

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

IDEOLOGY, CHARACTERIZATION, AND REALISM IN
SELECTED WORKS OF DASHIELL HAMMETT AND RAYMOND CHANDLER

By

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

CALGARY, ALBERTA

SEPTEMBER, 1987.

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ISBN 0-315-38016-0

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled, "Ideology, Characterization, and Realism in Selected Works of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler" submitted by Calvin Johnston in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

It is now acceptable for a student of literature to choose as the subject of study works of popular culture. Advances achieved in the theory and practical examination of cultural artifacts in the fields of anthropology, sociology, psychology, semiotics, and history, more than any concomitant advances in the area of traditional literary study, have opened up this possibility. However, that it is now acceptable does not, therefore, do away with the inherent problems associated with the formulaic, profit-oriented, mass market production system through which such works arrive. The tendency thus far in studying productions of this type has been to move quickly from an examination of the text itself to a discussion of its significance in larger, cultural terms. For the most part, works of this type cannot sustain a close critical examination, as they lack "literary" substance. The thesis attempts to find a middle ground on which superior works of popular culture offer the opportunity for a textual as well as cultural analysis.

The four works chosen for examination, Dashiell Hammett's Red Harvest and The Maltese Falcon and Raymond Chandler's The Big Sleep and Farewell My Lovely, were all first published as stories in the "pulp" magazine

Black Mask during the 1920s and 1930s. They are part of an American popular culture form known as hard-boiled detective fiction, and they have long been recognized as some of the definitive works in this sub-genre. The approach taken in the thesis is to examine where these works break away from, surpass, subvert, or alter the formulas which sustain the production of this kind of popular fiction. The primary aspects of these novels chosen for examination are the overt and covert political content, the treatment of male-female conflict (coincident to the development and use of the femme fatale), and the narrative techniques used in constructing the stories. The thesis seeks to identify qualities in the selected texts which undercut the notion that formula productions are mechanistic and lacking in complexity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Pamela McCallum for her patience, consideration, and guidance with both myself and this project. My wife and my daughter gave up a great deal with a smile, and I thank them.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION:
HAMMETT, CHANDLER, AND THE
FORMULAIC PRODUCTION OF POPULAR CULTURE

It is no longer necessary to begin a critical examination of a work or works of popular culture with an extended, obsequious explanation of why that particular text or group of texts warrants critical attention. Work conducted in academic disciplines other than the study of traditional literature has revealed the value of examining all aspects of culture--including those elements which do not readily recommend themselves on aesthetic or intellectual grounds. New approaches to the study of cultural products such as Norman O. Brown's Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History, Morse Peckham's Explanation and Power: The Control of Human Behavior, Roland Barthes's Mythologies, and Fredric Jameson's The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act have opened the scope of literary study beyond the established canon of literary classics. However, that it is now acceptable to choose texts for study from the area of popular culture does not substantively change the quality of the works themselves nor does it provide many new criteria for finding merit (as opposed to meaning in a broader cultural context) in such works. This thesis is going

to examine four works of popular culture, seeking to identify, if possible, characteristics within these texts which assist them to escape or transcend the limitations common to their form. The works chosen for this study are Dashiell Hammett's Red Harvest and The Maltese Falcon and Raymond Chandler's The Big Sleep and Farewell My Lovely. These novels (or in some cases the short stories from which the novels were later constructed) were originally published in a popular culture magazine called Black Mask. This magazine specialized in the publication of detective fiction for a mass market in the United States between April 1920 and July 1951. Black Mask and other magazines of the same type are today referred to as the "pulp" (a term used only by their producers when they were actually on the market), and they are now recognized as part of a publishing phenomenon which produced the greatest volume of written material in the history of language (Haining 11).

Recently, the pulps have been enjoying a warm kind of reminiscence by readers who never experienced them in their original form, resulting in, among other things, the publishing of a "new" Black Mask magazine. This would appear, however, to be a symptom of a growing trend toward nostalgia in our society and not a genuine interest in the fiction itself. Most of what was printed on the cheap, yellow-tinged pulp paper (from

which these magazines take their name) will never be missed, and the historical value of these productions remains with collectors interested in their gaudy hand-drawn covers, examples of American detective fiction, or early magazines in general. However, the work of some writers who found their way into print through the ignominious back door of the pulps may be somewhat slighted by their humble beginnings, and literary critics and students today are finding that perhaps some of the significant work produced during the early decades of this century arrived in the form of a seven by ten inch, twenty cent production whose only remaining relative is the comic book.

Before proceeding with an examination of the Hammett and Chandler texts selected for study here, it is necessary to establish the characteristics of "popular culture," pertaining to written works of fiction. This preliminary examination must also briefly explore why and how a distinction has come to be made between "high art" and its correlative "low art"--now synonymous with popular culture. The observations regarding this classification process will have to remain general, as no fixed criteria exist for finite distinctions in this area. Texts which immediately suggest their own place in the canon of serious literary study present few problems. The majority of these works bring a recommendation for recognition in their age and

position within a long-established tradition of artistic production. However, since the middle of the nineteenth century many artistic forms have been subjected to "commodification," leading to the production of the "subliterary genres of mass culture" (Jameson, The Political Unconscious 107). As will be discussed shortly with regard to the observations of Jean-Paul Sartre, at this juncture in the history of literature a rift develops between the artist seeking "authentic artistic expression" and an audience being satiated by the offerings of a rapidly expanding production system, willing to provide endless reproductions of any cultural product for which the audience is willing to pay (Jameson, The Political Unconscious 107). The advent of this "commodification" brought about the situation where any work introduced into society via the mass culture production system was categorically dismissed as worthless by rather elitist academic critics anxious to distinguish and thereby protect the canon of "classical" literature. For the most part there can be no disputing the sweeping judgements of these critics, and works which are left behind on the seats of aircraft and buses are not the focus of this thesis. Although appearing originally as mass culture products, it is those texts which fall into the not too vast area between the readily identifiable poles of the classical canon and the undistinguishable, continuous flow common to mass

culture that present an opportunity here for discussion and examination.

The four novels selected for study will be examined not as part of the mass culture phenomenon in general but as individual works each displaying the characteristics of its mode of production as well as, at times, perspectives, characters, and narrative techniques not commonly associated with a work of popular fiction. In particular, these texts will be examined in terms of the political ideologies which they express both overtly and covertly and in terms of their treatment of the sexual conflict between female villains and male heroes. These two facets--social criticism and the use of the femme fatale--have become recognized elements in the formulaic production of hard-boiled detective fiction; therefore, the relation of these elements to formula must be examined as well.

If there is one overarching characteristic of popular culture production, it is the use of formulas to achieve, among other things, the reproduction of a proven, marketable product. Any examination of a work of popular culture must take into account the nature and influence of formulaic production. John G. Cawelti in his excellent discussion of the formula production of literature offers four hypotheses about the "dialectic between formulaic literature and the culture that produces and enjoys it":

1. Formula stories affirm existing interests and attitudes by presenting an imaginary world that is aligned with these interests and attitudes. . . .

2. Formulas resolve tensions and ambiguities resulting from the conflicting interests of different groups within the culture or from ambiguous attitudes toward particular values. . . .

3. Formulas enable the audience to explore in fantasy the boundary between the permitted and the forbidden and to experience in a carefully controlled way the possibility of stepping across this boundary. . . .

4. Finally, literary formulas assist in the process of assimilating changes in values to the traditional imaginative constructs.

(142-43)

Although Cawelti's claims for popular culture formulas are ambitious, he does not go so far as to suggest that such works are sometimes extreme (that is, radical) in their perspective if not in their form. Popular culture is inherently conservative in both technique and subject, as Cawelti's statements above indicate. It has become important within academic circles in the twentieth century that new works of "art" display a subversiveness in technique and subject. This, of

course, has long been a recognized characteristic of many superior works of art; however, it has assumed greater importance of late, because it has become part of a defensive strategy in the struggle against "commodification." The quality of subversiveness is often recognized as a point of demarcation between works of popular culture and works of art. Subversiveness, by definition, would seem to disallow the use of formula in the creation of any work which might aspire to the status of art.

In his book, Which Way Did He Go?, Edward Margolies offers the following observations on the differing goals and achievements of "high art" and popular culture:

High art, in form or content, subverts ordinary perceptions of reality and hints at alternate interpretations of experience.

Popular culture, on the other hand, tends to reinforce one's private fantasies and yet to reconfirm social and moral attitudes as well.

(1)

Perhaps another way of stating this is to say that works of popular culture take no risks. The reader comes to such a work with a previously fixed set of expectations and with no desire to have the beliefs and attitudes which support those expectations tried or new ones suggested. Quite to the contrary: if this were to happen, the contract between the author and the reader

of popular culture would rapidly be deemed breached, and the author would lose a member of his or her audience. This eventually would translate into a loss of money, and money, it cannot be denied, remains the foundation of popular culture in our society. Therefore, I think it reasonable to suggest that a writer working in the area of popular culture (whether talented or not) is able to stretch the limits of a form to only a modest degree before risking having the work summarily dismissed as unlikely to provide a profit by the publishers.

However, more than any rigid formulaic restrictions placed on a work produced in the popular culture mode, it is the readers' expectations (which through time shape and influence production formulas) that limit the scope and nature of these works. Sinda Gregory in her book, Private Investigations, offers an observation similar to that of Margolies: "detective fiction, like any genre writing, operates within prescribed conventions that define the nature of the work (and thus the scope of its vision)" (xiii-iv). However, Gregory finds that detective fiction, because its interrogative structure is a "powerful pattern," allows writers to explore such complex and disturbing aspects of human experience as "the nature of chaos and personal vulnerability" (xiv), themes not commonly examined in popular culture. It later becomes obvious that Gregory

is alluding here to the appropriation of the detective form by writers of the nouveau roman such as Alain Robbe-Grillet, and she does, in fact, go on to say that Hammett's novels "are among the best examples of the antidetective novel" (12). While I agree with much of what Gregory has to say about Hammett and his work, I cannot accept her argument that it is the "pressing, desperate inquiry" which allows works written in the popular culture form of detective fiction to escape the limits of formula (xiv). Gregory's argument does describe the origin of the "new" or "antidetective" novel, but that form develops out of an exaggeration of a single aspect of detective fiction, and it becomes, both intentionally and unintentionally, a parody of the original. Hammett and Chandler, although they both parody aspects and conventions of the detective story formula at various times within their works, did take their work as writers of detective fiction seriously--if for no other reason than they were trying to make a living at it. This presents problems for Gregory's argument as it refers to their work, because they did not choose the detective form for the same form-conscious reasons as do writers such as Robbe-Grillet, though their performance within the form undoubtedly influenced these later writers.

It is not in the interests of popular culture to recognize innovations introduced into an established

form, especially by means of parody or irony, as this undercuts the elements of reassurance and familiarity which attract and hold the audience. Change does occur in both the formulas and the works of popular culture, but it is not acknowledged as such, for popular culture aids in making change acceptable through the quasi-magical technique of pretending that that which is new has always been and therefore is no cause for concern or reevaluation. This is at once how popular culture remains popular culture and how new perspectives or ideas are introduced into what appears to be a fixed form. Ross Macdonald, who is both heir to the hard-boiled fiction of Hammett and Chandler and a professor of English in the United States (under his real name, Kenneth Millar), states that popular culture "reaffirms our values as they change, and dramatizes the conflicts of those values. . . . It describes new modes of behavior, new versions of human character, new shades and varieties of good and evil, and implicitly criticizes them" (186-87). While I think that we can agree with Macdonald that popular culture "reaffirms our values as they change," he gives too much credit to popular culture with the unqualified statement that it "dramatizes the conflicts of those values." Popular culture does dramatize conflicts between value systems; however, it always does so as if that conflict had arisen in a vacuum. To gain an awareness of social

change through works of popular culture, they must be studied in series from a historical point of view and only then will the changes become apparent. As James Combs points out in his book, Polpop: Politics and Popular Culture in America (written in the tradition of Roland Barthes's Mythologies), the myths and formulas at the root of popular culture are "so democratic and flexible as to attract every possible kind of story" (42). Each work of popular culture is a mini-system which stands independently because of its essentially tautological structure. Everything is worked out within the text; the reader is not called upon to make a contribution to the final answering of questions posed within the work; the answers are always provided. Macdonald speaks of how popular culture "implicitly criticizes" the new: this is an inescapable situation for popular culture, as the old--that is, the accepted--is its essence.

For the most part, works of popular culture which seem to achieve more than their form normally permits are written by writers who deliberately attempt to stretch the fabric of that form. This stretching often takes the shape of parody, irony, or the reversal within an established form of an associated theme. The reasons why a writer situated within the mass culture production system would try to undercut or invert the sustaining formulas of that system are hidden from us. However, it

is not too difficult to understand why Hammett and Chandler found their way into print through the medium of popular culture magazines, while both desirous of producing "serious" fiction, if the nature of "serious" fiction at that time is considered. Sartre traces through history the changes in audiences and the correlative changes in form and content of "high literature" in his book, What is Literature?, and he makes the following observation about the changes which occurred in this literature at the turn of this century:

Thus, whereas literature ordinarily represents an integrating and militant function in society, bourgeois society at the end of the nineteenth century offers the unprecedented spectacle of an industrious society, grouped around the banner of production, from which there issues a literature which far from reflecting it, never speaks to it about what interests it, runs counter to its ideology, identifies the Beautiful with the unproductive, refuses to allow itself to be integrated, and does not even wish to be read. (99)

Sartre identifies here the intent and achievement of many serious artists of this time in making their work deny, in its very substance, the society from which it springs--the purpose in this effort being to

re-establish an independence or at least a distance from the stifling paternalism of a society which had turned art into a commodity. Sartre states that in pursuing "contestation" of the culture from which it arrives and which it mirrors (an essential characteristic of art), the literature of this particular time "pushed contestation to the limit, even to the point of contesting itself" (99). This tactic on the part of the "moderns" served to drastically reduce the competent audience for their literature, and many aspiring artists, including both of the authors studied here, were frustrated by the ambivalent purpose of this art to obfuscate meaning. In reading the attempts of both Hammett and Chandler to make their mark in the contemporary circle of recognized artists it rapidly becomes apparent that they were unable or unwilling to follow the direction being marked out by the avante-garde writers and critics of their time. Neither Hammett nor Chandler was able to provide, in the words of Sartre describing the artistic products of this time, a "glimpse of a black silence beyond the massacre of words, and, beyond the spirit of seriousness, the bare and empty sky of equivalences" (99). Rather, when they attempted work in a serious artistic vein, especially Chandler, it came out more in the manner of the Victorians than that of the moderns. They were both too much the limited products of their social backgrounds to

make the kind of leap needed to follow the "serious literature" of their day. Chandler was a sentimental romantic educated in England at Dulwich College, and Hammett was a resolute, self-taught American pragmatist who left school at thirteen. Nevertheless, both of these men were talented and insightful, and, although they found their way into print via the medium of popular culture, their work should not be arbitrarily categorized or dismissed.

