

THE HARD-BOILED DETECTIVE: PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND THE
PURSUIT OF REDEMPTION

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Dedication

To my parents, George and Libby Howard
Though they did not live to see me begin this educational adventure, they taught me by example the importance of reading and literature. Their reading tastes included political commentary, literary masterpieces and, of course, detective fiction.

Acknowledgements

The following inscription is from the inside front page of The Complete Sherlock Holmes given to me by my sisters Janice and Barbie on Christmas day in 1977. “May the travels through the streets and alleys of London with Sherlock Holmes make for many pleasant hours.” Further into this thesis, there are references to this book. In particular, one story from this book, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, became integral to what I eventually studied and wrote. It is fair to say that this was my real introduction to the genre and led to my eventual choice of thesis study. I have to give special thanks to them and my sister Susie as well for their love and encouragement of my reading and learning.

Professor Robert Rebein worked with me from the very start of my independent study when I decided to concentrate on Detective Fiction. The genre turned out to be more complicated and expansive than I had imagined, and there were multiple paths this could have taken. With his guidance and insightful knowledge, and I was able to sort through the various ways this thesis could have gone and settle on a direction. Once we agreed, he stepped back from the process and allowed me to research and write, providing comments and suggestions when I began to veer off course. This made the project both educational and gratifying. To him I extend a profound debt of gratitude.

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and I greatly appreciate their help. It has been a privilege to work with two gentlemen so renowned in their field.

I also have to mention the influence of Dan Barden, Professor of English at Butler University. It was through his Community Fiction class that I was able to gain the courage to enter a Masters program. After the class had ended, we met at a coffee shop on Pennsylvania Avenue and talked about the possibility of graduate school. From this conversation, I decided to enter the program at IUPUI.

Last, but certainly not least, I have to thank my wife Michele for her love and support. She had to endure many hours of me sitting in my office studying and writing. She has asked what I am going to do with my time now that this is complete. For some reason, I do not believe that will be a problem.

ABSTRACT

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THE HARD-BOILED DETECTIVE: PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND THE PURSUIT OF REDEMPTION

By start of the 1920s, the United States had seen nearly forty years of vast accumulations of wealth by a small group of people, substantial financial speculation and a mass change in the economic base from agricultural to industrial. All of this ended in 1929 in a crushing depression that spread not only across the country, but also around the world. Hard-Boiled detective fiction first reached the reading public early in the decade initially as adventure stories, but quickly became a way for authors to express the stresses these changes were causing on people and society. The detective is the center of the story with the task of reestablishing a certain degree of order or redemption. An important character hallmark of this genre is that he is seldom able to do this, or that the cost is so high a terrible burden remains. His decisions and judgments in this attempt are formed by his relationship with the people or community around him. The goal of this thesis is to look at the issues raised in the context of how the detective relates to a person or community in the story. For analysis, six books were chosen arranged from least level of personal relationship by the detective to the most intimate. The books are *Red Harvest*, by Dashiell Hammett, *The Big Sleep*, by Raymond Chandler, *The Galton Case*, by Ross MacDonald, *Cotton Comes to Harlem*, by Chester Himes, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, by Walter Mosley, and *I, the Jury*, by Mickey Spillane. In the study of these books, a wide range of topics are

presented including political ideologies, corruption, racial discrimination and family strife. Each book provided a wealth of views on these and other subjects that are as relevant today as when they were written.

Robert Rebein, Ph.D. – Committee Chair

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Chapter 1 The Hard-Boiled Detective: An Historical Genesis

In everything that can be called art there is a quality of redemption.
Raymond Chandler

Crime fiction, and especially Hard-Boiled detective fiction, has the capacity to bring greater awareness to disorder and inequities. This quality not only applies to the story within the pages, but also, and more importantly, to larger societal movements such as politics and race relations. To be redemptive as Raymond Chandler states, crime fiction must not only correct wrongs in the story, but must also illuminate matters that are real and often shocking. Realism and discord are central tenets of the Hard-Boiled detective genre, making this construct a medium for protest and debate. The detective is placed in these stories to solve a fictional crime and to define right and wrong in a concentrated version of the real world. The actions and relationship of the Hard-Boiled detective to a person or community are at the core of this definition. This thesis will explore how this relationship of the Hard-Boiled detective influences his judgment, grounds his morality and brings about redemption.

At the heart of each story examined in this thesis is a challenge to the detective. The challenge amounts to what this singular person will do when faced with a cacophony of facts and choices that concern his well being as well as what he is investigating. The only basis each of the detectives can call upon is his judgmental involvement to the world around him as he tries to bring order to a small part of this community. What constitutes redemption is subject to his relationship with a person or community as well, since redemption could entail anything from setting criminals free to all out vengeance. As each following chapter will detail, the relationship

could be as intimate as a sexual encounter and as isolated as a strange man in a strange town. In each story discussed, the detective's life and work become one and the same, and he will end up owning the solution he devises. Just as valid, one could say the solution owns the detective, since in each story the effects of the eventual outcome exact a private toll.

Detective fiction is no different from other genres that have developed, split and morphed as time passed and people look for new avenues of expression. There can always be a debate as to where detective fiction first began, but the generally accepted opinion is that Edgar Allan Poe wrote the first commercially viable detective story. His publication of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* in 1841, and the introduction of detective C. Auguste Dupin started a trend that is still strong into the 21st century. The creation of this genre, and this particular detective, was not an accident and was rooted in world events. The story was first published in 1841, a time when scientific methods began to gain importance, and conflict with theology.¹ The beginning of *Murders* has little to do with the murder, and instead compares the merits of Whist to Chess, concluding that Whist is the more skilled game due to the fact that it involves reading the opponent and numerous intangibles. *Murders* follows this line of reasoning as Dupin becomes involved with the supposed brutal murder of two women when he believes that the police failed by relying on circumstantial evidence and testimony from a group of people who all spoke different languages. Through intense examination of the facts and mental deduction, Dupin arrives at the conclusion that an escaped primate, an Orang-Outang, had committed the murders,

¹ Frank, Lawrence. Victorian Detective Fiction and the Nature of Evidence. New York: Palgrave Macmillan (2003). 30

and then draws the owner in and proves what happened. The mistake of the supposed eyewitnesses and the police was to think the evidence was entirely human in nature, and the thought that any other kind of being was present is never considered. They had confused primate behavior and physical evidence for human.

This was a few years before Darwin was to publish his *Origin of Species*, but scientists and theologians were debating these kinds of connections between humans and primates, drastically challenging long held worldviews.

It is possible, then, to argue that the detective story, not unlike the novel, appeared at a moment in social and intellectual crisis that it both recognized and defined, even as it promoted the transition from one worldview, generally Christian and ahistorical, to another, profoundly historical worldview that remains to this day unsettling.²

Science at this point in history began to question the source of the very ground people walked on, literally changing the accepted explanations of the origin of the dirt under their feet. People of science began to confront the biblically based formation of the universe and humanity. They applied a logical examination for the facts at hand, and sought to prove a scientific conclusion. Dupin applied rational thought to solve the case in *Murders*, while drawing upon the science of the day that was debating the relationship between primates and humans. This opening set of stories by Poe led to the start of a genre that still works to bring debate into the public forum.

Other legendary authors, Dickens for instance, followed with detective stories as well, but probably the best know is Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his tales featuring Sherlock Holmes. Holmes has become synonymous with literary sleuthing. The Holmes stories are direct literary descendents of Dupin from his method of investigation to the use of a friend as narrator. Holmes is driven by logical

² Ibid. 30

explanation and rational thought. Doyle himself was a medical doctor by training and had expressed confusion on the subject of the applicability of Christian faith. As a college student in the 1870s, he found that “the foundations not only of Roman Catholicism but of the whole Christian faith, as presented to me in nineteenth century theology, were so weak that my mind could not build upon them.”³ Doyle instead refers to scientists and philosophers such as Darwin and John Stuart Mill for worldview explanation. In Doyle’s *The Sign of Four*, Holmes recommends that Watson read a book by Winwood Reade called *The Martyrdom of Man*, which deals with issues of religious skepticism. *The Hound of the Baskervilles* presents a direct conflict between the unquestioning belief of myth and the triumph of logical thought when Holmes is asked to debunk a generations old family curse of a giant wild dog that preys upon the Baskerville family. Doyle sends Holmes to live in caves as ancient humans did, with talk of Neolithic man living upon the moor. At one point, Holmes says, “An investigator needs facts not legends and rumors.”⁴ Holmes became the embodiment of rational thought to the point where his name has become a part of everyday lexicon when describing a pursuit of intense logical thought. A classic Holmes moment plays out recursively across many stories: when faced with a difficult problem he would lock himself in his apartment at 221B Baker Street, with a bag of rough-cut tobacco and a pipe, and then proceed to spend the entire day smoking and rationalizing his way through a case.

These beginnings of the genre led to an era of closed-door clue-type whodunit mysteries, which went in a different direction, more towards escapism. This thesis is

³ Ibid. 134

⁴ Conan Doyle, Sir Arthur. “The Hound of the Baskervilles.” *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*. Garden City: Doubleday, [c. 1975]. 746

not a debate of which type of story is better or more important, as each has its own merits. However, in the early 20th century, these “Golden Age” detective stories stayed away from controversial subjects and used settings that were usually stylized and exclusive in terms of the opening convention: a dead body is introduced that upsets the status quo and the adventure begins. The locales for the stories are described as cozy, usually a great manor house or an inviting cottage, where there is assurance the crime will be resolved, and orderliness will be restored to where it should be.⁵ While Holmes plied the streets and alleys of London, occasionally succumbing to drug use, Miss Marple could solve a crime without leaving her cottage.⁶ The British detective’s morals in this era of the genre were never in question, and there is a defined difference between right and wrong providing a comfortable setting for readers and a place of escape for a few hours. But, as the 20th century began to unfold, the American Hard-Boiled detective genre came into being, going in a different direction and picking up on the impacts of political strains, cultural conflict, sex, racism, war and widespread economic downfall. This ushered in an era of realism where the crimes committed left a lasting pain on all those involved, especially the detective.

Early in the 20th century, the landscape of the United States began to experience great changes. This period saw the rise of a second generation of industrial giants who managed to accumulate great wealth and power in such industries as railroads, oil and finance, often through corrupt and brutal business practices. This was accompanied by a change in the work force as people moved

⁵ Horsley, Lee. Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction. Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2005). 38

⁶ Ibid. 33

from country to city, and formed labor unions. There was a World War and an extensive economic depression, resulting in mass displacement of people. Writers, like the painters and sculptors of the time, saw these things and put them into their works. Books like *The Grapes of Wrath*, published in 1939, brought these upheavals to the surface, by addressing these topics and opening them up to debate.

Although the Golden Age stories continued to be popular, Hard-Boiled detective stories frequently had themes that included subjects such as violence, religion, sex and racism. These Hard-Boiled detective stories were often not about solving a mystery, in marked contrast to the Golden Age stories, causing the genre to head off in a different direction. Friction over the diverging genre conventions soon crossed the Atlantic. Raymond Chandler in his essay *The Simple Art of Murder* said, “The English may not be the best writers in the world, but they are incomparably the best dull writers.”⁷ In response to the essay, John Dickson Carr, an American expatriate and Member of the London Detection Club, characterizes Chandler’s discussion of the English detective story as “a fit of screaming hysterics.”⁸ Many books from all genres in this era sparked derision, and led to book banning and challenges that have not abated through the decades. Also at work was a public, now more literate than before, that included classes of people who could afford the new mass-market editions. Early on, the Hard-Boiled detective stories filled this space for a working class who had recently learned reading skills and were looking for topics they could relate to. Mass production was taking over the industrial landscape, and this influenced the speed at which the stories themselves were produced. Writers who

⁷ Chandler, Raymond. *The Simple Art of Murder*. New York: Vintage Crime, (1988). 11

⁸ Smith, Erin. *Hard Boiled: Working-Class Readers and Pulp Magazines*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000. 185

regularly wrote for the new genre pulps averaged about 4000 words a day. Even the use of pulp paper, to speed production and reduce cost, was a result of this need to get reading material out to the public quickly and cheaply.⁹ The writers drew upon the topics of the day, wrote for a working class audience, and needed to produce at an astonishing pace. Because of this push to produce, the writing was sparse and to the point. The best writers of the day managed to use this sparseness to create impact and tone in the story, and in the process set a standard for the genre that is still in vogue. The stories had to be immediate to grab the reader's attention, meaning the authors wrote about topics that were in the headlines that day and events that impacted everyday life. A Hard-Boiled detective became a kind of surrogate for the reader who could now experience these extraordinary daily events.

Further, like real life, the episodes of the Hard-Boiled detective stories were seldom linear with tidy conclusions. This contrasts with most Golden Age stories that depended on rational thought and accounting for all the clues. Hard-Boiled detectives did the same to a degree, but ratiocination was seldom the central focus of the story. For sure, a mystery is solved, but this is only a means for presenting a larger idea. These stories are as much about the journey of the detective, and the world he lives in (and by extension our world) and the changes he goes through as the events unfold. The Hard-Boiled detective uses his own logic, which is colored by his and our experiences and thought processes, to resolve a solution that is right for him and his place in the community. The detective may not account for all the clues, nor is this always required to solve the problem. *The Big Sleep* by Raymond Chandler has the death of the Sternwood chauffeur towards the beginning of the book, but this crime is

⁹ Ibid. 19

never solved. The absence of the person and the information he could have provided is more important than who killed him.

