Hjortsberg's *Falling Angel* (1979). Hjortsberg's novel is a hybrid of two genres, the hard-boiled mode and the supernatural fantasy, in which the private eye Johnny Angel is hired by a mysterious client, who turns out to be Satan, to find a man who disappeared twenty years before, and who turns out to have been Johnny Angel himself before he suffered amnesia and reinvented himself. This narrative reversal, in which the detective turns out to be searching for himself, makes explicit the sort of divided identity that often characterises the figure of the private eye, and which manifests itself in the figure of the *alter ego*, as happens most famously in an early crime novel, Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

Other cinematic appropriations of the hard-boiled mode that merit special mention include *Chinatown* (1974), Roman Polanski's homage to the hard-boiled Los Angeles of the 1930s, and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982). *Blade Runner*, based on the Philip K. Dick science fiction novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), is another example of the sort of generic appropriation that the hard-boiled mode is receptive to, in which distinct genres, such as science fiction and the hard-boiled, are drawn together into a coherent whole. In the case of *Blade Runner*, and in the later *Angel Heart*, the generic appropriation is then appropriated still further by being adapted to the screen. The central figure in Scott's film is a bounty-hunter, or blade runner, whose job it is to hunt down renegade androids in the future metropolis of Los Angeles. Despite the huge digital advertising hoardings and the constant rain, the mean streets of *Blade Runner* are the same mean streets that Chandler refers to in his famous description of the detective, and Rick Deckard is the archetypal private eye. He is a tough loner with a gun and a mission who drinks like a suicide who has lost his nerve and is conspicuously bloody-minded towards the forces of law and order for which he works. His voice-over echoes the first-person narrative of much hard-boiled fiction and *film noir*,

and the character of Rachel Rosen, who, initially, does not realise that she is an android, is, in the early stages of the film at any rate, an unwitting *femme fatale*.

Other forms have appropriated the characteristics and iconography of the hard-boiled mode, including computer games such as the revealingly entitled *Gabriel Knight* role-playing games, and private eye/supernatural thriller hybrids in the mould of *Angel Heart* such as *Alone in the Dark*, the title of which emphasises the position of the alienated individual in a dark, threatening environment that is generally characteristic of the hard-boiled mode, and whose storyline hinges on the uncovering of the dark past of a mysterious family. Another form that has been remarkably receptive to the ideology and iconography of the hard-boiled mode is the graphic novel, such as Frank Miller's *Sin City* series. As the series title suggests, the *Sin City* stories unfold in a fictionalised Basin City that is characterised, above all else, by crime and violence, and the individual titles in the series are clear indicators of their hard-boiled heritage. *Booze, Broads and Bullets* (1998), in its defiantly politically incorrect use of the word 'broads', is a knowing nod to the tough-guy world and misogynistic dialogue of Chandler and Hammett. *A Dame to Kill For* (1994), whose title echoes the hard-boiled slang of *Booze, Broads and Bullets*, opens with a knowing appropriation of the opening of Polanski's *Chinatown*, and features a private eye called Dwight who appears, in varying degrees, in most of the other titles in the series. In *A Dame to Kill For*, he is seduced into murdering the eponymous dame's wealthy husband, and, once he has served his purpose, she shoots him four times. In a comic book appropriation of tough-guy dialogue, Dwight's right-hand man, named Marv, tells him: 'You're damn lucky all that dame had was a .32 . . . We wouldn't even be having this conversation if she'd used a real gun on you. Even so, getting shot in the face isn't high on my list of how to have a good time.' Dwight survives, and after extensive plastic surgery he returns to exact his revenge, in an ironic reversal of the title, on the 'dame to kill for'.

Another comic book appropriation of the hard-boiled mode is Martin Rowson's *The Waste Land* (1990), a knowing parody of both hard-boiled detective fiction (specifically *The Maltese Falcon*) and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, in which a Los Angeles private eye called Chris Marlowe, searching for his dead partner's killers, 'is lured into a web of murder, deceit, lust, despair and, coincidentally, a frantic quest for the Holy Grail'

(back cover). The case that Marlowe follows neatly dovetails the plot of *The Maltese Falcon* with the thematic concerns and motifs of Eliot's poem, emphasising the previously discussed parallels between modernism and hard-boiled fiction. When Marlowe first appears, he is reading a copy of *The Big Sleep*, with a client in his doorway 'coming in like a mean martini mixed from cold memory and old desire'. The rest of the story parodies both Eliot and the hard-boiled tradition in both words and images, although, significantly, Marlowe's overriding concern, expressed to Eliot in the notes at the end of the story, is 'to know what the hell's been going on!', emphasising the underlying drive of both modernism and the hard-boiled narrative.

Significantly, it is the ease with which the hard-boiled mode is appropriated that has led to the development of two distinct sub-genres in crime fiction, besides the hard-boiled itself. Priestman, following a similar claim by Julian Symons, argues that since the heyday of hard-boiled writing, the genre has split into two strands (Priestman 1990: 177). The first strand is what Priestman usefully terms the 'crime-thriller', the main focus of which is the crime, and the criminal committing it, rather than any appeal to the containment of crime or the solution of a mystery. Early examples include the novels of James M. Cain, which exploit the sort of relationship between crime and passion that Chandler always avoided, and the strand has developed further, and in different directions, in the novels of Patricia Highsmith, Elmore Leonard, and Thomas Harris. The second strand is that of the police procedural, which replaces the individual and self-employed private eye hero with a police team, and whose focus is the functioning of the group as a team. Early examples include the 87th Precinct novels of Ed McBain, but more recent examples are returning to a focus on a single individual, albeit a police detective, that has obvious parallels with the private eye hero. It is to the police procedural, in all its various manifestations, that this study will now turn.