Too much of what has been stated about Hammett and Chandler's work has been generalized from cursory examinations of the texts or from memories of movie and television productions. The superficial characteristics of successful devices and characters originally developed in their works have since been copied by countless imitators in all the popular culture media. As a result, generalized conceptions of these devices and characters have been formed without reference to the originals. Often, an examiner, reviewer, or "critic" will summarize the total production in a particular popular culture mode and call it a "tradition." "Fathers," or in the rare case, "mothers" will then be assigned to that "tradition," and everything is neatly re-packaged for further sale. No consideration is given in this process to the actual relationship of the originals to the "tradition." They become "known" through bowdlerized and popularized (that is, the

suppression or reformulation of disturbing elements into a position of new and non-threatening meaning) versions of plots, themes, characters, and narrative techniques which soon become ubiquitous in the market place of popular culture. For these reasons, it is worthwhile to re-examine the work of two authors who helped to create the "tradition" of the hard-boiled detective story.

It is the position taken in this thesis that, while Dashiehl Hammett and Raymond Chandler produced superior works in an established popular culture form, their works cannot be accepted as representative of that form, as they introduced new ideas and images which had yet to become part of the common stock of popular perceptions and beliefs sustaining that form. There are instances where the texts of these authors self-consciously work against the form in which they are produced to achieve the communication of ideas and imaginative sensibilities foreign to popular production and acceptance. Although recognized as the best writers to appear in an area of popular production, Hammett and Chandler both, to varying degrees, stand outside the mainstream of values informing the formulaic production of hard-boiled detective fiction during their time.

Those works within the sub-genre of hard-boiled detective fiction which come after the works of Hammett and Chandler cannot be understood without giving consideration to the creations of these two authors, as

their influence was pervasive. However, those works that follow are also the product of popular culture formulas which, as Combs points out, are flexible enough to expropriate any idea, device, or story and make it their own. This is why Hammett and Chandler are remembered by many for what they did not actually write. The real popular culture of their day can be found in the works of such second-level authors (an admittedly subjective evaluation) as Erle Stanley Gardner, Frederick Nebel, Paul Cain, and Horace McCoy. Because of heightened imaginative capacities, greater artistic sensibilities, and greater writing skills, Hammett and Chandler are both able to reach a level of creation (perhaps in the case of Hammett, artistic) uncommon to the popular culture milieu. This is not to say that what they produced was not part of the contemporary popular culture: it was and is even more so today. This situation notwithstanding, it is to say that caution must be used in approaching their works as examples of popular culture, because they occupy the ambiguous position of having been created within the parameters of a popular form while redefining the limits of that form, using, at times, a self-conscious parody of the form itself as a creative device. This thesis is not going to attempt to claim for the works examined here admission to the canon of "classical" literature. It is, however, going to examine the political

ideologies, sexual conflict, and, to some degree, the narrative techniques found in these works, seeking to identify characteristics and treatments unusual to works of popular culture, thus moving these works into a position of some cultural, if not strictly "artistic," significance. With an understanding established of the problematic position occupied within the ranks of popular culture productions by the works of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett, it is now possible to turn to an examination of the political aspects of their novels.

CHAPTER TWO
HAMMETT'S HARD-BOILED POLITICS

One of the recognized characteristics of hard-boiled detective fiction is its cynical and bitter commentary on political corruption and the general debased state of human relations in a contemporary urban setting. The social criticism found in these works is not, however, entirely straightforward. It can neither be immediately dismissed as an essentially meaningless convention of the form (as Hammett's work in particular contributed greatly to the establishment of that convention) nor can it be uncritically accepted as a sincere expression of dissatisfaction with the state of contemporary society. This chapter and the one following are going to examine the political aspects of selected works of Hammett and Chandler with a view to revealing where these works stand in relation to viable social criticism and the hard-boiled convention of a corrupt, diseased urban setting.

Hammett's Red Harvest is the most blatantly political text to be examined here. Contrary to some critical opinions, I believe that in its political ambition, if not its tone and development, this novel is the most adventurous and sincere political statement to be made within the confines of American popular culture during the period of Hammett's lifetime (1894 - 1961).

It is difficult for a contemporary reader to understand the serious political stand to which Hammett put his name in the writing of Red Harvest, the nature of popular culture being such that it rapidly turns innovation into kitsch or formula. Because popular culture is so pervasive and, within certain limits, expansive, it is a demanding exercise to comprehend the initial impact and import of a work whose essential elements have gone on to become part of a production formula. Hammett's achievement is so complete in the melding of his political statement with the meeting of the expectations of formulaic production of an established pulp fiction readership that the political element, while obvious, remains innocuous. The blatant simplicity of Hammett's method contributes both to the novel's success as a work of popular culture and to the lack of recognition which the work receives as a bold political statement, going against the grain of the popular ideology.

Red Harvest was first published serially in four monthly installments in Black Mask, beginning with a segment titled "The Cleansing of Poisonville" in November 1927. The remaining three parts, "Crime Wanted--Male or Female," "Dynamite," and "The 19th Murder," were published in the three successive months. The entire work (indications are that Hammett "considered it as four long, interconnected stories")

was not published until February 1929, when it came out in Alfred A. Knopf's new Borzoi Mystery Series (Layman 90).

Hammett's technique in Red Harvest leaves the recognizable "bad-guys" and "good-guys" alone. To introduce the political element, he simply posits a secondary cause behind the presence and activities of the "bad-guys" in the character of a corrupt, aging capitalist. Elihu Willsson, the "czar of Poisonville," is without doubt modelled after men whom Hammett met and worked for as an operative of the Pinkerton National Detective Agency (10). For us, living in the latter decades of the twentieth century, having been recipients of the mass media's driving purpose to sell scandal and sensation and having been taught the history of the holocaust, the hypocrisy of the Vietnam War, and the truth of Watergate, Hammett's capitalist villain is "small potatoes." However, if it were as simple as its having a capitalist villain, the novel would not be significant in terms of its political content. Hammett crafts the novel in such a way as to make its setting a generalized referent for the new urban centres growing rapidly up around the many large-scale industrial undertakings in the western United States. Therefore, although the novel is produced in a recognized popular culture mode, it is also constructed as an allegory.

In the first sentence of Red Harvest we are told

that the story is to be set in "Personville" (3). The import of this generalized nomination is blunted by the immediate substitution of another name which then receives steady usage throughout the remainder of the novel, "Poisonville" (3). Following the idea of generalized reference and allegory through to its development in Red Harvest, we can compare Hammett's description of the novel's setting with the traditional romantic image of the American West:

The city wasn't pretty. Most of its builders had gone in for gaudiness. Maybe they had been successful at first. Since then the smelters whose brick stacks stuck up tall against a gloomy mountain to the south had yellow-smoked everything into uniform dinginess. The result was an ugly notch between two ugly mountains that had been all dirtied up by mining. Spread over this was a grimy sky that looked as if it had come out of the smelter's stacks. (3)

As Peter Wolfe points out, Red Harvest owes much to the popular culture form of the Western: "the mountain setting harks to the old west. Hard-drinking, gun-brandishing rowdies people the city" (77). However, Hammett's treatment of the Western's usual theme of an idyllic frontier where strong individuals achieve self-determination is ironic from the outset. The use

of irony in this fashion indicates a consciousness on Hammett's part of the short-sightedness of standard popular culture themes, formulas, and symbols. That he finds easy acceptance for this work in an audience whose usual reading fare is being dealt some heavy blows by its imagery and thematic structure is further indication of his understanding of the elements with which he is working.

Hammett's achievement then is not just a treatment of the blacker side of unrestrained capitalism but rather his realization of this theme through the manipulation of a popular myth fundamentally linked to the ideology being criticized. In this regard, it is worthwhile to examine more closely what was (and for the most part still is) embodied in the "Western Myth" and then to contrast this with what is presented in Red Harvest. Combs attributes the "longstanding appeal of the West" to its "epic nature":

The winning of the West is our primal adventure, an epic quest in scope, a drama of mythical heroes, villains, and fools in a conflict set in a mythic time and place. The West is thus a powerful story with metaphorical uses for subsequent generations.

(41)

Combs goes on to assert that "the Western story is central to our [American] mythic legacy" (42). For

Americans as individuals and as a society, the Western myth is of considerable importance. The myth is used to explain political strategies and to provide a historical base for explanations of why the United States is the way it is and, more importantly, why it does what it does or is going to do. It is not insignificant, as shallow as it may seem, that the current President used to star in Western movies, and that he still associates himself with the Western myth testifies to the strength of its appeal for the American people (Combs 42-43). Combs points out in his discussion that the Western myth is complex, incorporating elements such "as pastoral dream, as righteous empire, as heroic morality play, as symbol of the 'American spirit,' a symbol of freedom, and a symbol of community" (43-44). It serves our purpose in discussing Red Harvest to compare the description of the novel's setting quoted above to the "pastoral ideal" commonly associated with the Western myth and described here by Combs:

The West survives as an image in the American mind of a pastoral ideal, a spectacular and raw landscape which held adventure, riches, and even salvation. It was the last natural setting--a "virgin land"--in which a heroic drama of conquest could be enacted. (44)

This description stands in stark contrast to that given on the opening page of Hammett's novel, where the

natural landscape has taken on a "uniform dinginess" with "ugly mountains" and a "grimy sky" (3). Hammett deliberately invokes an inverted image of this popular, to use Combs's term, "mytheme" (44). This first-page description serves as an early indicator that the novel is not, despite its mode of production, going to blindly follow a traditional, formulaic thematic scheme.

The extent of the political criticism embodied in Hammett's first novel is missed by many readers who do not realize that for a time he earned his living dealing with labour activism from the side of business owners. The history of the Pinkerton National Detective Agency (and the history of those agencies which sprang up on the heels of Pinkerton's success) is written on the same pages which describe the growth of the labour movement in the United States. Even today, private security firms offer such services as planning, surveillance, infiltration, and equipment to companies which wish to combat a strike or unionization. It is worthwhile, at this point, to digress briefly into a short discussion of the relationship which existed between private detective firms and organized labour at the time that Hammett worked for the Pinkertons. This is important, as much has been made of the fact that Hammett's experience as a detective helped him to change the detective story in the United States from the ratiocinative, "classical" British detective story to

the now characteristically American "hard-boiled" narrative, but not a great deal has been said about how this experience influenced his political beliefs.

One of the often overlooked aspects of Red Harvest is that Hammett would have been fully cognizant of the story's audience being, at least in the magazine publication, "the unsophisticated and under-paid millions" (Haining 13). Capitalist oppression was not an objective and distant issue for many of the original readers of Red Harvest. Hammett's experiences with the labour movement while in the employ of the Pinkerton agency are reflected in the novel and, it is reasonable to assume, later in his openly expressed Marxist beliefs. His experiences in this area contributed, at least in part, to his joining of the American Communist Party in 1937 or 1938, and this association, along with his trusteeship in the American Civil Rights Congress, eventually led to Hammett's six month jail term in 1951 for contempt of court in a proceeding prompted by the wave of anti-communist hysteria generated by Senator Joseph McCarthy (Layman 175, 220).

Frank Morn in his excellent book (developed from the archives of the Pinkerton agency among other sources), The Eye That Never Sleeps, traces the history of a company which has itself become an American institution. Morn states that "since the 1880s most detective businesses had provided strikebreakers as well

as spies and guards" (166). Morn also reports that "the government did nothing to restrict these activities, and the number of agencies offering extensive strikebreaking services grew to sixty by the 1930s, when a law was passed forbidding the mass transportation of scabs" (167). The western states were a fruitful area of employ for the Pinkertons. As the railroads opened up the territory, Pinkerton operatives (as they were called) worked for them watching conductors suspected of skimming ticket profits and occasionally tracking train robbers. The Pinkertons also worked for livestock associations, pursuing cattle rustlers and, more importantly, driving immigrant settlers from range land before they became established as farmers. They also worked for the mining companies, uncovering highgraders among the miners and gaining membership in the extremely active and militant industry trade unions. While carefully building a public image around the romantic elements of the detective profession, the Pinkerton National Detective Agency collected millions of dollars from companies in the American west for services performed in suppressing and spying upon "elements" in that new society whose purposes ran contrary to those of the dominant local business-owner.

Dashiell Hammett was not the first Pinkerton operative to become a writer nor was he the first to comment negatively on his experiences in that

profession. Charles A. Siringo was employed as a Pinkerton operative from 1886 to 1908. Before joining the agency, he had published a book in 1885, describing his experiences as a cowboy. When he attempted to publish a similar book about his experiences with the Pinkertons in 1912, the publication and distribution was blocked and eventually halted by court action on the part of the agency. This action incited Siringo to write an "angry diatribe against the Pinkertons" entitled Two Evil Isms: Pinkertonism and Anarchism in 1914 (Peavy vii). While the vindictive motivation behind the book is obvious, and substantiation impossible, given the secret nature of most of the work, Siringo makes a statement regarding the situation of miners at that time which is worthy of note:

My years of sleuthing has only placed one dark blot on my conscience. This was caused by having to work against coal miners, in their fights for justice. While I only reported facts, I consider it a disgrace to tell the truth, knowing that the truth will retard justice to a class of men who are poorly paid, and who take their lives into their own hands every time they enter a dirty coal mine.

Besides, these men and their families are treated as slaves by the greedy corporations

who own the mines. (108)

The final page of Siringo's book is given to a "facsimile of the script used in paying these slaves" (109). On that page is a reproduction of the company "money" issued by the Victor Fuel Company of Colorado as payment to their employees, a piece of paper worthless at any place except the company's stores.