Almost invariably, Hard-Boiled stories were written about people looking from a lower class towards a higher class, a position that, even as the genre has become more expansive and the writing more literary, continues to be one of the primary lynchpins. Erin Smith further discusses that an initial appeal of the Hard-Boiled detective figure was his autonomy.¹⁰ Early on, the Hard-Boiled detectives were predominately men, with the pulp magazines generally aimed towards male readers. Men in large numbers were moving from agrarian and other self-made professions to factory work and as a result felt a loss of this autonomy. The Hard-Boiled detective was a return to a male figure who worked outside the factory system. The detectives in these stories are usually out on their own, even when they worked for an agency, and only earned their living when they produced results. They are usually up against forces much greater, more established and far richer than they are. The detective also has the quality of living by a value system that lines up with character behavior. With the detective being the center of the story, this autonomy allows the Hard-Boiled private eye to establish a morality in this literary world that often was outside the law, a sharp contrast to the world of the Golden Age detectives. The Hard-Boiled detective looks at what is presented, renders judgment in accordance with his value system, and acts. Criminals may go free, illegal acts might go unpunished, but the detective did what he thought was needed.

The detective in the Hard-Boiled version of the genre varied in another critical way from those of the Golden-age writings. The Golden-age detective had an air of

¹⁰ Ibid. 80

detachment from the case at hand. Typically, he/she comes in, works the clues, and then at the end restores order and leaves to go on to other things. The Hard-Boiled detective, on the other hand, steps into the thick of the story and engages with the other people that make up that world. Often, the Hard-Boiled detective lives and stays in the community the story takes place in. Though he usually is up against forces above his social stature, he has to depend on his personal knowledge of the criminal's world, working within that element to obtain the final outcome. The situations in these stories can get so close to the detective's life, that scenes of personal relationships between the detective and other characters are common. Lee Horsley sums this up as follows:

In the tradition of the 1920s with Hammett's contributions to *Black Mask* magazine, the investigator is no longer detached and immune from danger. The hard-boiled private eye's self-conscious toughness and his aggressive involvement in his city's criminal milieu give him a very direct investment in the world he investigates.¹¹

The involvement is important to the Hard-Boiled detective stories. For many of these stories, the detective appears to have little else to pursue other than the case at hand. They are bound to what they are working on, and diligently pursue it to the end, whatever that might be. Each story overwhelms the detective, and this impels the plot and brings meaning to the text. Essential to how the story unfolds is the detective's degree of personal relationship with a person or community in the story. In other words, the detective's emotional relationships, or lack thereof, shape his professional involvement, influencing engagement with events in the story and manner of resolution. Each decision he makes has a personal consequence for all involved, and, like in real life, these decisions are based on the relationships with those around him.

¹¹ Horsley, Lee. Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction. 67

This thesis is arranged such that it will progress from the least degree of relationship to a person or community in the story to the most, and will address how these varying levels of relationship influence the detective's decision-making and meaning of the text. As the thesis progresses the detective increasingly becomes emotionally attached to a person or community.

Opening the discussion will be Dashiell Hammett's first novel *Red Harvest*. The detective in *Red Harvest* is the Continental Op, the same protagonist of many early Hammett stories and the focus of two later story collections. He is nameless, and almost formless, being unremarkable in appearance, around 40 years old, squat and somewhat pudgy. He comes into a strange town to help clean up corruption. In this situation, he is completely detached from the people he is working with and against. Any level of personal relationship is limited to what he needs to do to achieve his goal. He speaks the same language as the criminals who have moved in and taken over the town and is not hesitant to apply the same measures they do. The outsider status allows him to be free of alliances, and to have access he would not otherwise have. Most importantly, this almost total lack of relationship with a person or community gives The Op carte-blanche in his actions for destroying the corrupt organization of the town. It also allows a critical lens through which the reader can see the connection between business and organized crime.

The Big Sleep by Raymond Chandler has Philip Marlowe investigating the blackmail of a dying oil company owner. Like The Op, Marlowe comes into the story from the outside. However, the investigation occurs primarily in Los Angeles, Marlowe's hometown, and he uses this inside information of the city's criminal

element to proceed. The investigation causes him to act on behalf of the man who hired him, in an effort to save the dying man's pride. Marlowe's connections cause him and the reader to see that the political structure is full of holes. Though he solves the mystery he was hired for, he is powerless and resigned to the enormity of the systemic problems.

The Galton Case is partially autobiographical in that John Galton's life is similar to Ross MacDonald's. The author therefore has a personal relationship with the Galton, and in the book, the detective, Lew Archer, has great sympathy for Galton. Archer is hired for the case through an acquaintance. He uses his local knowledge to solve the case, but also traces Galton's life back, a path that has many parallels to MacDonald's. Archer does not believe Galton is who he says he is, and it takes a complete sorting of a web of family lies until he does. *The Galton Case* is a noted departure from the Hard-Boiled tradition by staying focused on the psychological destructiveness of living false identities so completely that people begin to believe them. The personal relationship of Archer with several of these people's lives clouds his perception of what is actually happening. Archer himself bends the truth to get what he needs from others.

Cotton Comes to Harlem by Chester Himes presents a concentrated view of Harlem through two police detectives, Coffin Ed Johnson and Grave Digger Jones. Coffin Ed and Grave Digger rely not only on their local knowledge of the city, but also on their intimate knowledge of the people around them. They live among the people they are investigating, and Himes regularly has them resort to violence as a means of control. Himes himself raised ire for this type of portrayal, but his

contention was that this kind of society was the natural result of racism and discrimination. Coffin Ed and Grave Digger know that the people of their community will never see redemption for the condition of their lives. They understand them so completely that they know the community has unrealistic expectations, making them subject to hustlers and false promises. The detectives come to the sad conclusion that prejudice is nearly insurmountable and will not change any time soon.

Easy Rawlins, in Walter Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress*, is hired through a friend to find a woman. His involvement to the case grows throughout the story, and he finds the woman, Daphne Monet, and has a relationship with her. Through this relationship, the reader sees how this mixed race woman is caught between the racial divide. This connection epitomizes the novel's running theme of the societal toll of discrimination. Rawlins becomes enamored with Daphne and the story turns from him being hired to search for her, to him wanting to live with her. However, she is too abstract, a person between worlds, to settle into a stable relationship. Throughout the story, Rawlins must rely on his perceptions of what is right according to the unjust society he lives in. Repeatedly, he has to draw upon his friendships and personal relationship to make decisions, and in the end realizes this is all he really has.

In *I, The Jury* by Mickey Spillane the detective, Mike Hammer, finds his best friend has been killed and vows vengeance on the murderer. Of the books studied, this one has the most personal relationship with the detective. Because of this relationship, the vengeance takes the form of a single-minded pursuit that continues until he finally enacts punishment as he sees fit. This type of story expresses the frustration with a bureaucracy that is lethargic and can sometimes give the appearance

of letting illegal acts go unpunished. The story also has a theme of the emasculating effects of women in positions of authority, both occupationally and sexually. *I, The Jury* was written at a time when WWII G.I.s were working their way back into society, finding a world much different than before and during the war. This book caused disdain due to the brutality and vigilantism that Spillane put into the character of Hammer.

The stories revolve around the detective and to understand the stories, the detective's motives and genesis must be understood. In most cases, the detective character himself is largely drawn from the author's background, if not partially autobiographic, while some are metaphors for the themes itself. For this reason, each chapter of this thesis includes a biography of the author. The Op has the same physical and mental attributes of Dashiell Hammett's Pinkerton colleagues and trainers.¹² Like Raymond Chandler, Philip Marlowe is morose and reclusive, and turns to alcohol when he needs to escape the realism of the events around him. In the books following Ross MacDonald's psychotherapy to address family issues, Lew Archer became more analytical and introspective. Coffin Ed and Grave Digger look and act like the extreme Harlem community Chester Himes created. Walter Mosley is mixed race and Easy Rawlins is constantly trying to exist as a black man who desires aspects of white society. Mickey Spillane wrote very quickly with little regard for analysis and critique of his work, while Mike Hammer does not let other's opinions influence what he is doing. In addition, as is true with many writers, these books come from the author's life experiences. All of the books discussed can be traced back to events experienced and statements made by each author.

¹² Nolan, William F. Hammett: a life at the edge. New York: Congdon and Weed, 1983. 9

The arrangement of the books from least to most intimate personal relationship will show how this influences the detective's morality and judgment, and determines the overall theme of the storyline. The least degree of personal relationship allows the detective to walk away from the chaos he caused, while the most relationship requires more definitive closure, though in each case a personal wound remains. The Op in *Red Harvest* does not care about Personville as he wreaks havoc and exposes criminality, and simply leaves town at the end with a self-inflicted burden. By contrast, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger have to live in the Harlem they ransacked and strive to find a way to give back what was taken. These two examples show the power of each approach. Hammett used the genre in a global socio-political sense to express how a society built purely on greed can only be remedied by bringing in an outside force and tearing it apart. Himes addressed socio-political themes as well, but it was done on a confined level by showing the individual torment caused by segregation. All of these books are based on the detective's principles. In *The Big Sleep*, Raymond Chandler has Marlowe desperately holding onto the tenets of the Knights Code while trying to negotiate through a thoroughly corrupt community. Ross MacDonald in *The Galton Case* took the genre in a different direction as Lew Archer analyzes and unravels the debilitating effects of people living lies. Easy Rawlins in *The Devil in a Blue Dress* has eventually to decide if friendship outweighs the need for justice. Mike Hammer in *I, the Jury* demonstrates a personal and social duality when considering the role of women in the professional world. Each takes a stance on debates that remain vibrant while using a different, yet equally valid approach. Therefore, the degree of personal relationship with a person or

community works with the debate presented in each book and it influences how the detective participates in the thematic outcome. The chapters that follow will explore this in detail.

Chapter 2 Political Anarchy in *Red Harvest*

I first heard Personville called Poisonville by a red-haired mucker named Hickey Dewey in the Big Ship in Butte. He also called his shirt a shoit. I didn't think anything of what he had done to the city's name. Later I heard men who could manage their r's give it the same pronunciation. I still didn't see anything in it but the meaningless sort of humor that used to make richardsnary the thieves' dictionary. A few years later I went to Personville and learned better.¹³

The opening paragraph for *Red Harvest* has Dashiell Hammett's iconic detective, The Continental Operative, or The Op, reflecting back to when he first heard of the town Personville, the locale for the story. He knew nothing of the town or the reputation it had, thus making him a total outsider when he was hired by one of the residents to help investigate corruption. This book is discussed first in this thesis because The Op has no personal connection to anyone in Personville or the community as a whole. In fact, he never meets the man who hired him, a journalist named Donald Willsson, as he is killed just as The Op arrives in town. This allows The Op to proceed through the story without hesitation, and become a way for Hammett to shed light on the effects of uncontrolled ambition for greed and power. Personville is in a state of apoplexy as various criminal organizations have taken over the government and police force. The Op originally was hired to help report and solve the problems, but after the death of Donald Willsson and an attempt on his own life, he becomes obsessed with the need for revenge. He eventually resorts to the same mindset as the criminal element. There are numerous interpretations to what Hammett is saying in this book ranging from striking out against the Ku Klux Klan to

¹³ Hammett, Dashiell. "Red Harvest." 1929. The Novels of Dashiell Hammett. New York: Knopf, 1965. 3

promoting communism. Either way, *Red Harvest* is Hammett's expression of how an atmosphere based on absolute self-interest is destructive to the point where the only remedy is profound change.