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## THE POLICE PROCEDURAL

'You can't understand. How could you? – with solid pavement under your feet, surrounded by kind neighbours ready to cheer you or to fall on you, stepping delicately between the butcher and the policeman, in the holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums.'

(Conrad 1974: 70)

### THIN BLUE LINES: FICTION AS IDEOLOGICAL STATE APPARATUS

Another Marlowe, in this case Charlie Marlow, the narrator of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902), observes that Western civilisation controls its criminal and asocial impulses only by 'stepping delicately between the butcher and the policeman, in the holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums' (Conrad 1974: 70). Marlow's narration of Kurtz's story of moral decay, and his own engagement with it, suggest that it is only the twin regulatory powers of the butcher and the policeman, rather than any inherent restraint or moral sense, which keep 'civilised' man on the straight and narrow. Specifically, the police procedural, as it began to develop in the second half of the twentieth century, foregrounds and is structured around 'a dominant Western symbol of social control: the policeman' (Winston and Mellerski 1992: 2).

The police, in this way, become the focus for the 'holy terror' of social scandal and judicial punishment, and '[b]ecause bourgeois civilisation is characterised by various forms of discipline' it remains civilised only through the fear of punishment articulated by Conrad's Marlow (Winston and Mellerski 1992: 1). Mandel identifies these various forms of discipline, aside from the police and the judiciary system, as being disseminated 'by the hidden hand of market laws, by the iron rules of factory discipline, and by the despotism of the nuclear family, authoritarian schools, and repressive sexual education' (Mandel 1984: 69). Significantly, the discipline they impose, in Mandel's Marxist analysis, tends to be handed down from above. In this way, despite Mandel's suggestion that the mass culture, and by extension crime fiction, is escapist, it is clear that the procedural is as much a part of the ideological state apparatus of control as the thin blue line of the police force is.

Mandel himself perhaps unintentionally suggests such a function of crime fiction when he observes that '[r]eading about violence is an (innocent) form of witnessing, and enjoying, violence – albeit perhaps in a shuddering, shameful and guilt-ridden way' (Mandel 1984: 68). It is this shuddering, shameful, guilt-ridden response to crime fiction that bears out Mandel's point that laws are respected not out of conviction or a belief in them, but simply out of fear of punishment (Mandel 1984: 69). Furthermore, there is a clear parallel here with Frederic Jameson's argument that mass culture, of which the popular market of crime fiction forms a part, can be understood as a means of 'managing', if not controlling, sublimated audience desires (Winston and Mellerski 1992: 1). The police procedural works on its audience 'to diffuse the potential for violent transgression' by foregrounding the police and the wider judiciary system, and in doing so, the procedural becomes, over the course of its development, one of the most effective means of policing a society governed not by morality, but by fear of scandal, fear of punishment, and by fear of its own capacity for criminal and amoral action (Winston and Mellerski 1992: 2).



## PRIVATE EYE TO PUBLIC EYE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROCEDURAL

In its emphasis on regulatory authority and social control, there is a sense in which the lineage of the police procedural stretches back as far as the Old Testament stories from the Book of Daniel, or at least to the *Newgate Calendar* stories, but the more usual critical consensus is to identify Georges Simenon and Émile Gaboriau as its earliest practitioners. Gaboriau's hero, Monsieur Lecoq, as the similarity between the surnames suggests, is based on the figure of François Eugène Vidocq, first head of the Parisian Sûreté, and his novels, particularly the earlier *L'Affair Lerouge* (1866), are often identified as proto-procedurals. Symons says of Gaboriau's crime stories that 'they are rooted in sound knowledge of police procedure' (Symons 1993: 55), but there are faults to be found with his identification as the first proceduralist. Like Wilkie Collins, Gaboriau's crime stories are at times strait-jacketed by the conventions of the sensationalist novel, and Knight states that they are 'basically sensational crime adventures with a little police work' (Knight 2004: 48). His influence on Collins, however, was significant, and he paved the way for further developments of the procedural, with the baton next being taken up by another French-speaking author, the Belgian Georges Simenon.

Simenon's Inspecteur Maigret is a policeman, but there is little interest in police procedure and cooperation in the Maigret novels. More than this, however, and despite Ian Rankin's suggestion that Maigret was the first procedural police detective (Rankin 1998: 9), it is Maigret's excessively individualistic heroism, like that of Lecoq before him, that Knight sees as the most troubling impediment to such an identification (Knight 2004: 160). Crucially, it is the individualism of Maigret, like that of the hard-boiled private investigator, which disqualifies them from the ranks of the procedural in most critical studies of the sub-genre, in this way stressing the importance of *collective* and cooperative police agency to the procedural.

For this reason, and others, the first police procedural is generally acknowledged as being Hillary Waugh's *Last Seen Wearing* . . . (1952). Its dialogue, its attention to the details of police procedure, and the uncertain success of the final resolution of the crime establish a pattern which, according to Knight, is characteristic of subsequent examples of