As the popular myth depicts, the American west was undeniably a lawless frontier; however, the absence of law and order did nothing but strengthen the position of those people able to buy their own kind of order through the services offered by the private detective and security firms, of which the Pinkerton agency was the largest and most successful. In many ways the early cities in this frontier resembled feudal estates governed by the owner of the local industry and policed by a standing army of company-employed guards. These conditions did not change to any significant degree in the time between Siringo's employment and that of Hammett's. Julian Symons in Dashiell Hammett tells how Hammett spoke of having "turned down an offer of \$5,000.00 by an official of the Anaconda Copper Mining Company to murder a union organizer named Frank Little" (39). Symons records that Little was later lynched, "apparently by vigilantes" (39). This incident took place during the "war on labour organizers" which "lasted from 1917 to 1920" (Layman 89). Hammett makes a

direct link between the labour activities of this period and the setting and details of Red Harvest with his inclusion of references to the "wobblies" or members of the International Workers of the World (6), as fifteen members of the IWW were shot on picket lines in Butte, Montana in April 1920 (Layman 89). Butte is eight miles from Anaconda, the town used as a model for the setting of Red Harvest.

Hammett's approach in Red Harvest is unique in that it links the lawlessness of Poisonville to the efforts of Elihu Willsson, who owns the city "heart, soul, skin, and guts," in subjugating its citizens (7). Hammett does not idealize the position of the IWW, acknowledging their use of such tactics as "the old sabotage racket" (7). However, he does make it clear that he views the workers as victims of Willsson's greed and high-handedness, evidenced in his tearing "up the agreements . . . kicking them back into their pre-war circumstances" (7). Hammett's feelings toward the situation are even more apparent in the uncharacteristically, opinionated paragraph which follows:

The strike lasted eight months. Both sides bled plenty. The wobblies had to do their own bleeding. Old Elihu hired gunmen, strike-breakers, national guardsmen and even parts of the regular army, to do his. When

the last skull had been cracked, the last rib kicked in, organized labor in Personville was a used firecracker. (7)

It should be noted that, while Hammett is careful to describe the history behind the narrative's present situation, linking it to the labour struggle, he does not include or make reference to the average people of Poisonville after the historical circumstances have been established. Hammett is writing an action story for a mass culture magazine, and, after formulating the story's blighted urban setting and positing capitalistic greed and power mongering as the causal base for the plot, he gets on with the expected business of conspiracy, adventure, and murder.

Although the perspective of the common citizens of Poisonville is never fully provided in the novel, Hammett is aware of their position and interest in the outcome of the conflict. The Op is not just working for Elihu Willsson; in fact, he sets up the contract between Willsson and the Continental Detective Agency in such a fashion that he will not be "playing politics" for Willsson (30). The Op is guided by an ideal of justice and a personal and professional sense of morality; he is a hero of the people, a figure not uncommon in works of popular culture. However, while the novel's hero, for the most part, does fit within the limits of popular culture formula, the narrative does not.

The novel breaks with the conventions of popular culture in two significant areas: the Op's "killing" of Dinah Brand (which will be discussed in chapter four), and the pessimistic closure of the narrative. There is no state of "happily ever-after" reached at the end of Red Harvest. On the contrary, the Op resorts to blackmail in an attempt to prevent Willsson from taking advantage of his being once again the sole power in the city:

"You're going to have the mayor, or the governor, whichever it comes under, suspend the whole Personville police department, and let the mail order troops handle things till you can organize another. I'm told that the mayor and the governor are both pieces of your property. They'll do what you tell them. And that's what you're going to tell them. It can be done, and it's got to be done."

"Then you'll have your city back, all nice and clean and ready to go to the dogs again."

(134)

The Op has no illusions about what is likely to happen now that Willsson has regained his power. Only the symptoms of the malaise affecting the world of Poisonville have been changed, the underlying cause still remains. Instead of riding off into the sunset as the popular image has it, the Op leaves town to hide out

under a pseudonym until he hears from his co-worker that it is safe to come out. There is no respite from the gloomy vision in the final, ironic summation "that Personville, under martial law, was developing into a sweet-smelling and thornless bed of roses" (142).

Hammett establishes a mood and tone in the setting and circumstances of Red Harvest that captures a sense of hopeless dissolution in the contemporary urban situation. This mood and tone go on to become part of the hard-boiled formula; however, they are never again given the same forceful and bitter treatment as they are in Hammett's fiction. Hammett's vision is too extreme for the general conservatism of popular culture. In his book, The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction, Dennis Porter credits Hammett (and Chandler as well) with creating a "new landscape for crime" in order to "communicate American myths" (129). It might be more accurate in Hammett's case to say that he creates a "new landscape for crime" out of the inversion of an already extant American myth--that is, the "mytheme" of the Western frontier. Porter recognizes the conflict between Hammett's vision and the "pastoral dream":

Hammett's Poisonville resembles the cityscape of American naturalism. . . . That is to say, it appears as the typical environment of an unregulated industrial capitalism, which

acknowledges no limits to the pursuit of private wealth. Both detective hero and reader are, therefore, faced with the alienated product of human labor on the level of a total environment. Moreover, Hammett's example in this became a model for the hard-boiled genre, whether subsequent writers shared his radical tendencies or not. . . . If American literature is a literature of extremes, if it veers between the poles of utopian quest and a nightmarish realism, it is because in the twentieth century, at least, its implicit theme has so often been the shattering of the pastoral dream on the concrete surfaces of the urban wasteland. (197-98)

The political ideology and its artistic reflection in the tone, setting, and plot of Red Harvest was not a convention at the time that Hammett wrote the story in four magazine parts. Further, he was well aware of the predominantly working-class, male audience which would receive his work. There is little that is subtle about either the novel's technique or its politicisim. It openly castigates the unrestrained capitalism of the early twentieth century in the western United States while making its way into that same society via a materialist production system. Hammett is quite

ruthless in his handling of the inversion of the "mytheme" of the West to provide impact for his political theme and observations. Nevertheless, all this does not serve to elevate Red Harvest to the artistic status of a work such as Thomas Hardy's Jude the Obscure or D.H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers; it does, however, provide the work with a credibility and significance not common to popular culture and makes it worthy of recognition as other than a work of formula.

As will become clear in the Chapter dealing with the sexual conflict in Hammett's texts, The Maltese Falcon is not a political novel in the same sense that Red Harvest or Farewell My Lovely is. The Maltese Falcon achieves a powerful and unique expression of the individual's situation in a world past that of Red Harvest in terms of alienation and desolation. For that reason, discussion of the novel will be left to chapter four. It is time to shift the focus of this examination of the political content of hard-boiled detective fiction to the work of Raymond Chandler.

CHAPTER THREE
CHANDLER'S HARD-BOILED POLITICS

If Hammett took a bold step in writing Red Harvest, a novel which brings an unconventional political perspective to a work of popular fiction, I do not believe that the same can be said for Chandler and his detective novels. It has long been recognized that one of the intrinsic elements of hard-boiled detective fiction is its cynical commentary on the corrupt, ineffective nature of municipal governments and institutions. Chandler brings the experience of living in this corrupt, urban environment to the reader through the tone and attitude of Philip Marlowe's first-person narration. Chandler's novels contain a vast array of gangsters, evil women, decadent rich, dirty cops, corrupt government officials, corrupt institutions, and characters just generally defeated by their world. As Frank MacShane points out, Chandler is able to "create the whole of Los Angeles in much the same way that such nineteenth-century novelists as Dickens and Balzac created London and Paris," and it is for his portrayal of the lonely, cruel, and corrupt world of Los Angeles during the 1930s and 1940s that his work is best remembered (67). But, in spite of all this, the political criticism found in his novels remains limited in its scope, conservative in its position, and somewhat

elitist in its perspective. Chandler's works express a pessimistic vision of the twentieth-century American urban situation, but this perspective is constrained by its presentation through the attitude, observations, and experiences of the narrator-hero, Philip Marlowe, and, in the final analysis, the reader is left unable to distinguish between Marlowe's sensibility and any objective "reality" presented in the novels.

Chandler's corrupt urban world seems linked more to a convention which he discovered previously established within the hard-boiled form than to any personal insight or concern. While it is understood that attempts to draw inferences from an author's personal situation are circumspect at best, it is interesting to note that "Raymond Chandler became a writer for the pulp magazines because he was broke, not because he wanted to write for the pulps" (Symons, "An Aesthete Discovers The Pulps" 20). The same to a degree was, of course, true of Hammett and many other popular writers, and writing for money is not in itself suspect. However, the method used by Chandler to learn his craft opens the question of what he personally brought to the form, aside from an obvious command of language and the ability to create striking, hyperbolic descriptions. Symons states that Chandler learned how to produce hard-boiled fiction by reading "three or four detective stories" (this is supported by MacShane in The Life of Raymond Chandler

48-49 as well) and by re-creating an Erle Stanley Gardner story from a synopsis which he had prepared of the text ("An Aesthete" 22). After his first story, "Blackmailer's Don't Shoot," was published by Black Mask in December 1933, Chandler "read everything he could find," making himself fully acquainted with the formative elements which had been established in the hard-boiled sub-genre's short history ("An Aesthete" 22). There is certainly nothing in Chandler's life, as there is in Hammett's, to indicate that he was a politically aware and active individual. Quite the contrary: everything in his life points toward his being a very ego-centric loner. There is something suspect, not about the quality of Chandler's prose and his narrative skill, but about his political sensibility. The description, given in his essay, "The Simple Art of Murder," of the world from which the "realist" writer takes his example is, when read a second time, naive:

The realist in murder writes of a world in which gangsters can rule nations and almost rule cities, in which which hotels and apartment houses and celebrated restaurants are owned by men who made their money out of brothels, in which a screen star can be the finger man for the mob, and the nice man down the hall is a boss of the numbers racket; a world where a judge with a cellar full of

bootleg liquor can send a man to jail for having a pint in his pocket, where the mayor of your town may have condoned murder as an instrument of money-making, where no man can walk down a dark street in safety because law and order are things we talk about but refrain from practising. (19)

The examples used are a bit far-fetched, and there is too strong a sense of one man griping here which undercuts any rational or experiential conclusions which may form part of this address. In this essay, which strangely enough Jacques Barzun uses to argue that Chandler's hero is "fighting society" (162), Chandler goes on to make statements which tend to identify him more as an insecure snob than as an enlightened social critic: "the police may not like your testimony, and in any case the shyster for the defence will be allowed to abuse and vilify you in open court, before a jury of selected morons" (19). At this point, one begins to wonder for whom, aside from himself, Chandler registers his concerns. He was without doubt a very idiosyncratic individual; the story is told of how he had attempted to "justify the right-hand margin" of his first story, "Blackmailers Don't Shoot," before submitting it to Black Mask (MacShane 49), and in spite of the requirements of formula, Chandler's idiosyncrasies do not fail to show up in his fiction.

Chandler is unable, or perhaps has no desire, to achieve in his work the same kind of emotional detachment that characterizes Hammett's fiction. Jerry Spier says of Chandler that "he was never bothered by having his works referred to as 'melodramatic' or 'sentimental'--terms of denigration in literary circles--because melodrama and sentimental romance were exactly right for his purposes" (119). Speir's assertion, however, seems to go against Chandler's own observations regarding and obvious esteem for "realism" found in his discussion of the detective form: "Realism takes too much talent, too much knowledge, too much awareness" ("The Simple Art of Murder" 17). I suspect that Chandler may, in fact, confuse his narrative style with "realism," for, as Barzun points out in regard to these remarks, "he never bothered to analyse what he meant by realism" (161). If this is the case, Chandler's social criticism is left with little credibility, as it certainly fails to establish any independence for itself either within the narratives themselves or as commentary on the social situation existing outside of the texts. There is too little dramatic development of the political themes expoused in Chandler's novels. Virtually nothing in these texts comes to the reader without being refracted through the consciousness of the narrator-hero, Philip Marlowe, and Chandler is certainly unable to avoid the common pitfall

of an all-pervasive subjectivity in his use of the first-person narrative technique.

There are substantial differences between the politics of Hammett's first-person novel and those of Chandler's. In Red Harvest, Hammett situates the entire story upon the premise that unrestrained capitalism is responsible for a situation of almost irremediable corruption and violence. The criminality which has grown out of this fertile situation requires a "blood bath" to cure, and then, because the corrupt capitalist remains and little in the fundamental politics of the situation has changed, the city is "ready to go to the dogs again" (134). In contrast, in The Big Sleep Chandler portrays a decadent rich family, "shows how corrupt they are as human beings" (MacShane 71), and then has his detective-narrator make the statement: "To hell with the rich. They make me sick" (57). This is a simplistic summary, but the analysis is accurate nonetheless: Chandler infuses his social criticism with a subjectivity that remains individualized in the consciousness of Philip Marlowe.

First person, male narration is probably the most consistently noted characteristic of hard-boiled detective fiction. Even in stories told in the third person the action and narrative voice follows the detective, as Hanna Charney remarks:

The detective is often the central

consciousness, mostly a dramatic one, of the detective novel. His mind is the stage of the action; his activities give it form; his conclusion is the orchestration of the themes of the work. (21)

The problem in Chandler's novels arises from the lack of dramatic development of his social criticism and his failure to let the character of Philip Marlowe exist at least somewhat independently of both the author's world views and the mood and tone of the novels themselves. MacShane recognizes that the narrative voice in the novels is "half-Chandler, half-Marlowe," and he attempts to claim that "what prevents the reader from mistrusting the voice of the narrator, or doubting its authenticity, is the liveliness of Chandler's language" (93). I do not believe that Chandler is able to capture (as MacShane attempts to assert with a comparison to Dickens) the trust of his readers with the perspective of his first-person narrator.