While not the originator of the Hard-Boiled detective story (Carroll John Daly predated Hammett by a few months), Hammett's books brought the genre to a new literary level. *Red Harvest* was the first of his five novels, with the others including *The Dain Curse*, *The Maltese Falcon*, *The Glass Key* and *The Thin Man*. Though this is a modest output, the impact has been lasting to the point where Hammett established a standard to which all that follow are compared. Hammett did not start out to be a writer, nor did he produce a prodigious amount of work. Of the authors being discussed in this thesis, Hammett is the only one who actually had worked as a detective. This experience is evident in many of the viewpoints seen in his books, and was part of a circuitous life. He worked for the Pinkerton Detective agency from 1915 to 1922, with his employment interrupted for a short time by service in WWI.¹⁴ While with Pinkerton, he worked numerous cases that included embezzlement, jewel thievery, transporting criminals and finding stolen merchandise. However, when he was hired as a strikebreaker at a miners strike in Butte, Montana this was to have a profound and lasting impact on the rest of his life. Pinkerton operatives were often hired to break up strikes, and in fact, Hammett claimed to have been asked to assassinate the president of the International Workers of the World, Frank Little.¹⁵ Hammett refused, but Little was lynched and murdered nonetheless. The resulting

¹⁴ Nolan. 3-20

¹⁵ Zumoff, J.A. "The politics of Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest*.(Essay)." *Mosaic (Winnipeg)*. 40.4 (Dec 2007): 119(16). [Academic OneFile](#). Gale. Univ Library at IUPUI. 2 Oct. 2009. 131

violence that was part of the strike breaking are believed to have caused him to look towards Communism.¹⁶

Hammett's personal life experiences tie into the political messages in his books. He began to write after leaving Pinkerton, submitting stories to *Black Mask*, in which *Red Harvest* was originally published as a serial. Hammett then submitted *Red Harvest* as a novel to Knopf, where he was encouraged to rework it to remove some of the violence.¹⁷ This was the first of the five books he wrote, with the last one, *The Thin Man*, published in 1934. From this point to the end of his life, he wrote sporadically and never published another book. During WWII, despite compromised health and being 48 years old, he was so incensed by the rise of fascism in Europe he volunteered for the Army and served as a camp newspaper editor in the Aleutian Islands, eventually being honorably discharged at the rank of Sergeant. Hammett would go on to serve as President of the New York Civil Rights Congress, which had ties to the Communist Party. Though there is disagreement as to his degree of involvement, this association led to him being black listed and eventually jailed for contempt during the McCarthy hearings.¹⁸ Hammett died in 1961, and over the objections of J. Edgar Hoover was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. His description on the Arlington National Cemetery website reads,

Samuel Dashiell Hammett — Wrote numerous detective novels, including *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Thin Man* in 1930s, served in World Wars I and II, jailed during McCarthy era as communist threat.¹⁹

¹⁶ Nolan. 14

¹⁷ Ibid. 79

¹⁸ Encyclopedia of World Biography, "Dashiell Hammett." 2nd ed. 17 Vols. Gale Research, 1998. Reproduced in Biography Resource Center. Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale, 2008.

<http://galenet.galegroup.com.proxy.ulib.iupui.edu/servlet/BioRC>

¹⁹ [Arlington National Cemetery](http://www.arlingtoncemetery.org/historical_information/literary_figures.html). 7 Oct. 2009.

<http://www.arlingtoncemetery.org/historical_information/literary_figures.html>

Red Harvest, published as a novel in 1929, has a simple premise and uses The Op who had appeared in previous Hammett short stories. Hammett never gives The Op a real name and loosely describes him as 40ish, kind of fat and plain looking.²⁰ As mentioned, Donald Willsson is killed early in the book, and The Op is then hired by Donald's father, Elihu Willsson, to essentially give control of the city back to Elihu. This changes after an attempt on The Op's life. The Op then forces Elihu Willsson to let him proceed unabated to exact revenge on the criminal element of Personville by pitting opposing forces against each other to create chaos. He then leaves at the end of the story, not really having solved much of anything.

This narrative thinly veils deeper meanings of the text, which has led to numerous interpretations. Personville, the strike and the placement of the detective all have parallels to Hammett's personal experiences. It has also been said, though debated, that *Red Harvest* shows Hammett's developing sympathies towards communism.²¹ Hammett sets The Op in this microcosm of pre-depression era America and shows collusion between business, law enforcement and organized crime. *Red Harvest* presents a small mining city, where just before the arrival of The Op, a worker's strike was violently put down. A character, Bill Quint, a representative of the International Workers of the World, is largely ineffectual in the book and had earlier come to town to preach working on the inside to hurt the company. Instead, the strike turned violent. Elihu, the mine owner, a sick, crass and vitriolic man, ran the town through a corrupt police force. He hires organized crime

²⁰ According to William F. Nolan, The Op is a literary rendition of one of Hammett's Pinkerton trainers, Jimmy Wright.

²¹ Zumoff. 130-131

in the form of a loan shop owner Lew Yard, a bootlegger Pete the Finn and a gambler Max “Whisper” Thaler, to put down the strike. After the strike is over, they stay in the city and take over with the cooperation of police chief Noonan. Also in the mix is a woman, Dinah Brand, who, while never described as a prostitute, gives up information on various men in town only for money. Through his Pinkerton employment, Hammett had been involved with these types of strikebreaking activities. The book connects the various strata of government, business and organized crime, and tells how this connection leads to an unchecked pursuit of greed, control and eventual dissolution of civil society. The opening description of Personville itself captures the vision of a civilization in decline. “The result was an ugly city of forty thousand people, set in an ugly notch between two ugly mountains that had been all dirtied up by mining.”²²

Personville would seem to align with Hammett’s championing of Communism over capitalism with *Red Harvest* frequently seen as showing capitalism run amok, and Elihu the industrialist being motivated only by power and greed. The term “Red” in the title could be interpreted as indicating the bloody conflicts that are part of the story, as the body count by the end is quite high. “Red” could also be seen as a connection to communism in line with Hammett’s well documented political leanings. While the intent of Hammett using *Red Harvest* to promote communism can be debated, any indication that this is proletariat literature does not hold up with the figure of The Op and how he behaves. Since this is a first person account, all actions are seen through his eyes and his judgment and morality. He becomes the weather vane for right and wrong, regardless of the applicability of civil law. The Op

²² Hammett. 3

arrives after the worker strike ended, and there is no reference to, or even any curiosity about the strike and what it meant. Though he has a friendly relationship with Quint, the IWW representative, Quint is completely unhelpful other than giving The Op a history of how the city came to its present state. The idea of starting a workers uprising or proletariat revolution is never part of the narrative and the strike is not even discussed beyond indicating that something happened. There is not even a mineworker or a regular citizen of Personville as a character in the book. In fact, most of the characters The Op deals with in Personville are outsiders such as him. The Op himself does not represent or work on the behalf of anyone but himself, and therefore cannot be considered either a laborer or proletarian.²³

Instead, the Op becomes a vigilante driven by revenge, a self-serving reaction that sets up the narrative for the entire story. The Op does some investigating to find Donald Willsson's killer, but after Elihu hires him to eliminate the criminal element, The Op becomes obsessed with avenging the attempt on his life. He promises to use the money paid by Elihu to "opening Poisonville up from Adam's apple to ankles."²⁴ The Op's lack of relationship with a person or community lets him behave in this manner by being beholden to no one. This is his advantage, but it eventually becomes a personal burden when he realizes the results of his actions. He works for an agency, but once he sets up his deal with Elihu, he is very circumspect with the home office about what he is doing. His actions focus on getting vengeance for the attempt on his life. He adopts the behavior of the criminals in town, by crossing legal and ethical bounds to achieve what he wants, and telling lies that lead to

²³ Zumoff. 124

²⁴ Ibid. 43

assassinations. He initially succeeds in setting his plans in motion and even takes pride in what he was able to do.²⁵ After seeing a car full of men careening down the street, The Op tells us:

I grinned after it. Poisonville was beginning to boil out under the lid, and I felt so much like a native that even the memory of my very un-nice part in the boiling didn't keep me from getting twelve solid end-to-end hours of sleep.²⁶

As seen in this quote and the previous descriptions, Hammett twisted the idea of the detective around. This is a trait common among writers of Hard-Boiled detective fiction, and can be traced across the different interpretations of the genre in the following chapters. Importantly though, The Op's disregard of civil obedience is prototypical of detectives later described. Unlike the Golden Age detectives, The Op drops any pretense of upholding the law, and instead becomes the law when he deems it necessary. This disregard is true with all detectives discussed in this thesis from The Op all the way through to Mike Hammer. Hammett reverses his experience as a Pinkerton strikebreaker as well, as he sets The Op in opposition to the industrialist, even though ownership hired him. He does however, stay with the Pinkerton basic principle that the ends justify the means.²⁷ The Op becomes fanatical with his goal to tear the city apart, and similar to Elihu's desire to control all that goes on, uses tactics of intimidation and deceit. The Op's actions feed the destabilizing cycle of violence.

As the story progresses, though, doubts creep in about what he was doing with the town and the effects on himself. He fears he is "going blood-simple like the

²⁵ W. Russel Gray. "Jimmying the Back Door of Literature: Dashiell Hammett's Blue-Collar Modernism." *The Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 41, No. 5, 2008. 773

²⁶ Hammett. 77

²⁷ Nolan. 8

natives.”²⁸ Further explanation of this doubt shows up on a sub-conscious level. After talking to Dinah Brand about the personal toll this was taking, she drugs him with laudanum and he has dreams about the ultimate result of this type of environment. One dream has The Op chasing a small brown man who is wearing a sombrero. The Op chases him through a city, at one point running over the top of a crowd of people by stepping on their heads and shoulders. The pursued man runs up a tall building with The Op right behind. With one hand, The Op grabs the man’s head and squeezes, while trying to get his knife out of his pocket with the other. They fall off the roof together towards the crowd miles below. Through the sub-conscious of The Op, Hammett gives a metaphorical picture of how this “Blood Simple” action leads to a fatal end for the community as whole. In the dream, The Op tramples over the population in his pursuit of a man of a different race. Both the pursued man and The Op fall off the building into a crowd of millions. When this drug-induced dream sequence ends, The Op awakens to find his hand around an ice pick sticking out of Dinah Brand’s chest. He is not sure if he stabbed her during the dream, but later finds out she was killed and he was left unconscious to look like he did it.

The cycle of violence continues as the bodies pile up. The Op sets the various gangs against each other, by unfixing a rigged boxing match causing Whisper Thaler to lose money, helping the police raid Pete the Finns liquor warehouse, while also collaborating with a rival crook Reno Starkey to eliminate Lew Yard. They begin to cancel each other out in brutal gunfights and clashes, and in the end, only The Op and Elihu remain with any real control of the city. But, even though The Op succeeded in

²⁸ Ibid. 102

doing what he had set out to do, eliminate the criminal factions, he left the one man in control who had started it all. Elihu Willsson. It is his town once more. The Op does not pretend that anything he did would lead to real change. He tells Elihu in their final meeting to call the governor, maybe bring in the National Guard to take over the town while a real police force is put together. He tells Elihu, “Then you’ll have your city back, all nice and clean and ready to go to the dogs again.”²⁹ The Op, after having done all of this, slips out of town to hide until events calm down. Later The Op cynically mentions that Mickey, a fellow operative, tells him that under Martial Law, Personville was a “Sweet smelling, thornless bed of roses.”³⁰

Though most interpretations of *Red Harvest* discuss political lawlessness, Sean McCann takes this perspective in a slightly different direction. He sees the microcosm of Personville as a cautionary tale of what would happen if the Ku Klux Klan’s ideals of reform were taken to extremes. The Op comes into Personville to clean up the crime and political corruption. McCann points out this is in line with the Klan’s efforts to have an organized crusade to reform and cleanse political institutions.³¹ However, as The Op proceeds to rout the city of crime and corruption, he becomes intoxicated with having this much control, and turns it into the personal crusade previously described. He never engages the general population, and as he deviates further from the goal of cleaning up the city, their needs are not even considered. McCann furthers his argument about Hammett’s repudiation of the Klan ideals, by indicating the various people causing the problems in Personville come from different races and cultures, American and foreign. The criminal world of *Red*

²⁹ Hammett. 134

³⁰ Ibid. 142

³¹ McCann, Sean. *Gumshoe America*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000. 78

Harvest is egalitarian. Anyone of any background can cause these kinds of problems, and therefore the KKK's solution of instituting segregation is unrealistic, and in fact leads to a downward spiral as is seen in Chester Himes *Cotton Comes to Harlem*. The dream sequence with The Op chasing a non-descript brown man is a metaphor for the outcome of such a segregated society. The dream just prior to this has The Op pursuing a black-veiled woman across an endless American landscape. The Op knows who she is, but cannot remember her name. McCann asserts that this pursuit of the femme-fatale across an unmappable landscape is in direct opposition to the Klan's vision of geologic and ideological separation. The woman that The Op pursues is everywhere and able to take care of herself (a strong female character that is common in many Hard-Boiled stories). This Femme Fatale image is opposite of that used in exotic fiction where a white female is put in danger by dark skinned natives only to be rescued by a brave white man.

He is in pursuit of a nameless woman, a paradigmatic example of the genre's femme fatale, and her displacement of exotic fiction's "stunning white girl" corresponds with the dissolution of the geographic and ideological legibility that white womanhood sanctified in both Klan discourse and in the Klannish fiction of foreign adventure.³²

By the mid to late 1920s Hammett's political inclinations had not fully formed, as this would happen in the late 1930s with him joining the communist party.^{33,34} Zumoff further cites related political readings that suggest *Red Harvest* is anywhere from anti-fascist, to proletariat, to "illuminating the violence, greed, and

³² Ibid. 82

³³ Zumoff. 132

³⁴ World Biography.

raw power that form the foundation of capitalism.”³⁵ These analyses are similar, but indicate that *Red Harvest* does not adhere to one political ideology. However it is classified, the theme of an unchecked quest for control leading to demagoguery is consistent. Hammett’s own political alignment was in a state of flux for much of his life. He believed in democracy, but he was upset by the idea of authorities telling him he had to believe in one specific form of government.³⁶ Even without knowing Hammett’s true intent, what can be said is that the detective he created, The Op, is placed to demonstrate the dangers of an uncontrolled force in society, whether that is capitalist, fascist or an applied ideology like the KKK. The Op personifies how this community, and especially how he as an outsider to that community, could be infected by these dangers.

³⁵ Zumoff

³⁶ World Biography.

Chapter 3 The Untarnished Detective in *The Big Sleep*

It was about eleven o'clock in the morning, mid October, with the sun not shining and a look of hard wet rain in the clearness of the foothills. I was wearing my powder-blue suit, with dark blue shirt, tie and display handkerchief, black brogues, black wool socks, with dark blue clocks on them. I was neat, clean, shaved and sober, and I didn't care who knew it. I was everything the well-dressed private detective ought to be. I was calling on four million dollars.³⁷

This is the reader's introduction to Raymond Chandler's private detective Philip Marlowe in *The Big Sleep*. Chandler had been writing short stories and novellas for a number of years using the Marlowe character before publishing *The Big Sleep* in 1939. Typical of his style throughout the book, this opening indicates the level and significance of visual detail, particularly color, written into the story. Philip Marlowe himself, dressed in blue, tells this story in first person. Chandler starts with an image of a blue man, on a rainy fall day about to step into a four million dollar mansion to begin an investigation. In contrast to *The Op*, Marlowe is involved with the community the investigation takes place in, which in this instance is Los Angeles, Marlowe's hometown. He knows the landscape, physically, socially and politically, and how to operate within it. What he does not know at the beginning are the people he is going to interact with during the story. As Marlowe's choice of blue attire suggests, he is a melancholy figure about to move through this literary world, slightly at odds with what he is going to begin. Important to the understanding of the book is that his knowledge of and placement in the community of Los Angeles leads to him completing his job without making any real changes.

³⁷ Chandler, Raymond. *The Big Sleep*. 1939. New York: Vintage Crime, 1992. 3

An analysis of this story cannot be complete without looking at Chandler's personal life and writing career. There are parallels between Marlowe's mood and demeanor to the way Chandler progressed through his life. Chandler was born in Chicago in 1888 and moved to London with his divorced mother in 1895.³⁸ His formal schooling was at Dulwich public school where he studied classic and modern subjects with a thought of going into law. He eventually took a job as a civil servant for the Royal Navy, though he quickly became bored and resigned after six months, setting up a life long pattern of starting jobs, losing interest and quitting. Chandler tried unsuccessfully to earn a living as a writer in both England and the U.S. With the outbreak of WWI, he joined the Canadian Army and later went on to enlist in the Royal Air Force.³⁹ After, Chandler returned to Los Angeles and landed a job as a bookkeeper with the Dabney Oil Syndicate. His fortunes took a dramatic change in 1932 when the Depression hit the oil business, and Chandler was let go, a move aided by his drinking and philandering.⁴⁰ Chandler returned to what he had always wanted to do, writing. He approached the craft methodically taking night classes on short story writing and studying successful writers of the period. His stories caught the attention of *Black Mask* editor Joseph Shaw, who began to publish them regularly. *The Big Sleep* was his first novel, which was a reworking of several of his previously published short stories. He wrote several more novels, with their success leading to Hollywood studios hiring him as screenwriter in the 1940s. His work in 1943 on the script for Billy Wilder's version of James M. Cain's *Double Indemnity* earned him an

³⁸ Hiney, Tom. Raymond Chandler: a biography. New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1997. 5-6

³⁹ Ibid. 41-43

⁴⁰ Ibid. 69

Academy Award nomination.⁴¹ This brought more screenwriting jobs, though he maintained a divided relationship with Hollywood. He at once complained about interference from the studios in the writing process, while also thinking filmmaking was capable of producing great art. During this time, *The Big Sleep* was turned into a now classic film-noir, directed by Howard Hawks, with the screenplay partially written by William Faulkner. Chandler was often critical of the films made from his fiction; however, he liked Humphrey Bogart's portrayal of Marlowe, noting his humor with an undercurrent of contempt. Warner Brothers apparently paid \$10,000 for the rights to the novel.⁴² He left film work bitter and exhausted in the late 1940s, and used Hollywood as a backdrop for his novel *The Little Sister*, a story that has a theme of false promises. Chandler died in 1959, and since that time, critics have both applauded his work, and labeled him a racist and misogynist. However, Chandler's influence is undeniable as seen in books by authors such as Robert B. Parker, Elmore Leonard and Walter Mosley, and films, most notably, *Chinatown*.⁴³

The plot in *The Big Sleep* starts with the aforementioned opening when Marlowe is called to General Sternwood's estate and meets with the General. General Sternwood hires Marlowe's services to find out who is trying to blackmail him. The storyline from here becomes very tangled and complicated and results in an inconclusive end. Chandler admitted to being a poor plotter and focused more on character, going so far as to say a good mystery did not require a last page. In a condensed form, Marlowe pursues the blackmailer, who turns out to have

⁴¹ Ibid. 145

⁴² "The Big Sleep (1946)." *American Film Institute Catalog*, 2 January 2010. http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.882003&xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&res_id=xri:afi&rft_id=xri:afi:film:24697.

⁴³ Hiney. 276-287

pornographic photos of General Sternwood's daughter, Carmen. In the process of getting the photos, Marlowe comes in contact with crime boss Eddie Mars several small time criminals, the General's uncontrollable daughters Carmen and Vivian, and several other Femme Fatales. This is a journey through a collection of corrupt and predatory people who live in and around Los Angeles. Marlowe also interacts with various policemen, not all of whom are honest, and a District Attorney who works within this system of corruption, community and business.

Unlike The Op in Hammett's *Red Harvest* though, Marlowe does not externalize his actions to change the community and bring people to order. Instead, he tries to work through what is there and keep to his ideals while doing his best to deflect all that is trying to change him. For Marlowe, this results in an internal struggle dictated by his need to perform the task he was hired for without being pulled astray by other forces. To paraphrase Horsley, *The Big Sleep* ties together larger controlling forces (the actions of crime boss Eddie Mars and the police) and personal wrongs (pornographer Geiger and the Sternwoods).⁴⁴

In a way, Marlowe begins a personal quest when he first visits the General and sees a stained glass panel of a Knight trying to save a nude lady tied to a tree.

...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.⁴⁵

Chandler often used aspects of classic literature, and for Marlowe in *The Big Sleep*, his quest becomes much like a twentieth century working-class version of the

⁴⁴ Horsley, Lee. *The Noir Thriller*. New York: Palgrave, 2001. 39

⁴⁵ *Sleep*. 3-4

Arthurian legend.⁴⁶ The qualities of this are clear in many portions of the story with how Marlowe behaves, the judgment he uses and the environment he works through. For Marlowe this becomes a challenge to the morals he feels he must uphold. It is this ideal of following the Knight's code of honesty, decency, defense of the weak and so forth that separates him from the behavior of The Op in *Red Harvest* or Mike Hammer in *I, The Jury*. The Op and Hammer each become carried away with a selfish vendetta, with the only goal to satisfy themselves. Marlowe also has a personal motivation, but by contrast, he wants to do a proper job for General Sternwood, while realizing he cannot change the criminal community that lives around him.

Marlowe comes into the Sternwood estate, where he meets with the General to go over why he was being hired. General Sternwood seems to only be kept away from death, the big sleep, by the oppressive heat and humidity of his greenhouse. Sternwood made his fortune in the oil business. The business, though, like Sternwood, is dying, and is later presented in the form of old rusty oil derricks and pumps that no longer function. The oil fields are drained of lifeblood, just as Sternwood is. Marlowe, seeing the man's desperation, could ask for an exorbitant fee, but stays with his standard \$25/day, plus money for gas. Later, Marlowe refuses this minimal pay because he feels he did not accomplish what he set out to do, which is part Knight's Code to forgo financial reward. There are additional dynamics of this meeting that play throughout the story. Marlowe sees a sick and dying man who has a tremendous amount of pride, and going by the Knight's Code, he has an obligation

⁴⁶ "Raymond Chandler." (2000): MagillOnLiterature Plus. EBSCO. Web. 18 Oct. 2009. <http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.ulib.iupui.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mjh&AN=014000080&site=ehost-live>

to serve the General. Marlowe also brings Sternwood a youthful life force that the General needs to stay alive. He senses that Sternwood has been hurt not only by the blackmailer (Sternwood never learns of the pornographic photos) but by the loss of a son-in-law Rusty Regan. Rusty was a boisterous ex-bootlegger married to Sternwood's daughter Vivian. Sternwood enjoyed his company, and drew strength from his energy, much like the mythical influence of an object like the Holy Grail. The Holy Grail is an enigma, both in history and in meaning, and is purported to have many mystical powers, one of which is to restore life. Sternwood needs the life giving force of youth to draw upon, but tells Marlowe not to look for Rusty. However, Marlowe, showing a level of personal relationship with Sternwood (following the Knights Code a commitment to a person he has agreed to serve) knows this is what the man really wants.

General Sternwood needs the life sustaining force of youth, which is in short supply. The Depression era of *The Big Sleep* is one of limited resources where money, oil, blood and youth are all scarce and valuable resources. As McCann points out, in the world that Marlowe works "wealth stems less from production than from predation."⁴⁷ The General is described as lacking blood as his oil wells are lacking oil, and needs the youthful presence of Regan and Marlowe to survive. Eddie Mars needs money for his organization, and when Vivian Sternwood wins big at his illicit casino, he conspires to have her robbed as she walks out. Carmen has youth and beauty, which Geiger, the man taking pornographic photos of her, captures for his personal profit. These various predatory actions present numerous challenges to Marlowe as he progresses through the story.

⁴⁷ McCann. 168

As well as being predators in their actions, many of the characters appear as evil predatory creatures from classic tales. The cause of the blackmailing of General Sternwood is his daughter Carmen. Carmen is introduced as an attractive, small blonde woman, who uses sex as a deadly bargaining tool. Mentally, she is completely unstable and prone to violence. Carmen behaves childishly in many cases, often seen by her giggling and thumb sucking, and having little sense of awareness, as evidenced in the uses of her pornographic photos. Geiger is exploiting her, yet she has no concept of contributing to a problem. A repeating description of her is ghoulish and parasitic, and she is often described as having “little sharp predatory teeth”⁴⁸ and hissing when provoked.⁴⁹ As a predator and foil to Marlowe, she is a particular problem in that she is capable of violence and is the center of the disarray in the story. Yet, because of his duty to her father (in the Knight’s parlance, his Lord), Marlowe has to protect her in a way to avoid hurting the man’s pride. Marlowe does not want to tell General Sternwood that Carmen is the one who killed Rusty and is the source of the pornography and therefore blackmailing. A direct test of his morals and growing personal relationship with the General comes when she sneaks into Marlowe’s apartment, takes off her clothes and climbs into his bed, offering him sex as a diversion from what he is doing. He refuses, knowing she will drain him of life, and she begins hissing and swearing.⁵⁰ Marlowe refuses with an explanation that goes directly back to his commitment to General Sternwood.

⁴⁸ *Sleep*. 4

⁴⁹ *Ibid*. 157

⁵⁰ McCann. 168

It's a question of professional pride. You know — professional pride. I'm working for your father. He's a sick man, very frail, very helpless. He sort of trusts me not to pull any stunts.⁵¹

In the apartment is a chessboard, and Marlowe notices that one of the Knights had been moved to a wrong position. He puts it back, thinking, "It wasn't a game for Knights"⁵² Towards the end of the book, he lets Carmen talk him into teaching her to shoot a gun down by the decrepit oil field. He theorized that Carmen had approached Rusty the same way, and offered to have sex with him, to which Rusty refused. She responded by shooting him down at the same field. Marlowe goes down there with her, and with the gun filled with blanks, lets her think she is firing into him. Carmen then collapses into an epileptic fit.

There are a number of other characters who work against Marlowe. Of these, there are two, Carmen's sister Vivian and crime boss Eddie Mars, who play a prominent role in trying to divert Marlowe from what he is trying to do. When Carmen kills Rusty, Vivian turns to Mars for help in concealing the murder and protecting her father. Once this is done, Mars has leverage over Vivian and, in keeping with his predatory nature, plans to begin using it to extort money from her. Vivian has an appearance much like her sister with the mannerisms and desires of a vampire. When betting at a roulette wheel at Eddie Mars' gambling palace, she proclaims she likes to bet on red, the color of blood.⁵³ Vivian offers Marlowe sex and money, advances he spurns, and she responds by tearing a handkerchief apart with her teeth.⁵⁴ Of these two people, Mars presents the biggest challenge to Marlowe's

⁵¹ *Sleep*. 156

⁵² *Ibid.* 156

⁵³ *Ibid.* 139

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 152

sensibilities and loyalty to General Sternwood. In Roman mythology, Mars is the god of war. Like a god of war, he runs an organization that has the capacity to create violence. He operates with the tacit support of the police, and has control over Vivian and Carmen. In *The Big Sleep* though, Eddie Mars' soft appearance is a contradiction to this image. Mars first comes onto the scene when Marlowe is going through the pornographer's house, looking for the photos of Carmen. Eddie Mars comes in the door, nervously holding a gun, and keeping with Chandler's use of color, is a study in dapper gray. He was wearing a gray shirt, gray hat, and suit of "soft, beautifully cut flannel."⁵⁵ His hair and eyebrows were even a soft gray. Gray can be elegant, but very much in between other colors, not leaning towards any kind of definition. Mars, we soon learn is a crime boss who is not partial to direct violence, but instead has others do the ugly tasks for him. He later uses a man, Lash Canino, for his dirty work (a man who prefers to wear brown).