The political issues in Chandler's texts are so intertwined with the narrow, subjective impressions of Philip Marlowe that it is difficult to perceive them as other than a part of his consciousness. George Grella observes of hard-boiled fiction in general that "the affluent are so often responsible for social problems that a quasi-Marxist distrust of the wealthy becomes a minor motif; the rich are merely gangsters who have

managed to escape punishment" (111). In the case of Chandler's fiction, Grella's assessment comes closest to what is revealed through an examination of the texts themselves, though I do not think that in any real way there is even a hint of a Marxist philosophy; "distrust of the wealthy" remains just a "minor motif." Chandler and Marlowe both engage in some questionable "rich bashing" for reasons which remain obscure. In Farewell My Lovely, Chandler sets up a contrast between rich and poor which is sustained throughout the narrative. The novel opens with the following description: "It was one of the mixed blocks over on Central Avenue, the blocks that are not yet all negro" (1). Later, we are given a description of the locale where, as it will turn out, the villainess, Velma Valento, has moved up to from the neighbourhood described above:

Aster Drive had a long smooth curve there and the houses on the inland side were just nice houses, but on the canyon side they were great silent estates, with twelve-foot walls and wrought iron gates and ornamental hedges; and inside, if you could get inside, a special brand of sunshine, very quiet, put up in noise-proof containers just for the upper classes. (97)

The strong sense of resentment toward the wealthy, which runs throughout the text, finding expression in

Marlowe's continual commentary--such as, his observation that "law is where you buy it in this town"--is not, however, borne out in any dramatic aspect of the plot (111). Mrs. Grayle is revealed to be an imposter to the upper class, having crept up from the streets, bringing the deadly habits of the criminal class with her. In fact, in the two novels examined here, there are no evil rich characters, except for women who are cast as having betrayed their situation as is the case with the Sternwood women, or as not truly belonging to their situation as is the case with Velma Valento. The rich patriarchs found in these novels are to some degree revered and to another pitied, cast as victims of their female relations. In The Big Sleep the suggestion is that General Sternwood is exhausted and crippled by the unrestrained behavior of his daughters, and in Farewell My Lovely Mr. Grayle is made a cuckold by his wife. The male-female conflict in Chandler's novels will be explored in greater detail in chapter five. The point being made here is that what at first appears to be evidence of a political consciousness on Chandler's part is little more than convention. Marlowe's verbiage conceals the fact that in terms of the narrative structure of the novels the rich are left pretty much alone.

Speir writes that "organized crime shadows the wealthy in Chandler's world, and that symbiotic

relationship functions as a leitmotif in many of the novels" (134). This is immediately apparent in both of the Chandler novels examined here, and, in Farewell My Lovely, Chandler goes so far as to make the wealthy villainess, Mrs. Merwin Lockridge Grayle, a former member of the gangster class. Chandler's portrayal of underworld characters and their colourful speech is one of his fiction's most notable features, in spite of the fact that it has little to do with the central plot or main characters. Fredric Jameson refers to the underworld goings-on in Chandler's novels as the "secondary plot," and he links this criminal activity with a general theme of guilt:

This trail of bloodshed is a false scent, designed to draw the reader's attention to guilt in the wrong places. The diversion is not dishonest, inasmuch as the guilt uncovered along the way is also real enough; the latter is simply not that with which the book is directly involved. ("On Raymond Chandler" 144).

Jameson understands Chandler's use and depiction of underworld characters as part of an artistic strategy which seeks to establish a world of "large and small systems of corruption" ("On Raymond Chandler" 143). This world is then disrupted by the presence and inquiries of the detective and through his activities

"exposed" for what it is. As Glenn W. Most states, "the detective is not only the solution, he is also part of the problem, the catalyst who by his very introduction both provokes murders and solves them" (347). Jameson notes that all of Chandler's novels are variations of a pattern where "the guilty party . . . must turn out to be in one way or another a member of the family, the client, or a member of his entourage" ("On Raymond Chandler" 144-45). In this regard, Chandler's hard-boiled detective fiction is not that different from the "classical" British detective story. It is worthy of note that Chandler, who complimented Hammett on giving "murder back to the kind of people that commit it for reasons, not just to provide a corpse" ("The Simple Art of Murder" 16), should work from a pattern that, as Jameson states, is "in itself little more than a variation on the law of the least likely party"--a decidedly British tradition in the detective fiction genre ("On Raymond Chandler" 145). Perhaps Chandler had experienced enough of the extremities of life to realize that most murders occur within a domestic setting (these were the days before published sociological surveys), or perhaps, as will be discussed later, there were issues which Chandler wished to explore in his fiction which caused him to situate his murders in the family. Chandler is recognized as one of the "fathers" of a sub-genre known for its violence and focus upon the

criminal milieu; however, an examination of his work reveals that all of his novels revolve around violence which occurs in a family setting of one type or another. Chandler's famous "tough-guy" detective, Philip Marlowe, in spite of his reputation, only kills once in the course of seven novels, and that killing occurs in the first, The Big Sleep. This is not to say that the underworld does not figure largely in Chandler's works; it is just that, while the language and characters of the underworld command a great deal of attention, they remain peripheral to the "domestic crime which is the . . . central event" (Jameson, "On Raymond Chandler" 145).

To digress for a brief moment, it is interesting to note that, as mentioned earlier, there is much about the works of Hammett and Chandler which does not coincide with commonly-held conceptions. It is one of the unusual aspects of the hard-boiled detective "tradition" that two of its most prominent heroes are, given the minimal damage which they inflict on other characters, virtually non-violent: Marlowe's behavior in this regard is recorded above, and Sam Spade does not even carry a gun in The Maltese Falcon.

Chandler's use of a domestic conflict to plot his murders will be discussed in greater detail in the examination of his portrayal of the femme fatale and his treatment of the male-female conflict. Having pointed

out the problematic nature of Chandler's social criticism, we can now turn to one of his novels and examine this aspect of his fiction. Edmund Wilson in his now famous indictment of the detective novel, "Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?" comments that Chandler's "Farewell My Lovely is the only one of these books [detective novels] that I have read all of and read with enjoyment" (38). Chandler himself writes in a letter to Alex Barris that this novel "would be called the best of my books (Letters 165), and Farewell My Lovely is Chandler's best novel. Unlike most of his texts, its political content does find some expression in the plot. The novel's structure neatly connects the figure of the femme fatale with both the decadence of the rich and the desperation of the underworld. The action takes place in the characteristic Chandler world of an urban emotional wasteland, and his use of language, to say the least, is exuberant, imaginative, and effective. This is a text which, though never really escaping the limits of popular formula, presents the reader with the best of what that sub-genre has to offer--as well as the character of Philip Marlowe, who has not failed to remain a distinct invention of the author, not the formula.

The corruption in Farewell My Lovely comes in the form of a place called Bay City which is controlled by a "mob of gamblers headed by a man named Laird Brunette"

who, to gain their power, "elected themselves a mayor" (72). The only figures introduced to the reader who actually are a part of this corrupt situation are the gambler, Laird Brunette, and three members of the Bay City police department, including the amusing character of Chief John Wax. Brunette is described in surprisingly complimentary terms, given that he is supposedly a "bad-guy" in the novel's treatment of civic corruption:

He had a cat smile, but I like cats.

He was neither young nor old, neither fat nor thin. Spending a lot of time on or near the ocean had given him a good healthy complexion. . . . He had nice hands, not babied to the point of insipidity, but well kept. (210)

Marlowe is actually assisted by Brunette, and their roles in the novel never pit them against one another as enemies. In spite of Marlowe's continuous railing at the corrupted nature of his world, men who occupy positions of status and power are never his real enemies in any of Chandler's novels. They are all, to varying degrees, portrayed in relatively appealing terms and treated with some respect by the hero. More on this treatment of dominant male figures will be discussed later.

Marlowe's conflict with "corruption" arises from

his dealings with the fraudulent psychic, Jules Amthor. He is beaten by two police detectives from Bay City when he becomes too insistent in his questioning of the quack doctor. Chandler's real achievement is in his ability to make the dirty and cruel side of this world come alive with descriptions like the following of Sergeant Galbraith, whom Marlowe dubs "Hemingway" because of his tendency to repeat whatever is said to him:

He was a windblown blossom of some two hundred pounds, with freckled teeth and the mellow voice of a circus barker. He was tough, fast, and he ate red meat. Nobody could push him around. He was the kind of cop who spits on his blackjack every night instead of saying his prayers. But he had humourous eyes.

(127)

It is at the hands of "Hemingway" and his boss, Captain Blane, that Marlowe receives the obligatory hard-boiled detective's beating. They also deposit him in a Dr. Sonderborg's quick-cure hospital, where he is drugged and held against his will, and the inference is that such things can happen because, as Marlowe says, "you can buy a town this size all complete, with the original box and tissue-paper" (150). However, in terms of the novel's plot and the structure of its suspense, the "corrupt" aspects of Marlowe's world have little to do with its central violence or final resolution. This is

the extent of Marlowe's fight with corruption. In the end, even the cop with the "freckled teeth" is made to be not as bad as first depicted.

When Marlowe and "Hemingway" make a kind of peace later in the novel, "Hemingway" gives an unusually long speech (these are usually reserved for Marlowe) regarding his situation and reasons for his going bad. Galbraith's sermon is never meant to be taken as a literal espousal of Chandler's opinions and ideas; in fact, its presentation is laden with irony:

"You know what I think? I think we gotta make this little world all over again. Now take Moral Rearmament. There you've got something. M.R.A. There you've got something, baby."

(185)

However, while the hero's attitude toward Galbraith's assertions is cynical and not a little disdainful at the time that he delivers them, a short time thereafter, Marlowe thinks of "tough cops that could be greased and yet were not by any means all bad, like Hemingway" (189). Nothing has transpired between the time of this reflection on Marlowe's part and the time that he spent with Galbraith when the "Moral Rearmament" speech was delivered. I do not mean to suggest that Galbraith's ideas and opinions directly reflect those of Chandler (and indirectly Marlowe); however, I do believe that Chandler really has no fixed position from which he

delivers, directly or indirectly, his social criticism. Rather, he is fully aware that such a theme is part of the hard-boiled formula, and it matters little from whose voice or from which position such comments issue as long as they are present within the text. Thus, to give Marlowe's voice a rest, "Hemingway" gets the floor, and, while the speech is being delivered, Marlowe maintains his trademark attitude of cynicism; however, to put everything into proper perspective, Marlowe's later reflection re-adjusts his position in regard to Galbraith's analysis, which is essentially that "you gotta play the game dirty or you don't eat" (185). Again, as with Chandler's comments in "The Simple Art of Murder," there is something lame about this complaint. Of course, these are not the words of Chandler speaking as himself; however, Galbraith's position is given at least perfunctory recognition by Marlowe, and there is no other voice which addresses the issue of corruption (aside from Marlowe's) in the text, although it is the subject of repeated reference. In the final analysis, there is no analysis; the problems are laid at the feet of what Galbraith identifies as the "percentage," and no more is said on the matter (185).

Chandler's primary focus in the text is always upon Marlowe's attitude and perceptions. While interacting with Galbraith, he demonstrates an aloof superiority to his ideas; yet, when he is later alone, he implicitly

subscribes, in general terms, to those very same ideas. We are now at the point where we can understand Marlowe's character as a political statement in itself. Stephen Knight in his excellent book, Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction, tells us that Marlowe's "individualism is informed and self-defending," and that because of this "the man who feels his internal organization is rewarding and sufficient can read Chandler as a validation of his own fear and hostility towards others and the environment" (163). Marlowe's psyche is the informing principle behind everything expressed in the narrative; therefore, there can really be no politics other than those of his sensibility. Knight states:

The elitism of the position proclaims itself; it basically resides in intellectual and emotional superiority, but the blank uninterest in poor and black citizens and the distrust of the rich indicate a strong underlying political attitude, that of the educated middle-class. A cerebral aristocracy is appointed, superior in mind and in manners to those above, below and less clever than the hero. (163)

There is little that is unsettling about Chandler's fiction for his readership. They were getting the best buy for their popular culture dollar. Chandler's ability with the English language "out-classed" that of

any of his peers, and, for some reason, the somber world of a corrupt urban situation depicted in his fiction was somehow strangely appealing and did not leave a bitter taste in their collective mouths.

Without ever challenging the boundaries of popular fiction, Chandler creates a unique tone and frame of mind in his novels. With his development of his first-person narrator-hero, Philip Marlowe, he adds an element of sanctimonious self-abuse to the character of the detective which remains a long way from the resolute isolationism of Hammett's Sam Spade. Chandler's hero appeals to an audience which had previously distanced itself from the pulp magazines, the middle-class, providing them with their perennial romantic hero among the rubble of their urban wasteland.

CHAPTER FOUR
SEXUAL CONFLICT IN HAMMETT'S TEXTS

In "The Bloody Pulps," Charles Beaumont says of pulp magazines that "their physical appearance suggested nothing short of mortal sin" (410). He goes on to associate the sinful nature of the pulps with the "quality of the paper . . . [which] summoned up . . . visions of brothels, public toilets, French postcards and petty crime" (410). Beaumont's logic is perhaps a bit circular here, but he does recognize a quality and a response long associated to pulp magazines in general and, I would suggest, to hard-boiled detective fiction in particular. There was throughout the pulps' history an under-the-counter trade in pornographic fiction printed on the same paper and produced in the same format as the action pulps (Blackbeard 297). The physical similarities coupled with many cover artists' deliberate allusions in their work to these darker members of the pulp family helped to produce the sexual connotations which are still, to this day, associated with the magazines. However, the lure of "forbidden sexual pleasures" cannot be attributed solely to a perpetual case of mistaken identity; there is also substance in the male-female conflict, as it is developed within these texts, that supports the suggestive fraud carried out by the cover artists.

The Continental Op shoots his first (and only) woman in the short story, "The Gutting of Couffignal," which first appeared in Black Mask in December 1925. Both the act of shooting the woman and a speech which the Op makes to the victim immediately preceding the shooting are important to the hard-boiled detective form. The shooting of the female villain in this story comes not as something unexpected but as the culmination of a pattern of increasing violence toward women in this type of popular fiction. The cover of the October 1920 (the seventh) issue of this monthly magazine "depicted a young woman cowering from a hot branding iron that has already branded her cheek with a livid, smoking image" (Blackbeard 297). Eventually, this attitude of violence toward women, more specifically "dark" or "evil" women, will be picked up and turned into explicit sadism in the Mike Hammer novels of Mickey Spillane, and it is disturbing to note that violence oriented against females and openly expressed themes of white, American supremacy have made Spillane the best-selling novelist (not just best-selling mystery novelist) of all time (Grella 116-17; Baker and Nietzel 70).