Towards the end of the story, Marlowe comes back to the Sternwood mansion, and sees the stained glass panel that was mentioned in the beginning. One of the recurrent themes in Hard-Boiled detective fiction is that despite the efforts of the detective, the world at large will continue without change. He looks at the panel thinking, "...and the knight in the stained glass window still wasn't getting anywhere untying the naked damsel from the tree."⁵⁶ Marlowe had clung to his sensibilities and judgment, succeeded in what he set out to do in stopping the blackmailers, found what happened to Rusty Regan, and managed to keep General Sternwood's pride intact. However, in the process, Marlowe helps Carmen avoid a murder conviction

⁵⁵ Ibid. 68

⁵⁶ Ibid. 209

by having her sent to an institution, sees his assistants killed, and leaves Eddie Mars still in control of his syndicate. Marlowe has to lie to the General about all that happened, creating a conflict with his morality between telling the truth and protecting the old man's pride. He stays with his judgment based on his relationship with the General, yet there is a profound sense of loss, since his actions are not going to make any real change. The corrupt atmosphere of inter-war Los Angeles, his community, continues with barely a notice. This futility is summed up in what a police captain in the Missing Persons Bureau tells Marlowe towards the end of the book.

I'd like to see the flashy well-dressed muggs like Eddie Mars spoiling their manicures at Folsom, alongside of the poor slum-bred hard guys that got knocked over on their first caper and never had a break. That's what I'd like. You and me both lived too long to think I'm likely to see it happen.⁵⁷

The Captain and Marlowe each know this is unfair, but neither can do a thing about it. Marlowe is part of a community that has declined to the point where fairness is not part of the civic equation, where men like Eddie Mars can operate unchecked with complete knowledge of the authorities. Through Marlowe's work in this community, we see that the only way to operate is to either be one of the predators, or be quick and tough enough to work around them. This exemplifies the desperate measures people in these types of societies resort to when, similar to Personville, the wrong factions step into power, gather all the resources they can and refuse to leave. Looking at the characters Marlowe interacts with, each is self-involved to the point where they have scant concern with their effects on others, with

⁵⁷ Ibid. 204

him caught in the middle, holding onto a code of ethics while trying to minimize the damage around him.

In Chandler's *The Simple Art of Murder*, he describes the detective as "neither tarnished nor afraid."⁵⁸ At the very end, Marlowe is untarnished in character, but racked with misery. The story concludes with him ruminating about the big sleep that had already come to Rusty Regan and would soon come to General Sternwood. He thinks, "You just slept the big sleep, not caring about the nastiness of how you died or where you fell. Me, I was part of the nastiness now."⁵⁹ The hopelessness is thorough. Marlowe's is a morose outlook, in a way almost hoping for death after his personal pursuit ended with mixed results. The general climate of the United States in the late 1930's was desperate, as the Depression had been around for almost ten years at this point, and people were worn out and cynical. *The Big Sleep* brought this to the fore by showing that the only people who succeeded during those times were predators, feeding off the vices of others.

These first two books, *Red Harvest* and *The Big Sleep*, were from the same basic era between WWI and WWII. These events were changing the world, and America's evolving governmental and societal structures are integral to these novels. Both authors came out of the *Black Mask* magazine experience, having used this as a way to introduce themselves to a writing career and style. *Black Mask* and magazines like it at the time helped define the Hard-Boiled detective style as a cynical gun-toting investigator. By the 1950's, these magazines began to lose circulation; as digest-size genre magazines rose to prominence a different kind of story and detective emerged

⁵⁸ Chandler, *Murder*. 18

⁵⁹ *Sleep*. 230

in popularity with Ross MacDonal and his detective Lew Archer. In terms of influence and reputation, Ross MacDonal is often compared to Hammett and Chandler, but his prominent stories have less of a communal comment and more of a personal exploration.

Chapter 4 An Introspective Investigator in *The Galton Case*

The law offices of Wellesley and Sable were over a savings bank on the main street of Santa Teresa. Their private elevator lifted you from a bare little lobby into an atmosphere of elegant simplicity. It created the impression that after years of struggle you were rising effortlessly to your natural level, one of the chosen.⁶⁰

Comparisons are inevitable. Reading the above opening paragraph there are similarities to the opening of *The Big Sleep*. In the Hard-Boiled detective genre, critics often put together the names of Hammett, Chandler and MacDonald, forming an unofficial triumvirate by which all others are compared. However, reading further in the opening pages, it becomes clear that MacDonald offers a third variation on the way the detective accepts the plot environment. The Op comes into a poisoned atmosphere with a tough vernacular, prepared to take on the worst elements of Personville. Philip Marlowe enters a mansion at odds with the surroundings, but not looking to cause a disruption. Lew Archer is calling on an acquaintance, Gordon Sable, and would seem to accept being temporarily pulled up to his level. This distinction marks the difference between MacDonald and most of his predecessors, and is a consistent part of his books starting with his novel *The Doomsters* and figuring prominently in his next work, *The Galton Case*. Relevant to this thesis, the reserved personal nature of Archer dictates how he interacts with people in the story and shapes his judgment and morality.

The plot of *The Galton Case* starts with the search for a missing family member. Sable hires Archer on behalf of his client, Mrs. Galton, to locate a son who

⁶⁰ MacDonald, Ross. *The Galton Case*. 1959. New York: Vintage Books, 1996. 3

had run away twenty years earlier. Mrs. Galton is a rich, bossy widow who is in poor health and wants to find her long lost son to try to patch up old differences before she dies. In the process of looking for the son, Anthony Galton, Archer learns he was murdered, but discovers he had a son, John Galton, who has reappeared in recent months.⁶¹ Through the course of the book, Archer learns that John does not know his real name or that he is related to Mrs. Galton. He was tricked into impersonating himself in an elaborate confidence game put together by Sable and a small-time criminal, Pete Culligan, to extract money from Mrs. Galton by having her write John into her will.

Critical to the theme of Archer resolving familial strife in this book is MacDonald's personal story. Ross MacDonald's real name was Kenneth Millar. He was born in 1915 in Los Gatos, California and moved with his family to Canada, where his father abandoned them when he was three. Throughout his adolescence, he moved around Canada living with various relatives. MacDonald would eventually serve in WWII, and earn his PhD in English from the University of Michigan in 1951. MacDonald had seen limited success with Lew Archer stories early in his career. Archer and the books MacDonald put him in were built consciously on the Hammett/Chandler wisecracking Hard-Boiled detective persona. However, in the mid-1950s, MacDonald underwent psychotherapy to deal with past and then-present family problems. Coming out of therapy, MacDonald wrote *The Galton Case*, in which he created an autobiographical figure in John Galton. After his therapy, there was a change in subject matter and in the character of Lew Archer as MacDonald

⁶¹ Throughout the story, John Galton goes by other various names; John Brown, John Lindsay, Theodore Fredericks. For sake of clarity, he will only be referred to as John Galton, unless otherwise necessary.

began to concentrate more on broken families and past traumas, while breaking the detective away from the tough gun-toting detective mold.⁶² McCann describes MacDonald's stories as being written for the "G.I. Bill intellectual."⁶³

In *The Galton Case*, MacDonald combined the theme of broken families hiding long buried secrets with one of people living lies. Throughout the book as Archer delves into family conflicts, they begin to resolve as the various people reveal their true selves. The book starts with Archer thinking he had risen to a higher level in life by calling on a successful lawyer. However, a few paragraphs later when the secretary "condescends to notice" him, he realizes has not really risen at all.⁶⁴ Archer himself often lies to people to get information from them, pretending to be someone he is not. He frequently follows the lies with a small confession, thereby getting cooperation from the person he was lying to. In a way, looking at the placement of this book in MacDonald's life, MacDonald had been trying to write like someone else, only to learn he could not thrive in doing so. His career success after the publication of *The Galton Case* would prove this out. He acknowledged that he was trying to emulate Hammett and Chandler with the books he had been writing, to the point where he named his detective Lew Archer, after Sam Spade's companion Miles Archer.⁶⁵

As stated, most of the relationships in the story commingle this self-deception with the larger theme of broken families. Archer's relationship with people and

⁶² "Ross MacDonald." *Contemporary Authors Online*, Gale, 2009. Reproduced in Biography Resource Center. Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale, 2009.

<http://galenet.galegroup.com.proxy.ulib.iupui.edu/servlet/BioRC>

⁶³ McCann. 204

⁶⁴ *Galton*. 3

⁶⁵ Jones, Tobias, "A passion for mercy." *The Guardian* 1 August 2009. 28 October 2009
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/aug/01/ross-macdonald-crime-novels>

families has a direct influence on his thought processes and judgment throughout the book. When Archer is watching a person's actions or speaking with them, MacDonald will include Archer's thoughts on their behavior. This is in contrast to how Chandler's Marlowe approached the Sternwood family members, or how *The Op* worked with people. The detectives in both *Red Harvest* and *The Big Sleep* primarily describe other's actions with little analysis of reason. Archer takes this a step further by searching for reason in what they did or said. This type of Hard-Boiled detective, one who tries to analyze the actions of other's has had a profound influence on subsequent authors of detective fiction such as Robert B. Parker and Sue Grafton.⁶⁶ Of the authors discussed in this thesis, Walter Mosley's detective Easy Rawlins is closest to this approach, as seen in how he interacts with the characters in his stories.

Three families or relationships form the central emphasis of the book. The first is the Galton family itself, starting with Mrs. Galton. Twenty years before, the family had driven Anthony Galton away by forcing him to be someone he was not and sending him to college to be an engineer. He never finished his degree, and instead tried to be a poet.⁶⁷ Archer, however, sees more in this family than what Mrs. Galton lets on, using empathy and insight to describe Mrs. Galton as she really is. Upon his first meeting with her and learning that she wants him to find her son, Archer describes his impression of her by thinking, "Still, there was something unreal about it. I suspected that she'd been playing tricks with her emotions for a long time, until none of them was quite valid."⁶⁸ As they get further into the meeting, Mrs. Galton sums up her relationship with Anthony by saying, "I brought him up to be

⁶⁶ Horsley. *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction*. 94

⁶⁷ *Galton*. 28

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 19-20

pure in thought and desire, but somehow — somehow he became fascinated with the pitch that defileth. And the pitch defiled him.”⁶⁹ A few lines later, she says she knows Anthony will be good to her despite what she said about him. Archer immediately sees her for what she really is and thinks “She spoke like a little girl betrayed by time and loss, by fading hair and wrinkles and the fear of death:”⁷⁰ Mrs. Galton had managed to bolster and surround herself with people who bowed to her every need trying to placate her irascible emotions. As Archer meets them, he realizes these people not only aid Mrs. Galton in her own self-deception, but live lives of self-deception as well. Cassie, a distant niece of Mrs. Galton’s, at first appears to be in her early twenties and is always on call to serve her. Upon meeting her up close, Archer sees she is around forty years old, but assumes the immature mannerisms of a much younger person. When Archer is with Mrs. Galton, Sable gets up and squeezes her hand, making Archer suspicious of his intent, knowing this kind of appeasement is not compassion, but purely part of Sable’s job.⁷¹ Unlike those around her though, Archer uses his insight to see Mrs. Galton differently. Whereas most of these other people surrounding her are living off her riches and putting up with her irritability, Archer sees through the outbursts and instead perceives a lonely old woman making a desperate attempt to find her son who can bring her one last moment of happiness and redemption. As the events unfold, Archer reveals that Mrs. Galton’s willfulness drove her son away, leading to her discontent, his murder and most of the conflict yet to happen in the story.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 23

⁷⁰ Ibid. 23

⁷¹ Ibid. 23

Mrs. Galton had called Gordon Sable to help find Anthony. Sable in turn hired Archer, who had done a job for him four years earlier. Though Sable was not the person to think of the scheme of stealing Mrs. Galton's money, he was the one who worked out the details. Sable gives the impression of being a successful, handsome lawyer who had recently married a beautiful ex-model, Alice. He has a tan face and wavy white hair that support the "illusion of youth" and wore clothes that emphasized his "tennis-player's waist."⁷² As noted above, Archer is aware he is not on the same social level as a man like Sable, and there is a constant suspicion of Sable's actions. What brings Sable into the crime is his broken relationship with his wife. Throughout most of the story, Sable keeps his wife out of view, but there are persistent comments by others as to her behavior. Sable has her committed to a mental hospital in a further attempt to hide and silence her. Towards the end of the story, Archer begins to put together that the relationship was a hoax, and that Alice had earlier run away to divorce Sable. This led Sable's wife to running up gambling debts with a violent mob boss, and Pete Culligan and Sable developing the plan to bring John Galton back to con Mrs. Galton. Sable later admits to killing his accomplice Culligan in a moment of anger earlier in the story, and manages to convince his mentally ill wife that she had done it. When the plot unravels and Archer confronts Sable, Sable's façade crumbles away and any impression of youthful vigor is gone. After a short physical altercation between Archer and Sable, Archer describes Sable as having "a strange resemblance to an old woman peering out through the fringes of a matted white wig."⁷³ Yet, towards the end, Archer has a

⁷² Ibid. 5

⁷³ Ibid. 217

humane reaction that goes back to Archer's judgment of what had happened to between Sable and his wife.

I felt a twinge of sympathy for Sable. He hadn't been able to carry her weight. In the stretching gap between his weakness and her need, Culligan had driven a wedge, and the whole structure had fallen.⁷⁴

Archer knows Sable will have to pay for his crimes, but there is no feeling of satisfaction from Archer in seeing Sable in this position. Archer draws upon his opinion of the people surrounding Sable, and, rather than expressing approval of seeing justice served, thinks Sable will have a difficult time getting rid of the police that were about to enter his home.⁷⁵ Again, this expression of sympathy illuminates a significant difference between Archer and most other detectives of this thesis. Archer had learned through his relationship with Sable that Sable was victimized by his need to maintain his vanity and image, which in the end resulted in a broken man as much as a criminal.

The connection between Sable and John Galton began when Culligan told Sable that John had just finished performing in a college production of *Hobson's Choice*.⁷⁶ Sable went out to introduce himself to John Galton as a Hollywood movie producer. John's trip back into the Galton family is part of a larger and carefully constructed narrative. When Anthony Galton ran away from the family, he married a woman who had come from a coarse background. Anthony was murdered by an acquaintance of Pete Culligan's, a man named Fred "Shoulders" Nelson, in order to steal jewelry and money that Anthony had. Under a threat of killing John, Anthony's

⁷⁴ Ibid. 225

⁷⁵ Ibid. 228

⁷⁶ The expression *Hobson's Choice* means that only one real option is offered and the only choices are to accept it or not.

wife agreed to marry Nelson, and eventually move out of the country to Ontario, Canada. This all happened early enough in John Galton's life that he did not know his true identity, and Culligan came up with a plan to convince John to unknowingly impersonate himself and return to the family and get written into Mrs. Galton's will. Culligan forces Sable into the deal as previously described. Integral to the plot is the retracing of John's life, which reveals aspects of MacDonald's life in the process.

Archer tracks John Galton's early years of poverty in a rural seaside community near San Francisco to his hardscrabble life in the fictional town of Pitt, Ontario to his attendance at the University of Michigan, and eventually back to California. This is essentially MacDonald's life. Like John Galton, Ross MacDonald used several names throughout his life. He published under, Kenneth Millar, John MacDonald, John Ross MacDonald and finally Ross MacDonald.^{77,78} Archer discovers John's life, essentially the same path as MacDonald's, and in the process applies his morality and rules on how to treat him. Throughout most of the book, Archer is not sure if John is who he says he is. Knowing the young man is a skilled actor leads him to believe he is able to project the emotions he needs for pretending to be Mrs. Galton's grandson. Yet, he had a strong resemblance to pictures of Anthony Galton. Mrs. Galton accepts him into her home and starts preparing to include him in her will. Archer goes to visit John Galton's mother (now using the last name of Fredericks) in Pitt, Ontario, and checks into her boarding house. It is here that Archer's humane nature settles on the image of what kind of life John Galton, and by

⁷⁷ "Ross Macdonald." *The Scribner Encyclopedia of American Lives, Volume 1: 1981-1985*. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1998. Reproduced in *Biography Resource Center*. Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale, 2009. <http://galenet.galegroup.com.proxy.ulib.iupui.edu/servlet/BioRC>

⁷⁸ He dropped the name John from his pseudonym to avoid confusion with John D. MacDonald, author of the Travis Magee detective series.

extension MacDonald, led. Being shown his room by Mr. Fredericks (formerly Fred Nelson), Archer is repulsed by the “shifting gleam and gloom on the room’s contents.”

These included a bureau, a washstand with pitcher and bowl, and a bed that had taken the impress of many bodies. The furnishings reminded me of the room John Brown had had in Luna Bay.

John Brown? John Nobody.⁷⁹

At this point, Archer still is not convinced of who John Galton is. Archer continues putting the events together, eventually figuring out how Sable and Culligan worked to use John. In an atypical fashion to a Hard-Boiled detective story, the ending has Archer bringing a family (John, his fiancée and his mother) together by managing to get the truth out of those involved. Archer knows John went back to Pitt to see his mother and possibly kill Mr. Fredericks, but Archer still thinks he is an imposter. His intent for following John is to prevent further crimes, arrest him and bring him back to justice. Instead, they find Mr. Fredericks had hung himself and Mrs. Fredericks now free to tell how she gave up her life years before to protect John. With the truth finally told, and the pretend existences over, the mother and son awkwardly come back together. Rather than hate, John feels sorry for his mother, and wishes to bring her back into his life. There is no attempt in the book by Archer to have John stand for any crimes he had committed.

In the hands of a lesser writer, this probably could not have been turned into a plausible story. MacDonald’s education and knowledge of the arguments over the importance of plot are a major difference between himself and Hammett and Chandler. The plots of *The Big Sleep* and *Red Harvest* are very complicated and run

⁷⁹ Galton. 194

in many different directions; some of the events are left completely unexplained. For MacDonald and *The Galton Case*, plot was of primary significance, and while the plot of *Galton* is complicated, all the pieces fit together. When MacDonald was getting his PhD in the early 1950s there was disagreement on the role of plot in fiction. According to Michael Sharp, there were two prominent schools of thought on critical methodology. The Chicago School followed Aristotle's *Poetics* on the importance of plot in the construct of tragedy, while New Criticism focused exclusively on the impact of the language.⁸⁰ Sharp studied MacDonald's college notebooks and papers, and claims that MacDonald followed these arguments and changed his philosophy from New Criticism to that of the Aristotelian theories between the time he entered graduate school to when he received his Ph.D. MacDonald is able to keep John Galton's story intact and within the bounds of possibility without resorting to hyperbole by skillfully peeling away various layers of lies and truth of all the characters of the story. Archer moves the plot along as he traces Galton's life and personal tragedy and pieces together John Galton's life from pre-birth to present day. This ability to systematically unravel the events yet make them seem natural to Archer's character creates sympathy with the reader, sustains the relationship of Archer with other characters, and outlines MacDonald's life. Added to this is the fact that Archer is the protagonist in this book, yet through Archer, the reader learns a tremendous amount about the primary secondary character John Galton. This relationship is unique in the books studied in this thesis, and would

⁸⁰ Sharp, Michael D. "Plotting Chandler's Demise: Ross Macdonald and the Neo-Aristotelian detective novel.(Critical Essay)." *Studies in the Novel* 35.3 (2003): 405(23). Expanded Academic ASAP. Web. 7 Jan. 2010

indicate that MacDonald wanted to focus almost as much attention on John's struggles, and by extension his own, as on Archer's actions.

The Galton Case has a more of a conclusive ending than most of the other books discussed in this thesis, and marks a departure in this genre. While not a fairy tale ending, Archer worked towards finding out who all these people are, and once they admit to everything, the healing begins. This is an emotional healing, much as MacDonald had gone through during this time of his life. MacDonald went on to write many more books using Archer as the detective, and during his lifetime was one of the most widely read mystery writers. This type of story, one dealing with familial strife, and Archer's analysis of people's actions is a constant in subsequent MacDonald books, and as mentioned influenced many authors. He moved the Hard-Boiled genre away from stories primarily of action to more ones of introspective human imperfection.

The relationship of Archer with a person or community places the story third in this thesis because Archer starts largely unacquainted with most of the characters, but strives to learn what he needs to about their personal composition. He does not go any further than professional decorum allows when working for a client, so a distance is maintained. *Cotton Comes to Harlem* by Chester Himes, to be discussed next, takes the relationship a step further. Archer kept knowledgeable involvement, but professional distance from those he worked with. The detectives in *Cotton*, Coffin Ed Johnson and Grave Digger Jones, know they have to use their intimate knowledge of Harlem to perform their job, and then have to live in the community after they disrupt major parts of it.

Chapter 5 Allegiance to a Captive Community in *Cotton Comes to Harlem*

The voice from the sound truck said:

“Each family, no matter how big it is, will be asked to put up one thousand dollars. You will get your transportation free, five acres of fertile land in Africa, a mule and a plow and all the seed you need, free. Cows, pigs and chickens cost extra, but at the minimum. No Profit on this deal.”

A sea of dark faces wavered before the speaker’s table, rapturous and intent.⁸¹

Cotton Comes to Harlem starts with a promise of returning to a life that is fair and decent. This pledge is designed to raise the hopes of downtrodden people by playing upon the poverty they live everyday and the prejudice that exists all around them. The guarantee of rapturous deliverance is an orchestrated scam by a bogus preacher in the story by the name of Deke O’Malley. He is an ex-con who is offering both spiritual salvation and a path to a better life, in trade for money these people can barely afford to lose. In all, he collects \$87,000 from this group of people, but it all explodes into a shower of violence within minutes, with the appearance of a group of white men in a meat delivery truck and the arrival of a bale of cotton. Pandemonium ensues as Chester Himes’ hard-boiled detectives Coffin Ed Johnson and Grave Digger Jones are brought in to solve the crime by whatever tactics they deem necessary. The victims of the swindle live near the same neighborhoods as Coffin Ed and Grave Digger, and the two detectives investigate not only because of their profession, but because these are their people.

Chester Himes came to the detective fiction genre from a different angle than the other authors featured in this thesis, and this distinction figures importantly in the

⁸¹ Himes, Chester. *Cotton Comes to Harlem*. 1965. New York: Vintage Crime, 1988. 5

theme of the book. While Dashiell Hammett was jailed for contempt during the McCarthy hearings, Himes is the only one to have been convicted of a violent crime. He served seven and a half years, from 1928 to 1936, in the Ohio State Penitentiary for armed robbery. Throughout his Harlem Cycle series featuring Coffin Ed and Grave Digger, Himes had a point of view that was unique. His books dealt with the tensions both between races and within, capturing problems he knew first hand and the strange conflicts they can cause. Growing up, he lived in a segregated society, yet one where his mother did not want him attending the poorly funded segregated Mississippi schools. In addition to this, there was constant tension between his light-skinned mother and his dark-skinned father, leading to their divorce in 1928. Himes led a wild life as a young adult, gambling and selling illegal whiskey until he was caught and convicted of armed robbery. Prison was difficult, but it was here that he began to write and managed to get a few stories published. After release, he worked odd jobs and continued to write while moving around the country, eventually working with the Works Project Administration (WPA) through the Ohio Writers Project. The fiction he wrote during this period was semi-autobiographical and dealt with worker related racial strife, in a genre often referred to as protest fiction. One of his books during this period was *If He Hollers Let Him Go*. This story is about a man, Bob Jones, who, like Himes, had moved from Ohio to Los Angeles to work in the shipyards during WWII. Jones becomes a crew leader over a group of black workers, but endures racism from white workers, is falsely accused of raping a white woman, and is constantly at odds as to how to fight back at oppression. This and other Himes books had limited success in the United States, and he eventually moved to France at

the advice of black American expatriates. His first success with the detective fiction genre came at the urging of his French publisher, Marcel Duhamel, as a way to generate quick sales. Duhamel felt that Himes was skilled enough at writing about conflict and crime that he would adapt well to Hard-Boiled detective fiction. His Harlem Cycle books sold well in France, but took years to develop an interest in the United States.⁸² They are now a mainstay and are much studied in the Hard-Boiled detective genre.

Cotton Comes to Harlem starts with the aforementioned Back-to-Africa rally. The bale of cotton, now with the \$87,000 inside, is mistakenly dumped into the street during the chase between those in the meat truck and Deke O'Malley's men. Coffin Ed and Grave Digger come in and begin investigating the case to try to recover the money for the citizens of Harlem and arrest O'Malley. Entering into the mix is a southern white man, Colonel Calhoun, who starts his own Back-to-the-South movement, promising high paying jobs to those who returned to the south to pick cotton. The story extends into a series of multiple pursuits by people trying to find the bale of cotton to get the money, while Coffin Ed and Grave Digger also look for O'Malley. Numerous beatings and murders follow. Coffin Ed and Grave Digger eventually find Deke O'Malley and his girlfriend Iris being held hostage in O'Malley's church by two syndicate members wanting payment from O'Malley. Coffin Ed and Grave Digger settle the standoff by shooting the syndicate members with tracer bullets setting them and part of the church on fire. The bale turns up at the Cotton Club as part of an erotic dancers act, after which Colonel Calhoun buys the

⁸² "Chester Bomar Himes." *The Scribner Encyclopedia of American Lives*, Volume 1: 1981-1985. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1998. Reproduced in Biography Resource Center. Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale, 2009. <http://galenet.galegroup.com.proxy.ulib.iupui.edu/servlet/BioRC>

bale back from the dancer, Billie, only to find the money missing. Coffin Ed and Grave Digger agree to let Calhoun escape a murder charge if he paid them \$87,000, which they then give to the people taken by O'Malley. On their reports, they lie about Calhoun getting away. Uncle Bud, a junkman who found the bale in the street, ends up with the money originally put there and moves to Africa where he lives like a king.