In the "Couffignal" story the Op is pitted against Princess Zhukovski, a woman depicted as exotically as her name suggests. Not only is this woman sexually alluring, she is the active villain in the story, and, as she tells the Op, she is his equal: "I'm as strong as

you, and quicker, and I can shoot" (10). Her downfall proves to be her reliance on the Op's conventional response to her gender; when he is physically unable to stop her from leaving, she expects that he will let her walk away. Instead, the Op responds with a very deliberate act of violence: "I put a bullet in the calf of her left leg" (37). The conflict expressed in this story is unabashedly apparent: the female villain attempts to control the male detective through the use of her sexuality, and she is treated as a serious threat. The violent resolution of this conflict becomes conventional and remains pervasive in hard-boiled detective fiction until the late sixties. To Hammett's credit, I believe that he moves away from this limited view in his novels, maintaining and developing the femme fatale figure but in ways which outstrip the male-anxiety conflict explored in "Couffignal." Before proceeding with an examination of how Hammett develops the "dark woman," in Red Harvest and The Maltese Falcon, it will be worthwhile to briefly discuss this figure in general.

The independent, sexually-charged, physically dangerous woman of hard-boiled fiction had a popular culture ancestor from which she evolved. Margolies states:

In the 1870s a number of dime novels began featuring white heroines who dress as men and

who were as adept as their male counterparts in cutting down villains and Indians. They had learned their killing ways as one-time captives of Indians, and were now exercising their arts effectively. (9)

Margolies goes on to point out that these women "were the precursors of tough killer females in the writings of 1920s authors," of whom, of course, Hammett was one (9). A significant change occurs in this female character on her way to becoming the femme fatale. Though she retains her ability to kill, with the enhancement of her sexuality, she moves from "cutting down villains" to cutting down heroes.

Overt sexuality is a fundamental component of the hard-boiled villainness. Her character, along with "tough," masculine first-person narration, is the essential substance of hard-boiled fiction. She is without exception the most sexually-charged figure in a narrative of this type. Popular culture writing being what it is, the villainness is often nothing more than an extended description of female sexual attributes, never reaching a firm state of characterization.

However, in the texts of Hammett and Chandler, the femme fatale reaches a zenith in both characterization and sexual impact. Although many other popular authors create much more sexually explicit roles for this figure, they fail to achieve the effective balance of

sex, destructive potential, and allurement found in a character like Hammett's Brigid O'Shaughnessy. If one were to lament the apparent failure of present day writers of hard-boiled detective fiction to recreate the illusive, exciting quality of the fiction of the twenties and the thirties, the loss could accurately be attributed to the inability of contemporary writers to infuse the figure of the female villain with the same fascinating potential of forbidden pleasure mingled with danger that is sometimes found in the earlier fiction. However, perhaps this inability to reproduce the tensions imbued in the early works indicates a relationship between this type of fiction and a specific historical situation. Cawelti makes a relevant observation:

Formulas are cultural products and in turn presumably have some sort of influence on culture because they become conventional ways of representing and relating certain images, symbols, themes, and myths. The process through which formulas develop, change, and give way to other formulas is a kind of cultural evolution with survival through audience selection. (128)

Following Cawelti's thoughts, the passage of the best of the hard-boiled detective fiction may be related to the gradual acceptance of the liberated woman by American

society. In fact, the present nostalgia directed toward this type of fiction may be related to an even more recent trend toward conservatism within mainstream (middle-class) American society.

The transformation of the action-oriented heroine of the dime novels into the "killer females" of the early hard-boiled detective stories paralleled radical changes in the role and attitudes of women in the post-war United States. Sexual freedom was becoming a reality. The wide-spread ownership of the automobile gave rise to the situation where young people had a convenient place to carry out premarital sexual activity (Baritz 164-68). The Volstead Act passed on January 16, 1920, initiated the prohibition era and had the unanticipated effect of turning average middle-class citizens into "criminals" and making the "underworld chic" (Landrum 115). A large portion of social activity went underground during the ensuing decade to the world of the speakeasies where gangsters, bootleggers, prostitutes, and previously quite average citizens came together in a situation which began with the illicit consumption of liquor but quickly led to other "vices" as well. Dennis Dooley traces the changes which occurred during the post-war years in the status of women and their attitudes:

Young women who had held down "men's jobs" in wartime factories, and now commanded the vote

into the bargain, rebelled at the old dispensation--ankle-length dresses, heavy woolen stockings, and sober hairdos gave way to lipstick, bobbed hair, short skirts and smoking cigarettes in public. . . . American youth were not only having sex, they were talking about it, too. (11)

The underlying anxieties felt by both the older generation and males in general concerning the rapidly changing role and character of women during this time finds its way into the fiction of popular culture and eventually becomes a convention of certain forms of this fiction. When the historical situation changed, as it gradually did through the forties, fifties, and sixties, the tensions which prompted the creation of and sustained the interest in the femme fatale dissolved. The readers' response, not the formula, had changed, making the re-creation of hard-boiled fiction "as it was" an impossibility.

It may be too simplistic to see in the female villain of hard-boiled popular culture the characterization of widely-felt insecurities regarding the changing place of women in contemporary American society. Nevertheless, what happens to women in these texts does for the most part remain unique to that time. The attitudes and images expressed by the authors were, at least in part, the product of social

observation and experience. Grella speaks of how the detective's "moral code often exacts [a] severe personal sacrifice" from him (109). The moral code referred to by Grella is a dominant aspect of hard-boiled fiction which relates directly to the portrayal and treatment of women within the form. This moral code, however, is not as straightforward as it might at first seem. In Chandler's fiction, as will be discussed in the next chapter, the detective's code becomes chivalric, expressed in the actions and words of Philip Marlowe. In Hammett's work, the detective's code is more mundane, or to use Knight's word, "materialist," and it is linked to the protestant work ethic, at least in those stories and novels featuring the Continental Op (136). What Hammett does to this code in The Maltese Falcon is somewhat different and will be discussed shortly.

Now that the femme fatale and the sexual conflict inherent in her appearance has been examined, it is appropriate to quote the speech, referred to earlier, which the Op makes to Princess Zhukovski before he shoots her in "Couffignal":

"Now I pass up about twenty-five or thirty thousand of honest gain because I like being a detective, like the work. And liking work makes you want to do it as well as you can. Otherwise there'd be no sense to it. That's the fix I'm in. I don't know anything else,

don't enjoy anything else, don't want to know or enjoy anything else. You can't weigh that against any sum of money. (34)

This is the explanation which the Op gives the female villain when she offers him both her money and her sexuality. As ridiculous as it is, the Op claims that he must remain steadfast to the rules of his chosen game of "manhunter," and, when the Princess tests his allegiance to this code, the Op shoots her in the leg. The message would appear to be clear, and, in this regard, Grella makes the following observation:

The detective generally finds that the beautiful and available girl is also the source of guilt; consequently, he is compelled to arrest a woman he desires or even loves. The particular terms of this sacrifice suggest the marked tendency of American fiction to depict women as potentially destructive, and demonstrate the detective's ambivalence toward them. (109)

Having to forego the pleasures of the "evil" woman, because he is an "honourable" man who will live by his chosen code of morality, incorporates into the detective figure a very conventional, puritanical asceticism. However, as with other aspects of these seemingly simple texts, this attitude on the part of the detective is connected with another characteristic of the hard-boiled

detective as he is depicted by both Hammett and Chandler--that is, to use James Naremore's word, that he is "homophobic" (52). This is true more of Chandler's character Marlowe than of Hammett's detectives. In Hammett's work, the hero's preference for the company of men is not blatantly obvious in any text but The Glass Key--though the rough treatment of the homosexuals, Joel Cairo and Wilmer Cook, in The Maltese Falcon could constitute the repression of homosexual tendencies on Hammett's part. In Chandler's work, however, there is a definite tendency toward misogyny coupled with admiration for male characters by the narrator-hero, Philip Marlowe. More will be said on this later.

Of all the "bad" women to be examined here (there is at least one in each text) Dinah Brand of Red Harvest is the most ambiguous. Brand acts as the informer and confidant of the Op, never attaining full status as a femme fatale because she does not pose a direct threat to the hero. As mentioned previously, the setting of the novel represents a kind of "everytown" in which Hammett explores the effects of unrestrained capitalism. Hammett's use of allegory in the novel makes it apparent that he is attempting to incorporate more into the work than the obvious expression of the old "good-guy" "bad-guy" formula. The setting, the action (that is, the killings), and, in Dinah Brand's case, the characters take on additional meaning within

the novel. The setting has already been discussed; the killings become, through their unhalting excess, a kind of black comedy; and Dinah Brand comes to represent the pervasive evil force residing at the centre of the novel--money.

Brand is not described in the usual "bombshell" terms reserved for the "dark" ladies of hard-boiled detective fiction. Rather, she is described in a more masculine fashion:

She was an inch or two taller than I, which made her about five feet eight. She had a broad-shouldered, full-breasted, round-hipped body and big muscular legs. The hand she gave me was soft, warm, strong. (22)

Critics such as James Naremore and Michael Mason point out that many of the acceptable or safe women in both Hammett and Chandler's fiction are described in masculine terms (52; 95). Brand, however, is not strictly described in masculine terms. There are elements in her description ("full-breasted, round-hipped") which also suggest the Gaea or mother figure. But, the most characteristic feature of Brand's description is her inherent slovenliness:

Her coarse hair--brown--needed trimming and was parted crookedly. One side of her upper lip had been rouged higher than the other. Her dress was of a particularly unbecoming

wine color, and it gaped here and there down one side, where she had neglected to snap the fasteners or they had popped open. There was a run down the front of her left stocking.

(22)

The run in her stocking accompanies Brand throughout the narrative and comes, in Dickensian fashion, to reflect or symbolize an unstated aspect of her character. Brand occupies many roles in the narrative scheme of the novel. She represents the fallen woman who drags men down to their dissolution, as seen in the fate of the young bank clerk, Robert Albury. She fulfills the role of nurturer or mother, as witnessed in her taking in of the "lunger," Dan Rolff (20), and then this role is quickly undercut with the beating which she administers to Rolff in front of the Op. She acts as the Op's comforting companion when he weakens from the rigors of Poisonville and all the killing of which he has been a part, suggesting that he drug himself to escape his thoughts. But most of all, she is a "girl who knows her Poisonville" (56), admitting that the primary factor for her in her relationships is money: "'Money,' she explained, 'the more the better. I like it'" (23).

The figure of Dinah Brand is central to the corrupt, irrevocably tainted world of Poisonville. She can have "her pick of Poisonville's men," and, as the Op soon learns, all paths lead to her door (22). Her

influence is felt by almost all of the male characters in the novel. Albury speaks of his infatuation with Dinah as if it were some kind of affliction which is "worse some days than others," and it is on "one of the bad ones" that he kills Donald Willsson out of jealousy (40). Albury's killing of Willsson is the act from which all the action in the novel flows. In his confession to the Op, Albury reveals one of the primary functions of Brand as an element of the narrative and casts some light on her positioning within the thematic structure of the text:

"When I was in danger, facing the gallows, she didn't--didn't seem so important to me. I couldn't--I can't now--quite understand--fully--why I did what I did. Do you know what I mean? That somehow makes the whole thing--and me--cheap. (41)

The sway in which Brand held Albury is only broken and known for what it was when the Op puts the situation before Albury in a way which has him "facing the gallows." On one level within the novel the figure of Dinah Brand can be interpreted an embodiment of the essentially incomplete and debilitating nature of money and its companion, avarice. To use Norman O. Brown's term, Dinah functions in the novel as the representation of "filthy lucre" (234). A reading of this type gives some credence to the writing of love letters to Brand by

the decrepit capitalist, Elihu Willsson. Viewing Brand as a personification of money-lust also explains the acting out of her murder at the hands of the Op. The Op's assignment is to "clean this pig-sty of a Poisonville" (29), and, when the task begins to overwhelm him and he too becomes infected with the "fever," he seeks to escape the town's influence first through taking laudanum and then, in a state of "instinctive" self-preservation, by "killing" Dinah Brand. Of course, the Op cannot actually murder Brand, because, in accordance with the rules of the popular culture formula, she has not been declared a "bad-guy" and therefore is not suitable for killing by the hero. However, symbolically Dinah Brand is the "bad-guy" of Red Harvest, and it is testimony to Hammett's artistic sensibility that he attempts to handle such a thematic conflict and resolution while working within the strictures of a popular culture production formula.

On the symbolic level the Op and Brand are opponents in a mortal conflict; however, on the realistic plain of the narrative, she is the only character to whom the Op speaks openly and truthfully. It is to her that the Op turns when he feels "blood-simple," and she responds to him with something like empathy, although the Op's suspicious nature is quick to note that "she smiled too softly and spoke too indulgently" (104). It is through the Op's

conversations with Dinah that the reader learns of his plans and intentions, and it is only in their dialogue that attempts are made at humour--such as, Dinah's wry commentary on the Op's methods:

"So that's the way you scientific detectives work. My God! for [sic] a fat, middle-aged, hard-boiled, pig-headed guy, you've got the vaguest way of doing things I ever heard of."

(57)

Hammett is working here at what he later achieves in The Maltese Falcon--an ambivalent, love-hate relationship between the male hero and the female villain. In Red Harvest, Hammett is handicapped by the already established character of the Continental Op. He cannot create the same choices for the Op as he does for Sam Spade. Further, it is questionable whether Hammett was capable at the time that he wrote this novel of developing the femme fatale that we discover in Brigid O'Shaughnessy.

In what remains in my opinion the finest piece of hard-boiled detective fiction yet written, Dashiell Hammett constructs a narrative around the enigmatic relationship which he develops between the detective "hero," Sam Spade, and the femme fatale, Brigid O'Shaughnessy. A starting point for this examination of The Maltese Falcon can be found in Steven Marcus's observation that "in Hammett, society and social

relations are dominated by the principle of basic mistrust" (xxiv). In this novel Hammett tells the story of two isolated, self-reliant, and resilient individuals who are attracted to each other at the same time as circumstances and facets of their characters pit them against one another. It is part of the problematic nature of popular culture that the work which is recognized by most as the greatest achievement in the sub-genre of hard-boiled detective fiction is, at the same time, a work which, at the time it was written, violated the accepted codes for that particular type of production. In fact, in 1929 when the text was being prepared for release as a novel in Knopf's Borzoi series, Hammett's editor at Knopf, Harry Block, wrote to him in concern over the, in Hammett's words, "to-bed and homosexual parts" (qtd. in Marling 86). It is worthy of note that Block tells Hammett that such expression "would be all right perhaps in an ordinary novel" (qtd. in Marling 86). Hammett's determined response to this comment reveals his desire to introduce new elements into his work within the popular detective form:

It seems to me that the only thing that can be said against their use [the "to-bed and homosexual parts"] in a detective novel is that nobody has tried it yet. I'd like to try it. (qtd in Marling 86)

The Maltese Falcon was a special work for Hammett.