Reading this synopsis of the story demonstrates an isolated community that is lawless and largely unregulated, which is what Himes set out to portray. For Himes, detective fiction was an expression of American Violence, as seen in his unique presentation of the detectives and the city.⁸³ His fictitious look at Harlem has drawn ire from various critics claiming that Himes presented the black community as “a world typically peopled by violent brutal black males, freakish black hermaphrodites, and garish black prostitutes amongst other black caricatures.”⁸⁴ However, Himes never intended for his version of Harlem to be an exact copy of the real community.⁸⁵ There were certain aspects related to injustice that he wanted to emphasize that required him to create an exaggerated form of the city and its citizens. This is no different from the mobsters running Chandler's Los Angeles, or the threat of gun battles on every corner in Spillane's New York. Himes creates a Harlem as isolated from a larger city and an even larger country, which contributes to the unrest and violent reaction of victims of prejudice. Thieves, murderers, swindlers and the like, rule this fictional Harlem. Himes claimed that discrimination was an absurdity that

⁸³ McCann. 288

⁸⁴ Klein, Kathleen Gregory, ed. Diversity and Detective Fiction. Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999. 211

⁸⁵ Cochran, David. American Noir, Underground Writers and Filmmakers in the Postwar Era. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000. 109

caused more absurdity.⁸⁶ As seen in the above plot outline, the violence was a result of this absurdity of discrimination, meaning that if a group of people are isolated and held in poverty these problems are going to erupt. We see Himes' use of absurdity in numerous, often coarse and comical ways, such as when the junkman, Uncle Bud, shares a found bottle of wine with a friend, only to learn it is actually urine, but then ends up being the only one to make it back to Africa.⁸⁷ It is also brutal absurdity as in the appearance of a bale of cotton on a Harlem street, containing \$87,000, which travels around and is the catalyst of an incredible amount of destruction.

Himes' Harlem is colorful and vibrant, but can also quickly turn into chaotic mayhem. His detectives are much like the version of Harlem he created. Within the story, the police establishment can only work in Harlem by using locals. Coffin Ed and Grave Digger are black men who work in Harlem, and though they get along with and respect their white superior, Lieutenant Anderson, it is clear they do not understand each other's motives and tactics. Lt. Anderson is wise and respectful enough to rely on their local knowledge of how to accomplish things in Harlem, since he and officers who are not from there are baffled by the seemingly senseless crimes that occur on a regular basis.⁸⁸ Coffin Ed and Grave Digger even look like the city they work in. Coffin Ed's face is a patchwork of varying colored skin graphs, the result of acid burns he received from a previous incident. The names the writers select for their detectives are always significant, either to the author, or to the content of the story. The names Coffin Ed and Grave Digger foretell the death and destruction that they bring as they cut a path through the story. A gravedigger and a

⁸⁶ Ibid. 95

⁸⁷ *Cotton*. 21

⁸⁸ Ibid. 14

man who is associated with coffins are workingmen who are close to the earth and the boundary between life and death. Both Coffin Ed and Grave Digger dress in workman's cloths, described as looking like hog farmers in the city. They are different from the other detectives discussed not only in appearance but also in personality and motivation. They always work as a team, as police officers do. One is a sounding board for the other, knowing they can rely on each other to the point where there is little verbal communication between them when approaching a situation. Their personalities are very similar, though Coffin Ed in *Cotton* is more prone to sudden violence, due to residual anger from having his face scarred. However, one tends to temper the other, if he begins to get overzealous, almost behaving as two sides of a consciousness. This is much like Himes' Harlem, where someone is always ready to breakout in a bizarre display of brutality with only barest restraint keeping control. Most relevant to the thesis, they really are trying to make an impact on the lives around them for altruistic reasons, and this is the basis of their relationship with the community. This sets them apart from most other privately hired literary detectives. The Op is the only other one discussed who tried to change a community by ridding Personville of its criminal element, but he was bent on revenge rather than a deep-seated need to improve conditions. Coffin Ed and Grave Digger want to bring a measure of salvation to the friends and neighbors in Harlem, though in keeping with Himes' thought of the intractability of prejudice, their efforts have scant lasting effect.

Coffin Ed and Grave Digger can turn to violence very quickly, such as when Coffin Ed becomes angry with Iris and begins choking her after she tried to warn

O'Malley they were looking for him.⁸⁹ This kind of reaction puts them at odds with the police hierarchy in how they work their cases, but based on their personal understanding of the community, they know this is how they have to perform. Lt. Anderson says the police commissioner wants them not to use brute force in their investigations. They try to explain how the community is so hopelessly lost that their methods are the only ones that will work.

Make criminals pay for it – you don't want to do that; pay the people enough to live decently – you ain't going to do that; so all that's left is let them eat one another up.⁹⁰

This statement is another way for Himes to show the downward spiral of discrimination. Short of true substantial change, this kind of social degradation would only compound itself until all the unrest just bred further more destructive unrest. Coffin Ed and Grave Digger know that half measures were not going to allow them to accomplish their objective of restoring some hope to the people Deke O'Malley swindled. They also have a devotion to bringing redemption to those who are so often taken by slick conmen promising a deliverance that cannot be delivered. For Coffin Ed and Grave Digger, this devotion goes beyond what they need to do as police officers, and they are willing to break laws and heads in their redemptive pursuit. When they need to sneak Iris out of a holding cell, they ask the police captain to help. The Captain tells them if they are caught he will not only deny any knowledge, but that they had to deal with the consequences on their own. Grave Digger angrily replies, "I wouldn't do this for nobody but my own black people."⁹¹ Towards the end, they strike their final deal with Calhoun after Calhoun learns the

⁸⁹ Ibid. 29

⁹⁰ Ibid. 14

⁹¹ Ibid. 122

money is not in the bale. Coffin Ed and Grave Digger are willing to let him escape despite the fact he was wanted for murder and they had the evidence to convict him.

They agree to let him go if he paid them \$87,000. Calhoun is astonished.

“Incredible! You’re going to give them back their money?”

“That’s right, the families.”

“Incredible! Is it because they are nigras and you’re nigras too?”

“That’s right.”⁹²

They give this money to the people who lost it to O’Malley, but with a feeling of despondency. The citizens of Harlem are so grateful to Coffin Ed and Grave Digger that they throw a big barbeque in their honor, but the affair is bittersweet for the two of them, because they know the impossible condition of the people they helped. This ending takes them out of the bounds of the story and more to what Himes wanted to express about the desperate measures people subjected to discrimination are willing to take. The beginning of the book opens with people giving hard-earned money on the expectation that moving back to Africa would bring them a better life. Calhoun uses this same kind of promise to try to lure people to his back-to-the-south attempt by putting up big posters of contented, healthy workers in the cotton fields, next to pictures of starving African children. He then proceeds to eat a large southern breakfast in the presence of a group of onlookers. Some of those onlookers feel nostalgic for the life he is trying to present.⁹³ Himes expressed a controversial opinion that racism was a one-way trip downward, and that integration would be problematic because black culture and consciousness was so deformed that African-Americans would be potentially dangerous people.⁹⁴ In the society of *Cotton*

⁹² Ibid. 153

⁹³ Ibid. 65

⁹⁴ Cochran. 100

Comes to Harlem, the only options available to the citizens for escaping abject poverty are criminal behavior, pure luck in the form of gambling, unquestioning belief in religion, or a journey to somewhere supposedly better. O'Malley counted on all these options for escape to put together his swindle. However, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger stand apart from the general citizenry in that they did not buy into the limited and unrealistic options of escaping poverty and instead became policemen and are trying to remedy the problems. They realize none of these solutions for escaping poverty will fix the real problems, and are impossible or self-destructive. During the barbeque, the crowd presented Coffin Ed and Grave Digger with a souvenir map of Africa.

Grave Digger was called upon to speak. He stood up and looked at his map and said, "Brothers, this map is older than me. If you go back to this Africa you got to go by way of the grave." No one understood what he meant, but they applauded anyway.⁹⁵

In the end, after the rally is held nothing was improved. Calhoun went back to Alabama, there were numerous killings and almost all those left were in the same places they started out.

The cause of all this turbulence was the pursuit of the bale of cotton, and is part of Himes idea of how an absurd circumstance brings in absurd elements and results. A discussion of this book cannot be complete without analyzing how this item traveled through Harlem and created different reactions and results from different people. The bale became an object of desire, interest, anger or shame depending on who had and wanted it. Calhoun wanted to use the bale in an attempt to lure people into moving back south to pick cotton, by trying to convince them that

⁹⁵ *Cotton*. 157

this would lead to a good life of steady employment, health and happiness. With the money inside, Calhoun wanted to put it forth as a symbol of the supposed wellbeing found in picking cotton. Lt. Anderson understood the symbology Calhoun was trying to use, but Coffin Ed and Grave Digger do not understand, since neither could really relate to what a bale of cotton might mean. Instead, to Coffin Ed and Grave Digger the pursuit of the bale was a means to complete their duty to the community by returning the money to people it was taken from. Uncle Bud made his living by picking up trash in the streets at night and selling it and was the lowest person on the social scale. He saw the bale had value as a commodity. After considerable bickering, he sold it to a Jewish junkyard owner, Mr. Goodman, for \$25, but later got it back and found the money hidden inside. Mr. Goodman saw it as nearly valueless, but bought it anyway, feeling trapped and guilty for holding out on Uncle Bud. Deke O'Malley and Iris were obsessed by the money planted inside, but this eventually landed them in jail.

The scene that brings most of these conflicting reactions together is when Billie, the dancer, uses the bale in her act. Her dance shows her being seduced by the bale, then performing a mock sex act with it, all before a racially mixed audience. At the end, she shouts "Ohhh, daddy cotton!"⁹⁶ Afterwards, she auctions the bale off for the actors benefit fund. Calhoun wins the bid, only later to find the money is no longer in the bale. In this dance scene, Himes puts in all the various emotions the bale causes and the influence it has over everyone. Here is the seduction many felt by this object, and the control it held causing a visceral excitement that drove several of them to extremes. In the end, the bale of cotton causes Calhoun to lose money on the

⁹⁶ Ibid. 147

entire episode and expose him for the racist crook he is, yet allows him to get away with murder.

Chester Himes had strong views about social degradation, and this comes through in the book. The images and conflicts in *Cotton* are strong and work towards his idea that extreme situations, be it poverty, prejudice or class conflict, makes the illogical occur on a regular basis. In a society where systemic problems are allowed to exist, oddities will happen that can turn into chaos. His detectives are part of this community, and they believe their methods are the only way to manage this kind of turmoil. Again, this is similar to *Red Harvest*, where extreme tactics work, but only temporarily, while profound fundamental change is the only true solution.

The principal allegiance of the detectives is to the community. What they do, they do for the people that live in Harlem, even if it is only a temporary solution. The community in *Cotton* is a Greek Chorus as is evidenced in the opening paragraph. They speak to the reader essentially as a combined voice, showing the hope brought on by a promise, the hurt of being stolen from, and then the appreciation of having their money returned. In the next Chapter, Walter Mosley addresses comparable race relations in *Devil in a Blue Dress*, even to the point of having a white gangster in DeWitt Albright with many physical similarities to and mannerisms of Colonel Calhoun. However, the type of relationship is completely different. Coffin Ed and Grave Digger are policemen who work to relieve an injustice to a community, whereas Easy Rawlins is an amateur part-time investigator who becomes emotionally attached to the woman he is hired to find. Both books are about racial conflict, but go about telling that story in completely different ways.

Chapter 6 The Unintended Detective in *Devil in a Blue Dress*

I was surprised to see a white man walk into Joppy's bar. It's not just that he was white but he wore an off-white linen suit and shirt with a Panama straw hat and bone shoes over flashing white silk socks. His skin was smooth and pale with just a few freckles. One lick of strawberry-blond hair escaped the band of his hat. He stopped in the doorway, filling it with his large frame, and surveyed the room with pale eyes; not a color I'd seen in a man's eyes. When he looked at me I felt a thrill of fear, but that went away quickly because I was used to white people in 1948.⁹⁷

Easy Rawlins, the detective in *Devil in a Blue Dress*, lives in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, and in this opening scene, he is in the bar of a friend in a familiar setting. This differs markedly from the opening paragraphs of the previously discussed first person stories by Hammett, Chandler and MacDonald. In those previous stories, the detective comes into a location that is unfamiliar and he is set apart from the background; the detective clashes with and upsets the surroundings. *Devil in a Blue Dress* is similar to *Cotton Comes to Harlem* in that the detective is in a familiar place, but an outside disturbance enters the picture. In *Devil*, the upsetting influence enters in the form of a white gangster named DeWitt Albright. Most of this book takes place in and around Easy's neighborhood, and quite often in his home. He is reluctant to leave the familiar surroundings, because this causes him to become self-conscious of his race and how he is looked upon. Easy has a desire of retaining home ownership in his neighborhood that influences him to make unwise decisions in order to pay his mortgage. These and his intimate interest with the woman in the blue dress, Daphne Monet, are very personal connections that sway his judgment throughout the book even to the point of determining its eventual outcome.

⁹⁷ Mosley, Walter. *Devil in a Blue Dress*. New York: Pocket Books, 1990. 1

Devil in a Blue Dress is Walter Mosley's first novel. Walter Mosley was born in Los Angeles, grew up in Watts, and lived there during the mid-1960s when race riots troubled the city. Mosley did not start out to be a writer; instead, after graduating from college he began a career as a computer programmer. He started writing and taking classes, eventually quitting his job as a programmer to pursue writing full time. Since the publication of *Devil*, Mosley has added more detective novels, as well as books in other genres such as science fiction and social commentary. Reading *Devil*, there are many similarities between his home life and the book's themes. Mosley's family was racially and religiously mixed. His father was a black man from the deep south, and his mother was a Jewish woman from New York, whose ancestors came from Eastern Europe.⁹⁸ By all accounts, Mosley's upbringing was sound, and race was always an issue that was discussed, along with stories and tales from both sides of the family. *Devil* uses this idea of trying to live on both sides of the racially divided world, but then takes the idea further and examines how this may cause a person to behave. Easy is able to see both the black side and white side of the racial argument, but finds himself at times admiring and other times disparaging certain aspects of both. *Devil* also talks at various times about the plight of Jewish people. Part of Easy Rawlins back-story was that he was involved in finding some of the WWII concentration camp victims, and in *Devil*, he maintains a compassionate friendship with a pair of Polish Jewish liquor storeowners.