From the beginning of his writing career in 1922, he had aspired to be a "serious writer" (qtd in Hellman xv). Lillian Hellman, Hammett's female companion for the latter half of his life and a recognized dramatist in her own right, states that Hammett's attitude to writers and writing was "romantic"; "you made sacrifices for it"; "you wanted to have money, of course, but you weren't in competition with merchants or bankers, and if you threw your talents around you didn't throw them to the Establishment for catching" (xii-iii). Hammett's failure, if it may be called that (considering the little that he produced), in the forum of "serious" writing might, in his early years, be attributed to an inability to distinguish the pretentious from the "serious." In this regard, writing to the expectations of the popular culture audience required that Hammett keep both his subject and his prose "concise, to-the-point" (Nolan, Life 33). By the time that Hammett began to write The Maltese Falcon he had completely developed a rigorous "clipped" prose style (Knight 135). This style, coupled with his desire to explore themes not common to the detective form, helped him to construct a novel of which Raymond Chandler writes: "The Maltese Falcon may or may not be a work of genius, but an art which is capable of it is not 'by hypothesis' incapable of anything" ("The Simple Art of Murder" 17). When "Herbert Asbury, a reviewer, praised

the novel, Hammett responded: 'I can't tell you how pleased I was with your verdict on "The Maltese Falcon." It's the first thing I've done that was--regardless of what faults it had--the best work I was capable of at the time I was doing it'" (Marling 87). If, as William Marling asserts, "The Maltese Falcon broke the barriers of the genre . . . and is . . . a work of art" (87), Hammett's success in this work has much to do with the relationship he constructs between Sam Spade and Brigid O'Shaughnessy.

Before proceeding with an analysis of the central relationship in the novel, it is necessary to examine the two main characters; and, before the portrayal of Sam Spade can be explored, it is necessary to comment briefly on a major change in narrative technique made by Hammett in The Maltese Falcon. Until the writing of this novel, Hammett had utilized a first-person narrative technique (best personified in the Continental Op) to convey the story to the reader. However, in The Maltese Falcon Hammett develops a third-person narrative style. The motivation for this change in technique is hinted at by Naremore who observes:

Hammett's later novels use an even more neutral technique, a third-person narration which presents everything from the detective's point of view without ever telling us what the detective is thinking. (60).

The suspense generated in The Maltese Falcon is focused as much upon what is motivating Spade as it is upon the pursuit of the falcon. Hammett engages the reader in a guessing game involving not only what has or will transpire, as in conventional suspense, but also what will be the central character's response. As readers, we follow Spade through his adventure, but even at the end of the novel we have only come to know him vaguely and that through a very objective, distanced observing of his actions. Hammett captures in this narrative technique something similar to the one-dimensional perspective of a person's character obtained from a long and continued surveillance. During his time with the Pinkerton agency, Hammett reputedly excelled at the task of surveillance, and Layman notes that from his experience with detective work "he learned a method of observation that he later used to give his work a stark sense of reality" (Nolan, Life 11-12; 13). This technique for conveying to the reader a sense of stark reality will be picked up some thirty years later by Robbe-Grillet in his writing of the nouveau roman. Naremore notes that the technique relies on a "defamiliarized" version of the common place, and that it is preoccupied with a "representation of the surfaces of things" (61). What all of these comments point to is the uniqueness and sophistication of a narrative technique which initially draws little attention to

itself but which subsequently achieves a sensibility almost fundamentally contradictory to a work of popular culture.

Hammett's third-person narrator is so impartial that, although he does follow Spade along, he slowly conveys to the reader, as Dooley points out, that, contrary to the established rules of popular culture, the "hero," Spade, "can die" (103). Further, at no point in the narrative is the reader "assured of the essential decency" of the main character (103).

Hammett, who had long desired to write a "serious" piece of fiction, plays off the expectations of his readers in both the popular culture sub-genre of detective fiction and in himself as a recognized popular writer to construct a unique trap into which the reader is drawn without warning. Once caught in the trap the reader becomes aware that the comfort and reassurance common to the popular novel is missing. This moral obtuseness and undercutting of the conventional hero is carried over into John Huston's 1941 film version of the story. As Nolan reports in Dashiell Hammett: A Casebook, the screenplay was "almost entirely Hammett's novel," including most of the dialogue and scene layouts (102). Humphrey Bogart, who has since been much recognized for his ability to portray the anti-hero, made an appropriate Sam Spade, and the film's success rests on the same factor as the novel's: its resistance to the

popular culture tendency of reducing morality to a fixed schematic. The bitter world of hopeless suspicion and relentless isolation depicted in The Maltese Falcon is conveyed to the reader by "an objective, totally impartial voice that betrays not the slightest hint of affection or adulation concerning the detective hero" (Dooley 103). The reader who sat down to enjoy an exciting bit of escapist "tough-talk" and "gun-play" finds that he or she has "bought into" an ambivalent, existential exploration of human relations in a harsh, grey world bearing an uncomfortable resemblance to their own.

Nolan writes that "The Maltese Falcon, when closely studied, is basically a series of brilliant dialogues, set in motion and bolstered by offstage events" (Casebook 58). In spite of the novel's reputation as the epitome in a sub-genre that is recognized, in part, by its gratuitous, plentiful, and vividly described violence, "aside from a bit of scuffling and a punch or two, all of the violence takes place offstage" (Nolan, Casebook 57). Sam Spade does not even carry a gun, and, as Nolan notes above, action is not a dominant aspect of the text. Though hailed as the best of its kind, in many respects The Maltese Falcon is of a kind all its own.

As well as changing his narrative technique in the writing of The Maltese Falcon, Hammett abandons his

long-standing (approximately seven years) detective figure, the Continental Op, and creates an entirely new character for this role. There are few similarities between the Op and Sam Spade other than their chosen trade. The Op is described as "short, thick-set, weighing about 180 pounds, balding and approximately 35 years of age" (Baker and Nietzel 33). The Op works for the large, established Continental Detective Agency (modelled after the Pinkerton National Detective Agency), and he is required, after the fashion of "true-to-life" detectives, to submit reports, ensure payment for services rendered, and generally work within the law. The Op on more than one occasion explains that he operates according to a code which is both part of the job and part of his character.

In contrast to the Continental Op, Sam Spade is described as follows:

Samuel Spade's jaw was long and bony, his chin a jutting v under the more flexible v of his mouth. His nostrils curved back to make another, smaller, v. His yellow-grey eyes were horizontal. The v motif was picked up again by thickish brows rising outward from twin creases above a hooked nose, and his pale brown hair grew down--from high flat temples--in a point on his forehead. He looked rather pleasantly like a blond satan.

(295)

Further to the above, Spade is six feet tall and has powerful, rounded shoulders. His general shape is described as "conical" and later like a "shaved bear's," because "his chest was hairless," and "his skin was childishly soft and pink" (296, 301). Some critics such as Robert A. Baker and Michael T. Nietzel believe that Spade, like the Op, operates from a code of conduct--not an agency's code but a more personal, moralistic "private detective's creed" (34). This does not, I believe, provide an encompassing explanation of Spade's character, as it is revealed through his interaction with the other characters in the novel, especially Brigid. The idea that Spade operates according to a code comes, of course, from his speech to Brigid at the end of the novel in which he explains how he is going to have to give her up to the police, because "when a man's partner is killed he's supposed to do something about it" (438). Taken literally, Spade's words here do indicate that he is following a pre-established set of values which he had concealed from the reader and the other characters in the novel until this critical moment of decision. However, there is more to Spade than this; he is not just some automaton acting out a sort of pre-formulated destiny. He acknowledges that some of his stated reasons for giving up Brigid may be "unimportant," pointing, perhaps, to the unfullfilling

shallowness of living by a set of rules (438). In fact, it is the tension created between the obvious "sin" of accepting a murderess for a mate and the meaningless vacancy of his life before her, (which he knows will return if he chooses the conventional path) that gives the novel its impact.

As mentioned earlier, The Maltese Falcon is often hailed as the paramount work in the sub-genre of hard-boiled detective fiction, and the character of Sam Spade then necessarily dubbed the "ultimate private eye" (Baker and Nietzel 34). Rather than complacently accepting this widely-held opinion, it is worthwhile to construct our own assessment of Spade. Hammett, in the Introduction to the Modern Library publication of The Maltese Falcon (1934), quoted here from Layman's biography, gives the following account of Spade:

Spade had no original. He is a dream man in the same sense that he is what most of the private detectives I worked with would like to have been and what quite a few of them in their cockier moments thought they approached. For your private detective does not--or did not ten years ago when he was my colleague--want to be an erudite solver of riddles in the Sherlock Holmes manner; he wants to be a hard and shifty fellow, able to take care of himself in any situation, able to

get the best of anybody he comes in contact with, whether criminal, innocent by-stander or client. (106)

According to Hammett then, and I approach his after-publication comments with caution, Sam Spade "is a dream man," the stuff of fiction. He is for Hammett the concrete expression of a personally held paradigm arrived at from experience and observation. He is not the product of a popular culture formula, although, undeniably, the private eye figure in general forms part of his ancestry--as much as The Maltese Falcon itself can be said to fall within that particular category of popular fiction. The most revealing part of Hammett's explication of the model for Sam Spade is in his describing the private eye as a "hard and shifty fellow, able to take care of himself in any situation." There is little new in this creed, as it forms part of the American individualism doctrine still widely esteemed today, and it was, in part, the image of this aggressive ever-suspicious individual which inspired the work of the French existentialists in the forties and fifties (Naremore 60). It is the existential man, the outsider, that Hammett describes above as the model for Spade, and Spade is an existential character. However, because Hammett's objective narrative technique limits itself to externals, the existential consciousness, explored so extensively by the French novelists, is not presented in

The Maltese Falcon.

Spade's code, if he has one at all, is more an attitude than a set of rules. His guiding principle, though it carries none of the honourable connotations commonly associated with the word, is that he "won't play the sap" for anyone (438). An attitude of suspicion and perennial self-defence is paramount. The predatory, demonic images used to describe Spade reinforce the cynicism and resiliency found in his response to the world. There can be no romantic answers for Sam Spade, and yet he is more than just the determined cynic. Hammett constructs the story in such a way that Spade is understood to be making a real and vital decision in rejecting Brigid. That Spade (and the reader) are brought to the point of such a decision in a popular culture production is a compelling testament to Hammett's narrative skill, as Spade knows from the outset that Brigid is a manipulative liar and a killer. It is extraordinary that such a conflict is worked out before a popular culture audience, and it is Hammett's narrative technique which provides the distancing and innocuous objectivity necessary to stage such a drama before a popular culture audience. As Nolan insightfully observes The Maltese Falcon "is a tragedy of a new kind, deadpan tragedy" (Casebook 63). The world of The Maltese Falcon is one of the blackest of human possibilities. Sam Spade warns Brigid, "don't be

too sure I'm as crooked as I'm supposed to be," but the impression given is that at this point--the close of the novel with Spade having already made his choice--Hammett is simply trying to provide a plausible basis within Spade's character for his refusal of Brigid (439). From the first page of the novel, the reader has had to discover Spade on his or her own without the help of explanations, and this particular explanation, coming where it does, goes against what has been learned of Spade through the course of the text. Hammett states that the model for Spade was a "hard and shifty fellow," and I tend to think that in Spade's case W.H. Auden's observation that "the detectives of the hard-boiled school . . . are motivated by avarice or ambition and might just as well be murderers" is accurate (21).

Before proceeding with an examination of the relationship which is created between Spade and Brigid, it is appropriate to briefly look at Hammett's portrayal of the femme fatale. Brigid is the foremost example of what is now a pretty tired figure in the detective fiction genre; her character inspired countless female villains which have appeared since in print, film, and television. Marling offers some insight into both the femme fatale figure in general and Hammett's unique portrayal of the figure in Brigid O'Shaughnessy:

The archetype itself dates back to the Middle Ages; in pure form she is called the

succubus. Heroes of the early grail romances, such as Percival, were afflicted by succubi. When Hammett calls upon this peril, however, the effect is more subtle than in a morality drama because the novel has realistic and romantic levels too. These put the love relationship in higher relief than the quest or the question of who killed Miles Archer.

(79)

Brigid is, of course, the type of woman whom men find sexually attractive. She is described as "tall and pliantly slender, without angularity anywhere" (295). She also has the witch-like ability to dissemble, and she is able to fool most men (Miles Archer being the first example). Spade, however, is able to see through her false behavior, as when he confronts her with his knowledge of the deaths of Miles Archer and Floyd Thursby. As part of her response, Brigid is able to make herself seem "smaller, and very young and oppressed" (316). Spade sardonically compliments her on her performance, and she quickly follows up with another manipulative tactic, admitting "the lie was in the way I said it, and not at all in what I said" (317). This in turn prompts Spade to say aloud, as if warning himself, "now you are dangerous" (317). Eventually, all other techniques having failed, Brigid offers Spade her sexuality: "Can I buy you with my body?" and this is

where the popular image of the femme fatale remains (332). She is the woman of easy virtue, the vehicle of dissolution for any man who would take her up on her offer. Wolfe calls her a "Medusa-figure" (114). However, in The Maltese Falcon, Spade accepts Brigid's offer, and, contrary to the consequential morality of such later works as those of Chandler, their sexual behavior remains disconcertingly meaningless in terms of the novel's denouement. Brigid is characterized more by her deceitfulness than by her sexuality. She appears incapable of telling the truth or of putting anything before her own self-interest. These qualities, in turn, serve to justify Spade's relentless suspicion. Together they seem to be engaged in an inescapable roundabout of negative response.

Spade's refusal to trust Brigid is as blindly compulsive as her deceitfulness. This dogged attitude of suspicion finds its lowest expression in Spade's strip-search of Brigid in his attempt to locate a missing thousand-dollar bill. He is not so much after the money as he just has to "know what happened to that bill" (425). They both refuse to give up those qualities which make them strong in their isolation:

When she was naked she stepped back from her clothing and stood looking at him. In her mien was pride without defiance or embarrassment. (425)

Yet, in spite of the predominantly negative relations which develop between them, there is something in their (as Hammett says) ability to "get the best of anybody" which inspires a kind of mutual respect and attraction. Spade, at one point, tells Brigid that he cares little about her essential goodness; rather, he is interested in her ability to survive:

He turned to face her. The two vertical lines above his nose were deep clefts between red wales. "I don't give a damn about your honesty," he told her, trying to make himself speak calmly. "I don't care what kind of tricks you're up to, what your secrets are, but I've got to have something to show that you know what you're doing." (332)

In making this statement, Spade seems to be putting aside all conventional values. It could be, for we are never told, that Spade is just explaining here what he needs to proceed with confidence in her behalf to an overly fractious client. However, at this point, the relationship between Brigid and Spade is no longer clear; he and his partner were originally hired to assist a Miss Wonderly with an errant sister. Since then Spade's partner has been killed, and he is now dealing with the woman whom he knows played a role in that murder. Dooley states that Spade's "relationship with Brigid O'Shaughnessy deepens into something very

like love" (101). The relationship between Spade and Brigid is shot through with ambivalence. Spade himself, after delivering his rejection speech, states: "All we've got is the fact that maybe you love me and maybe I love you" (438). If this were melodrama (my obvious submission is that it is not), there would be no need to qualify a declaration of love with "maybe." Brigid is a killer and a liar, but she offers Spade the chance for a kind of companionship based on a mutually-shared sense of ennui and a determination to survive at all costs, no matter what the misery. Dooley describes Spade as a "kind of existential hero cut adrift from the usual certainties that sustain other people" (107). In the final assessing of accounts, Spade cannot allow himself to "play the sap," as this credo is intrinsically linked to his ability to survive, and, as bleak as the future might be, Spade is nothing if not a survivor.

To understand the existential theme which informs the character of Spade, delineates the relationship which comes to exist between himself and Brigid, and creates the dilemma of his "winning ways" in a world destitute of honesty and love--it serves our purpose to turn briefly to Colin Wilson's definitive book on the existential sensibility, The Outsider, and his analysis of the existantist's situation:

Freedom posits free-will; that is
self-evident. But Will [sic] can only operate

when there is first a motive. No motive, no willing. But motive is a matter of belief; you would not want to do anything unless you believed it possible and meaningful. And belief must be belief in the existence of something; that is to say, it concerns what is real. So ultimately, freedom depends upon the real. The Outsider's sense of unreality cuts off his freedom at the root. It is as impossible to exercise freedom in an unreal world as it is to jump while you are falling.

(49)

Wilson identifies here the malaise found at the centre of Sam Spade's world, his sense of "unreality." The novel unfolds like a game-board: its scenes are limited; its action is sparse; and its dialogue (except for the closing chapters) is so terse as to be almost trite. Hammett focuses upon the relationships which develop between the characters, and the unifying theme is one of distrust and distance. Emotion is continually being filtered through the rationality of each character. They never cease vying for position, thus the sense of the unreal. Hammett's novel is about a contest, played out by desperate, relentless characters in a desolate and irrevocably hopeless situation. The falcon is held out to them as the prize; however, there should never have been any doubt about its essential worthlessness.

The intriguing tension created by Hammett in the novel is that for an instant, against all the rules and conventions, something develops between Spade and Brigid which might hold the potential for a kind of fulfillment; however, Spade will remain the "winner" and so turns away from the possibility.

Although limited in almost all aspects, The Maltese Falcon, represents in a microcosm the alienated, urban sensibility. The novel surpasses anything produced within the confines of American popular culture until, perhaps, the sixties, in terms of the honesty and expression of its vision of the individual's situation in contemporary society. In some ways, the novel prefigures the work of the French existentialists, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Hammett's narrative technique and achievement in this novel is so commanding that he walks away with the limits of the popular formula for hard-boiled detective fiction, leaving his readers with the idea that something has changed but unable to discern just what it might be. Chandler is also able to incorporate elements in his depiction of male-female conflict which are beyond the limits of the hard-boiled form. However, rather than pushing toward a more expansive and complex expression of a world vision, Chandler's work moves in the other direction, inward.

CHAPTER FIVE
SEXUAL CONFLICT IN CHANDLER'S TEXTS

Unlike Hammett, Chandler never develops more than one detective figure. Although found in his early stories under names such as Mallory, Carmady, and Dalmas, Chandler's detective is always a version of his contemporary "knight errant," Philip Marlowe (Symons, "An Aesthete" 20). Marlowe, for all the similarities which come as part of the sub-genre's formula, is quite a different character from Hammett's Continental Op or Sam Spade. As mentioned earlier, Chandler gives Marlowe a much more subjective narrative voice than does Hammett with his detectives, and this has led critics--such as, Speir, to remark that Marlowe "is finally not so much a fully developed character as he is an attitude, a tone of voice" (109). In Chandler's case, however, this may not be unwanted criticism; he himself expressed the idea that the detective "does not and could not exist. He is the personification of an attitude, the exaggeration of a possibility" (qtd. in MacShane 70). In this statement there is a slight hint of the "romantic aestheticism" which Chandler brought with him to the pulps from an English public school education and a very lonely childhood (Symons, "An Aesthete" 23). Eric Homberger notes in his essay on Chandler's classical education, "The Man of Letters (1908-12)," that Chandler's early

poems (produced while he was still in England) "written as they are in a conventional late-romantic vein, convey a sense of anxiety about the role of the poet and the fate of the Victorian religion of art in an uncaring world" (17). Homberger goes on to note that, in the essays which Chandler wrote during this time in his life for such magazines as The Academy, he chose for his subject "portraits of various kinds of contemporary literary types." Out of all this, Homberger identifies Chandler's obvious "lack of engagement with the literature of the day" (17), and brings us to the point where Knight's astute observation sheds some light on the troublesome subjectivity of Chandler's hero-narrator:

Philip Marlowe is not just a figure of the alienated individual, crouched in the slit-trench of self-consciousness--he has much in common with the archetypal spokesman of that figure, the lonely writer. (159)

As mentioned previously in chapter three, there is little distance in Chandler's detective novels between the attitude and sensibility of the narrator and that of the author. The critical and questioning reader, though perhaps finding the perspective of the narrator attractive, soon develops a sense of distrust in the pervasive voice of the narrator-hero and begins to question the integrity (if I may use such a word) of the

work. Knight observes of Chandler's detective figure that his "name, class position, and education [Marlowe has been to college] all make him clearly a marginal figure, disavowing allegiance to any socio-economic group" (161). Although closer examination may reveal that this statement is not exactly true, the significance of this observation is that it offers an explanation for the demonstrated attractiveness of Chandler's work for contemporary intellectuals. As Knight tells us, Chandler creates in Marlowe "an archetype of the educated urban alien" and expresses the "anxieties and the necessary defences of alienated intellectuals in a world that increasingly devalued their skills" (161, 166). It is interesting that a figure such as Philip Marlowe should appeal to an "intellectual" audience, as he comes to represent a very inhibited, repressive, and perhaps even psychotic morality.

Chandler uses the figure of Philip Marlowe to convey the rather miserable consciousness of a disillusioned romantic to his audience. He also uses his detective hero to convey a very strict moral code, and an examination of Marlowe as a character who embodies such a morality will lead us to a discussion of Chandler's portrayal and use of the femme fatale and the expression of male-female conflict in his novels. Before proceeding with this examination, however, it

will be useful to briefly look at Chandler's hero. Physically, Marlowe is described as a big man after the type of Sam Spade: "slightly over 6 feet tall and weigh[ing] 190 pounds" with dark hair and brown eyes (Baker and Nietzel 47). However, at this point the similarities between the character Helmut Heissenbuttel calls the "lost soul of Puritan treatises" and Hammett's Sam Spade cease. Spade is described and comes across as a very tough kind of person--physically, mentally, and emotionally (too much so in the end). Marlowe, on the other hand, talks a "tough game" to the other characters in the novel while continuously revealing to the reader through his narrative commentary a melancholy sentimentalism. He conceals his rigid morality from the other characters in the text until he is forced by circumstance to reveal it. When the revelation comes, it is abrupt, surprising both the other characters and first-time readers. As many critics have observed, Marlowe seems to have been modelled after the idea of "an up-to-date knight errant," some taking as their "clue" the fact that Chandler once named his detective Mallory in an early story (Knight 137). However, no elaborate deduction is needed if one refers to Chandler's own, much quoted, description of what the hard-boiled detective represents:

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 honor--by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world. I do not care much about his private life; he is neither a eunuch nor a satyr; I think he might seduce a duchess and I am quite sure he would not spoil a virgin; if he is a man of honor in one thing, he is that in all things. ("The Simple Art of Murder" 20)

As is obvious from the above, Chandler had quite definite ideas about the detective figure's character and consequent role. His conception is quite a long way from what we find in a character like Sam Spade, who is, at times, difficult to distinguish from the criminal. While Chandler's ideas are admirable in some respects, they do not escape being naively romantic and rigidly nostalgic. Though he carefully states that he would leave the hero's "private life" alone, he makes the point that his hero, being honorable "in all things," "would not spoil a virgin." Chandler's concept of honour, morality, and the general rightness of things is

inextricably tied to his sentimental vision of a romantic past. Of course, Chandler can be taken too literally here for the sake of disparaging his ideas as they find expression in his texts; however, he certainly does leave the way open for the criticism that realism, as a narrative technique, is beyond his artistic imagination. Speir attempts to provide Chandler with a credible way out of this criticism with the statement that "even a cursory look at Chandler's overt references to the romance and knight-errantry within the novel . . . indicates a decided touch of irony in his treatment of the subject" (30). As a reference for this claim, Speir uses the well-known passage describing a knight attempting to rescue a damsel provided on the opening page of Chandler's first novel, The Big Sleep. It is worthwhile to quote that piece here as it provides a convenient way into the text:

Over the entrance doors, which would have let in a troop of Indian elephants, 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 on 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. (7)

Contrary to what Speir would have us believe, the obvious parallel drawn between Marlowe and the knight is never undercut in the novel through the use of parody, irony, or similar device; the identification receives support and remains intact throughout. When Marlowe returns to the mansion for his final confrontation with the Sternwood women, in which he reveals Carmen as Rusty Regan's killer, he draws attention to the fact that "the knight in the stained-glass window still wasn't getting anywhere untying the naked damsel from the tree" (173). Marlowe's chivalric code is made obvious in the conversation which immediately follows this observation:

I shook my head. "You have an advantage over me, General. It's an advantage I wouldn't want to take away from you, not a hair of it. It's not much, considering what you have to put up with. You can say anything like to me and I wouldn't think of getting angry. I'd like to offer you your money back. It may mean nothing to you. It might mean something to me." (174)

Although Marlowe's graciousness is directed toward a male in this instance, it is not difficult to recognize

the heroic (in the romantic sense) tone of his declaration. Contrary to Speir's statement, there is no trace of "a decided touch of irony" here.

There are also coincident differences between the femme fatale as she is portrayed in Red Harvest and The Maltese Falcon and the examples created in Chandler's The Big Sleep and Farewell My Lovely. In the former two novels, the "evil" nature of the female villain is conveyed in her objectively described sexuality, her dangerous manipulations and deceptions, and an underlying sense that she is somehow less than whole (not in any way due to weak characterization). She is defined by aspects of her character which come to the reader via dramatic development or objective narration. In Chandler's novels, the "evil" women are known through their overt sexuality, their openly-displayed desire for the detective, and his emotional rejection of them. This is not to suggest that Chandler lacked the ability to produce convincing female characterizations; rather, it is that his first-person narrator's intervening consciousness inhibits all other possible means of knowing the text. This leads the questioning reader to, after some exposure to the technique, wonder whether the work can stand independently of the expression of the male hero's and, I suspect, the author's overwhelming rejection of the sexual woman. In The Big Sleep the female killer is portrayed as insane, but in this, the

least sophisticated of Chandler's novels, it may be the case that her being insane is the only coherent explanation which will encompass the hero's responses to her throughout the text. This becomes, of course, a question much like that of the chicken and the egg--that is, which comes first, the hero's response to the villainy, or the making plausible of the hero's actions through the attribution of villainy? If this were not a work of popular culture, answering this question would be impossible. However, we know that the hard-boiled detective formula requires a dominant, male champion (in all arenas) as hero; therefore, Chandler may, in fact, have been cornered by his male character's behavior toward the sexual advances of the female villain.

In The Big Sleep, Philip Marlowe is hired by a decrepit, rich man, General Sternwood, to remove a "morbid growth" in the form of a gambler cum blackmailer from the "back" of his family (15-16). The General's family is limited to two daughters, Vivian and Carmen, whom he describes as follows:

"Vivian is spoiled, exacting, smart and quite ruthless. Carmen is a child who likes to pull wings off flies. Neither of them has any more moral sense than a cat." (14)

This sets the stage for the central conflict of the novel: Marlowe versus the amoral Sternwood girls. Marlowe's first interview with the General takes place

in a greenhouse, where the air is suggestively described as "thick, wet, steamy and larded with the cloying smell of tropical orchids in bloom" (10). Through the course of this meeting, images of dead and crippled men are repeatedly introduced into the narrative. The plants have "nasty meaty leaves and stalks like the newly washed fingers of dead men" (10). The General describes himself as a "very dull survival [sic] of a rather gaudy life, a cripple paralysed in both legs and [significantly] with only half of his lower belly" (11). He goes on to refer to himself as a "newborn spider," and it is not unlikely that Chandler was familiar with the female spider's propensity to kill and devour her mate (11). The most vivid imagery bringing together the themes of death and female sexuality is found in the General's observation that orchids, which Marlowe does not "particularly" care for, are "nasty things. Their flesh is too much like the flesh of men. And their perfume has the rotten sweetness of a prostitute" (11). It is in the midst of these images of sex, injury, and death that the General describes his promiscuous daughters and then laments the disappearance of his son-in-law, Rusty Regan. His words describing Regan stand in stark contrast to his description of his daughters and to the tone created by the accompanying images of death. He tells Marlowe that Regan "was the breath of life" to him, "a big curly-headed Irishman

from Clonmel, with sad eyes and a smile as wide as Wilshire Boulevard" (12-13). The General states that he was "very fond of Rusty" and comments that his marriage to Vivian was "ridiculous" and "probably didn't last a month, as a marriage" (12-13). From the first chapter of his first novel, Chandler puts the reader on notice that women, particularly sexually active women, are going to be the agents behind the injury and death of central male characters.

The femme fatale, as she appears in the fiction of Chandler, is representative of what seems to be a very biased and subjective consciousness on the part of the author. Michael Mason in his essay, "Marlowe, Men and Women," notes that "in four out of the seven completed novels the chief culprit is a woman" (95). Mason goes on to note that "the most brutal murders in the Marlowe novels are committed by women with whom the hero has had an erotically exciting contact" (93). Unlike Brigid O'Shaughnessy whose complexity compliments the character of Sam Spade (their relationship resisting easy categorization as a device of melodrama), Chandler's female villains are, in the final analysis, reduced to an expression of an individual insecurity residing in the central character and permeating the tone of the entire work. Because of the prevalence of this theme, one suspects that this insecurity may be present in the author as well. The femme fatale of hard-boiled fiction

formula, becomes a very unique and specific figure in Chandler's novels. She has to become the plausible motivation for Marlowe's celibacy, a role she is never asked to play in Hammett's novels. While this interpretation lessens the impact of Chandler's work, at least he stops short of the brutal and sadistic treatment of women found in the work of Mickey Spillane.

The descriptive language that Chandler uses to cast his female villain in The Big Sleep is interesting because of its animalistic imagery. It is never made entirely clear just what kind of creature Chandler might be suggesting with this imagery, but it is worth pursuing to demonstrate the level at which he situates his femme fatale. Chandler repeatedly uses the word "tawny" to describe Carmen's hair, and this coupled with the General's comment that his daughters have no more "moral sense than a cat" suggests that Chandler is using feline characteristics to suggest his predatory female (8, 14). Carmen's eyes are described as "slate-grey" or "slaty," and her teeth are always "little sharp predatory teeth" (8, 178). When she becomes violent, her face takes on a "bony scraped look," and she makes hissing noises (76). Some of the most vivid language in the novel is devoted to description of this psychotic, killer female:

Carmen was up on her feet too, coming towards me with her hand out, still giggling and

hissing. There was a little froth at the corners of her mouth. Her small white teeth glinted close to her lips. (77)

But, perhaps the best description of the creature into which Carmen is transformed can be found when Marlowe discovers her in his bed and rejects her offer of sex:

Her teeth parted and a faint hissing noise came out of her mouth. . . . The hissing had stopped. Her eyes were dead again. . . .

I looked away. Then I was aware of the hissing noise very sudden and sharp. It startled me into looking at her again. She sat there naked, propped on her hands, her mouth open a little, her face like scraped bone. The hissing noise came tearing out of her mouth as if she had nothing to do with it. There was something behind her eyes, blank as they were, that I had never seen in a woman's eyes. (132-33)

Marlowe describes her as "full of some jungle emotion," and she becomes quite literally a violent, sex animal, prefiguring the "nymphomaniacs" who will people the paperbacks of the fifties and sixties (134; Geherin 93-131). Chandler's female villain is never again as blatantly the sexual savage as she is in Carmen, whose only motive for murder is the rejection of her sexuality. At one point in his career, Chandler

actually received a letter from a reader who openly accused him of homosexuality as evidenced by the treatment of women in his fiction, and more will be said on the possibility of Chandler's being a latent homosexual later (Chandler, Letters 188). Through time the murders committed by women in his novels become less frequent and less brutal until finally in his last and most poorly received novel, Playback, "nobody is murdered by a woman" (Mason 95).

Marlowe interacts on a sexual level with two other female characters in The Big Sleep--Carmen's sister, Vivian, and a gangster's wife, Mona Mars. Vivian's sexuality is as explicit as Carmen's without, however, the element of violence. She is described in terms which make her the most alluring of the women in the novel:

She was worth a stare. She was trouble. She was stretched out on a modernistic chaise-longue with her slippers off, so I stared at her legs in the sheerest silk stockings. They seemed to be arranged to stare at. (18)

Her sexual advances are direct and almost matter-of-fact, as when the following exchange takes place during an examination of a nude photograph of Carmen:

"She has a beautiful little body, hasn't she?"

"Uh-huh."

She leaned a little towards me. "You ought to see mine," she said gravely. (54)

The relationship which develops between Marlowe and Vivian is one of apparent one-upmanship in which Marlowe never fully succeeds in putting Vivian "in her place." Vivian tells Marlowe, "I loathe masterful men" (20), and it is her who suggests taking their passionate activity to his place after his rescue of her from Eddie Mars's thug (128). Marlowe, unable to accept Vivian on terms set down by her, comes out with the statement that "kissing is nice, but your father didn't hire me to sleep with you" (128). It is difficult to reconcile Marlowe's response here with the fact that Vivian is presented as a woman married on three previous occasions. At this point, Chandler has Marlowe engage in a discordant, if brief, lecture on his purpose, somewhat reminiscent of the Op's speech to Princess Zhukovski in Hammett's "The Gutting of Couffignal":

"The first time we met I told you I was a detective. Get it through your lovely head. I work at it, lady. I don't play at it."

(128)

As Leon Arden notes of Marlowe, "to avoid seduction he is forced to such extremities as rude behavior and bad dialogue" (78). What has long been accepted as fundamental to hard-boiled fiction in general--that is,

that the detective remain steadfast in the face of sexual temptation, appears in Chandler as the expression of a very individualistic aversion to sexually aggressive women. I do not think that we can safely go as far as Arden and attribute Chandler's sexual repression to his education in an English public school (74), but there is definitely an influence and probably an attitude which shapes his fiction in this area, producing responses and situations not entirely coherent within the texts themselves.

In contrast to his rejection of Vivian and Carmen, Marlowe actually forces himself upon the woman who saves his life, Mona Mars:

I leaned against her and pressed her against the wall with my body. I pushed my mouth against her face. I talked to her that way.

(164)

The reasons for this change in attitude on Marlowe's part are not made clear in the text, though it could in fact be because "her own hair was clipped short all over, like a boy's"--not to overlook the possible homosexual tendencies in Chandler's fiction (162).

Mason makes the following observation on the treatment of women and men in Chandler's novels:

The general effect is that Chandler's world is morally skewed in a way that makes nonsense of the author's claim, which he liked to imply if

not actually state, that the Marlowe novels are edifyingly clear-sighted about good and evil. Their moral scheme is in truth pathologically harsh on women, and pathologically lenient towards men. For just as the novels are full of homicidal females--gunning men down, beating their brains out, and pushing them out of windows--they are correspondingly devoid of bad males. (95)

There can be no denying the truth of Mason's statement. Violent behavior toward women comes both before and after Chandler's work in the hard-boiled sub-genre; however, the tense game which he constructs between Marlowe's temptation by sexually exciting female characters and his inevitable turning away is found nowhere else. Natasha Spender, a close friend of Chandler's in the later years of his life, when speaking of his childhood in a household which lacked any male presence, writes:

Clinically this pattern of childhood situations is often recognized as a determining factor for later homosexuality. By his own account this was not so in Raymond's case, though its strenuous repression might have accounted for the alert and vehement aversion he always went out of

his way to express towards it. This may be why we all, without a second thought, assumed that he was a repressed homosexual, too facile a conclusion perhaps, but backed up by the fact that for all the jolly talk he didn't ever make the slightest advance to any of us nor to any of our friends. (131)

What is striking about these comments by Spender is that in Chandler's fiction, while he does express a conventional disdain for homosexual figures like Lindsay Marriott in Farewell My Lovely and the live-in boyfriend of Arthur Gwynn Geiger, Carol Lundgren, in The Big Sleep, his open admiration for dominant male figures is incessant. Chandler's preoccupation with male figures in this way sometimes fractures the coherence of his texts. Mason points out that Moose Malloy, the "violent, oafish simpleton" of Farewell My Lovely "gratuitously" breaks a man's neck and "soon afterwards he strangles Mrs Florian and knocks her brains out on the bedpost. But Marlowe continues to feel for him a mixture of tenderness and boyish admiration" (95). If this attitude on the part of Marlowe is somewhat "morally obtuse" (Mason 95), his observations on first meeting Red Norgaard are amazing in their attention to detail:

He had the eyes you never see, that you only read about. Violet eyes. Almost purple.

Eyes like a girl, a lovely girl. His skin was as soft as silk. Lightly reddened, but it would never tan. It was too delicate. (196)

In Chandler the boys look like girls (even "tough" ex-cops like Norgaard), and the girls, like Anne Riordan of Farewell My Lovely who is "as steady as an old homicide veteran" and lives in a house where nothing is "womanish," look and sometimes act like boys, if they are not the villainess (58, 147).

Spender uses the word "facile" to excuse her simplistic attribution of repressed homosexuality to Chandler; I do not know if such a label can be avoided in discussing the male-female conflict as it appears in his novels. It is fascinating that works with as much homosexual latency as Chandler's find such wide popular acceptance. For the most part, his audience never recognizes what is happening on this level of the narrative; however, they must still experience the works as they read them. Formula, in this case, conceals a great deal of what is idiosyncratic in Chandler's fiction. The femme fatale was previously established in the hard-boiled form. Chandler simply expands the conflict between this woman and the male hero to the point where he chooses men over women. This is, of course, in most works of fiction not an expression of repressed homosexuality, and the suggestion here is certainly not that there is something "wrong" with

homosexuality. Rather, the purpose has been to expose an aspect of a work released through the production system of mass culture which runs contrary to the usual conservative tenets of that mode of production.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION:

THE LIMITS OF FORMULA

Developing a critical approach from which to approach a work of popular culture is a problematic venture. If the approach is too simplistic and limited, it achieves little in the expansion of understanding for this aspect of our society or the work itself. If it is too rigorous and strictly modelled after approaches developed for the examination of "works of art"--that is, literary works accepted as "serious" and as part of the "classical" canon--it haughtily places the work of popular culture in the unfair position of being judged by a set of criteria formulated for something other than what it is. A work of popular culture makes no claim to recognition as something other than its mode of production indicates, although a critic or student may attempt to make such a claim on its behalf. We have yet to reach the point where the written fiction of our mass culture production system is actually "created" by a machine; therefore, we cannot afford to ignore it or blindly categorize it for quick dismissal. Popular culture is culture, and it is also, of a type, literature, so the problem remains: what do we do with it? Dale Hauser recognizes this problem in an editorial written for a "popular culture" issue of The Sphinx:

In moving from theoretical formulations about popular culture to practical criticism, the temptation is great to pass immediately on to the larger social or cultural issues behind a particular work. This is especially true on account of the absence of formal integrity of popular cultural artifacts--there seems to be so little there to hold our interest.

However, . . . until we understand these artifacts and practices "in and for themselves," and discover the (often concealed) formal structures by which they are related to their social context, we cannot make a convincing case about their value in either positive or negative terms. (vi)

Hauser's observation that, as critics and students of literature, we are quick to "pass immediately on to the larger social or cultural issues behind a particular work" is accurate. The trend today, which has risen from the study of semiotics and culture as an ordering force within society, is to examine works of popular culture for the sole purpose of understanding not the works themselves but what they mean in terms of a larger social context. While this is certainly worthwhile and interesting study, it does not assist us greatly in discovering the actual structure and message of a work produced within this system.

At the end of chapter one, I stated that the works of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler present problems when viewed as examples of popular culture, because both authors had expressed a desire to produce "serious" works of literature, and because they introduce new elements to the formulas which support the production of hard-boiled detective fiction. Perhaps what should have been stated then is that the texts examined here will always be works of popular culture first and then perhaps, in later examination, something else as well. These works open a door for understanding a type of popular fiction, not as a cultural artifact, but as fiction--that is, literature. They occupy the middle ground between the "serious" art of a unique period in the history of literature and the almost indistinguishable, continuous product of a mass production system. That these works fail in aesthetic terms to rise to the level of works recognized as art by the critical community surrounding the "classical" canon does not lessen their value in this study. We can know art from what is not art, or, in the case of the works examined here, what is almost art. Margolies refers to Hammett and Chandler as "thematically ambivalent about social and cultural values" (3), and he too notes their middle place in the hierarchy of literature:

A few authors employing popular forms have escaped the usual conservative conclusions.

Their works constitute a grey area lying somewhere between high art and popular writing. The effectiveness of elitist fiction is measured by its ability to surprise or communicate fresh, original, or unusual understanding of experience to an audience. The effectiveness of a popular writer, on the other hand, lies chiefly in the way that he conceals from his reader something that the reader already knows or secretly believes. This knowledge may include ideas that are politically and socially acceptable. . . . But sometimes the outlook contained in a work of popular culture may be at odds with official views. . . . When this happens the study of popular culture may reveal serious underground rifts in the society at large.

(2)

The approach taken throughout this thesis has been to start with the popular images or formula elements of the hard-boiled detective sub-genre and then to go to the texts of Hammett and Chandler in an attempt to discover where they break away from, surpass, subvert, or alter formula. The first intention of this method was to simply provide an apparatus for analyzing the works themselves. The second purpose was to exhibit that formula as the term applies to popular fiction is

not, contrary to its definition, consistent or straightforward. At the lowest level of popular production (not examined here by any means) the structural elements of formula are all that exist; however, a short distance beyond this level other more human and less systematic elements begin to appear. At this point, perhaps "art" is still a long way off, but the texts begin to incorporate elements which belie the label of formula and its connotation of a mechanistic kind of fiction.

Hammett's treatment of politics in the Red Harvest does not aid in elevating the work toward the status of art in any significant way. Nevertheless, his efforts are worthy of notice, for they tell us something about him as a writer and individual, about his time, and about popular fiction. That Raymond Chandler's fiction in The Big Sleep and Farewell My Lovely seems to indicate repressed homosexual tendencies on his part and treats quite openly affection between male characters is remarkable considering the traditional disapproval of such responses among the usual audience of popular fiction. It demonstrates how the sparse frame of formulaic production serves to conceal rather obvious elements within such works. The treatment of women in hard-boiled fiction is directly linked to contemporaneous changes in the social structure of American society. However, in the work of both Hammett

and Chandler this treatment involves more than just the expression of widely-felt social anxieties; they both bring individual interpretations to this subject. And finally, in The Maltese Falcon, I think that Hammett comes very close to achieving his goal of writing a "serious" piece of fiction. This is, of course, a subjective opinion, but too much has to be ignored in Hammett's development as a writer and in the novel itself to accept Spade as a one-dimensional character who gives up Brigid in the cause of a simplistic, moralistic code. Where lies the reward for his virtue? In the arrival of his dead partner's wife, Iva? That is where the story began. Her arrival signals his return to a life with as much meaning as death, and that is a subject foreign to popular fiction.

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