Easy Rawlins is a different sort of detective from the others discussed in this thesis. As mentioned in the opening paragraph, he was sitting in a familiar bar, when

⁹⁸ "Walter Mosley." *Contemporary Black Biography*, Volume 25. Edited by David G. Oblender. Gale Group, 2000. Reproduced in *Biography Resource Center*. Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale, 2009. <http://galenet.galegroup.com.proxy.ulib.iupui.edu/servlet/BioRC>

someone walked in. Easy is not at this point (and never officially becomes) a detective. His friend Joppy knows he has recently lost his job and is worried about making his mortgage payment. Joppy and Albright know each other, so Easy is introduced, and would not think of helping if he did not need the money to keep his home. Every other detective discussed in some way works in an official capacity either by being licensed and working on their own, or being employed through an organization. Easy initially is hired with no formal arrangement, with each successive agreement in the story done verbally. In some cases, he gets an advance, but most of this is done on faith between himself and whoever might be hiring his services. This separates Easy from detectives like The Op and Coffin Ed and Grave Digger, in that he ultimately is not beholden to anyone but himself and his client.

Devil in a Blue Dress is Easy Rawlins' start into the world of amateur detective work. As mentioned, he was hired by DeWitt Albright to find a white woman, Daphne Monet, on behalf of Todd Carter, a mayoral hopeful. Easy goes about finding her by visiting familiar clubs and bars and discreetly asking around. He happens across a friend who knows where she is, and he learns Daphne likes to associate with a black gangster, Frank Green. Easy finds Daphne, and they have a brief, intense affair. Daphne is captured by Albright and Joppy who are working together in an attempt to get the \$30,000 she stole from Carter. Easy and his friend Raymond, who Easy calls Mouse, save her. In the process, Mouse kills Albright and Joppy, after earlier killing Frank Green. Mouse tells Easy that Daphne is actually mixed race, but often pretends to be white. After this is known, Easy learns that Daphne was sexually abused by her father, causing her to create two personas to

cope. Daphne also admits to killing an influential local politician, Mathew Teran, who had been abusing young boys. Before separating, Mouse, Daphne and Easy split the \$30,000. Easy knows of all the crimes committed, but lies to the police about what happened because of his loyalty to Daphne and Mouse, and the freedom the money will bring.

There are primarily three personal relationships that motivate and engage Easy, and lead him eventually to lie to authorities after the resolution of matters. As mentioned previously, his need to be a property owner and his relationships with Mouse and Daphne are each important to him, and he is constantly balancing the need to address all. Of these, the need for home ownership causes him to challenge and second-guess his decision making, which often results in an action he knows will have bad consequences. To Easy, home ownership is essential to his identity as a man and standing in society, and gives him a sense of independence that he otherwise would not be able to have. Home ownership is part of Easy's way of answering to a perceived racial inferiority.

Devil starts with the threat of Easy losing his home, and therefore his standing and identity, as a recent job layoff leads him to help Albright in his search for Daphne. Joppy uses Easy's plight to leverage him into accepting Albright's offer.⁹⁹ After Albright leaves Joppy's bar, Joppy and Easy continue to talk and Easy becomes jealous of Joppy's success of owning a run-down bar over a butcher shop. Joppy keeps trying to convince Easy to take Albright's offer, when Easy thinks to himself:

The thought of paying my mortgage reminded me of my front yard and the shade of my fruit trees in the summer heat. I felt that I was just as good as any white man, but if I didn't even own my front door then

⁹⁹ *Devil*. 3-4

people would look at me just like another poor beggar with his hand outstretched.¹⁰⁰

The irony of home ownership is that it provides a freedom and sign of success, while also becoming an additional burden. It is an identity for Easy, but one that is difficult to maintain. Easy has a home and place to call his own, but he is also saddled with the fact that he is only a few missed payments from losing it and becoming the poor beggar he describes. The above quotation also describes how discrimination leads to Easy's feeling of racial inferiority. Easy turns home ownership into a remedy to combat discrimination and a means to rise above the station of many of his peers. It is a mixed situation, one that continues to provide Albright with a way to extract more services from Easy. As the story progresses, this concept of pride in home ownership continues to be tested as his house is invaded and becomes a magnet for violence and confrontation. At different points in the book, the various people he is having problems with come uninvited into his home. For example, the police stop by and apprehend Easy for the murder of a woman he was seen with;¹⁰¹ Daphne finds his phone number and calls him in the middle of the night needing help;¹⁰² Albright comes over to threaten Easy into finding Frank Green;¹⁰³ Frank Green waits for Easy to come home and attempts to kill him. Easy is saved in this scene by the unexpected appearance of Mouse.¹⁰⁴ Easy then saves Frank from Mouse, thinking, "I thought Mouse would sympathize with keeping blood off my furniture."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 9

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 67

¹⁰² Ibid. 85

¹⁰³ Ibid. 101

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 146

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 150

Mouse is a childhood acquaintance of Easy's who has psychopathic tendencies. There is a deep connection between the two of them to the point where Easy subconsciously turns to Mouse when problems disturb him. For instance, when Easy finds Frank Green at a bar, his thoughts go back to the last time he had seen Mouse.¹⁰⁶ Further in the story, after Albright comes to Easy's house and threatens him, Easy tries to call Mouse, though he does not understand why.¹⁰⁷ What Mouse brings is an alter ego for Easy to call upon when in physical danger or indecision. Mouse is a personification of an internal voice that Easy also turns to in decisions of grave consequence. This voice, like Mouse, has a dialect Easy grew up with in segregated rural Texas. Easy recounts the first time he heard the voice he was trapped in a farmhouse outside Normandy in WWII. He had to make the choice of kill or be killed, and the voice came to him to bolster his courage and do the desperate measures that were needed to survive.¹⁰⁸

Mouse, like the voice, never wastes time worrying about the consequences of his violent actions or where he stands in the world. He knows what he is, and unlike Easy, accepts the racially divided society as if it is the natural order of things, and believes it is useless to behave otherwise. Mouse expresses this towards the end of the book by saying Daphne and Easy need to accept who they are rather than pretending and thinking like they are white.¹⁰⁹ Mouse, and the voice, are a part of Easy, and therefore influence his judgment. Easy knows that Mouse killed Frank Green and considers it murder, but knows he cannot do anything about it. When

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 48

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 106

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 99

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 205

asked why he killed him, Mouse angrily replies, “So what? What you think he gonna do fo’ you? You think he wasn’t gonna kill you?”¹¹⁰ Easy knows he would not have been able to do what Mouse had done, and has to accept the fact he will have to lie about the crime. Mouse saves his life numerous times in the story, and by taking Frank Green out, removes a lingering threat. Easy does not tell the police about this, but continues to fret about this conflict to the very end of the story.

When talking to Odell Jones, a kind of quiet sage figure Easy turns to, he asks if it is wrong not to turn in a friend who had done something egregious. Odell says, “All you got is your friends, Easy.”¹¹¹ This statement from Odell is a realization for Easy of the value of friendship in a society where law and justice are not meted out properly. Throughout the story, Easy is bombarded by forces of corruption and malice, which come in all forms and are not limited by race. Easy is deceived by his supposed friend Joppy, abused by the police, threatened by Frank Green and DeWitt Albright, and so forth. In the end as the summation by Odell says, the only thing Easy can do is turn to and defend his friends. The authorities were of no help, and only came in to intimidate him. This message is similar to what Himes was saying in *Cotton Comes to Harlem*. The legal forces were going to be inadequate, unable or too inept to do what the detectives deemed as correct. In Easy’s case, that meant he could only rely on and abide by his friendships.

Like Mouse, Daphne commits serious crimes that Easy decides not to report to the authorities. Daphne influences Easy’s decisions in a different manner, however. In a way, Daphne can do what Easy wants to do, that is, live on both sides

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 205

¹¹¹ Ibid. 215

of the racial divide. She appears in the book initially as a white woman with a mysterious French-tinted accent. She associates with Frank Green, a man described as having very black skin,¹¹² while also being the lost love interest of Todd Carter, the well-to-do white businessman who is running for mayor. However, her pretense begins to drop away after she calls Easy and they go to her friend's house where they find him stabbed to death. Once the panic sets in her French accent goes away.¹¹³ Easy subsequently learns she stole \$30,000 from Todd Carter, but he makes no efforts to report the crime. Daphne manages to seduce Easy into an intimate relationship, and he begins to become enamored with her. To him she is a beautiful and highly desirable white woman, who is later revealed to be racially mixed. The cause of Daphne's two personas and the reason for her eventual killing of Mathew Teran stem from sexual abuse by her father (who happens to be black). Teran is a local politician who had been using Daphne to intimidate his mayoral rival Todd Carter. Once Easy and Daphne have been intimate, she begins to tell him of her father abusing her when she was a young teenager. Her method of surviving this is to assume two separate personalities, using one or the other depending on the situation. Daphne still loved her father while her original personality, Ruby Hanks, loathed him. She is not schizophrenic, as each persona is fully aware of the other. Daphne pretends her father left the family, but Ruby says Frank, her half brother, killed him. Earlier in the story, Teran picks up Easy, and Easy sees Teran has a Mexican boy with him in the car. Easy is sickened, but is unable to do anything about it.¹¹⁴ Like Mouse, Daphne steps in and exacts restitution where he is not able to do so. Daphne tells Easy about

¹¹² Ibid. 146

¹¹³ Ibid. 94

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 79

shooting Teran for what he is trying to do to her and what he was doing to the boy with him. She later dispassionately relates this to Easy, almost as if Daphne is describing how Ruby killed Teran.

“I pulled the trigger, he died. But he killed himself really. I went to him, to ask him to leave me alone. I offered him all the money but he just laughed. He had his hands down the little boy’s drawers and he laughed.” Daphne snorted. I don’t know if it was a laugh or a sound of disgust. “So I killed him.”¹¹⁵

Easy knows she had committed a murder and stolen the money, yet, because of their personal relationship and what she did to Teran, he chooses to keep her crimes to himself. Even after all they shared, he is so infatuated with the Daphne persona that he could not quite see her as Ruby Hanks. It finally took her leaving and Mouse’s pointed comments to convince him Daphne was not her real self. The three of them split the \$30,000 evenly, and Easy, wanting to protect Daphne and Mouse, went on to tell the police that Frank Green killed Teran. In the end, Easy does what he thinks is correct by the morality he has established based on his personal relationships.

The personal relationships in this book influence whether or not the detective reports a crime. Easy also had a deep mistrust of the police and did not believe they were fair in their actions. With these factors, Easy was willing to risk forgoing the rule of law to protect his friends. These actions are rooted in discrimination, which is a major premise of the book. This story takes the similar problems of discrimination seen in *Cotton Come to Harlem*, and goes further into the confusion and conflict this causes on a personal level. Easy sees parts of the white society that he admires and wants, such as home ownership, and a real ability to escape and stay out of poverty. There is also the constant reminder that many of these goals will be impossible to

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 202

achieve, or at least difficult to hold onto. He falls in love with what he think is an exotic white woman, and then has difficulty breaking away from that belief. Daphne herself moves manically between the black and white societies, while Mouse does not care about discrimination and is egalitarian in his violent behavior. Easy has a constant battle with a criminal element of the white establishment, which he sees as operating essentially unabated. At one point Easy resents how black people made him think and act a certain way when he was around white people.¹¹⁶ These encounters all cause personal conflict for Easy as he tries to step his way through the investigations.

This discrimination and the personal conflicts that ensue influence Easy's judgment and morality, resulting in him taking the law into his own hands. This is similar to how Mike Hammer reacts in *I, the Jury*. Both Hammer and Easy establish the moral center of their respective novels, thinking they must do what is fair in an unfair society. The comparisons between the two stories end fairly quickly, though. Both bring the perpetrators to a violent end though each author and detective gets there by a different method. Even the two names, Hammer vs. Easy, show the difference. Easy tries inconspicuously to find Daphne in order to keep his house from being foreclosed, but other problems intervene. In *I, The Jury*, Hammer begins a single-minded pursuit of the killer and stops at nothing to get there. Easy has a constant struggle with racial uncertainty that permeates everything from his friendships to his need for home ownership. Hammer is quite accepting of different races, but the main conflict of *I, The Jury* is gender related.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 13

Chapter 7 The Vigilante Agenda of *I, The Jury*

I shook the rain from my hat and walked into the room. Nobody said a word. They stepped back politely and I could feel their eyes on me. Pat Chambers was standing by the door to the bedroom trying to steady Myrna. The girl's body was racking with sobs. I walked over and put my arms around her.¹¹⁷

I, The Jury came to the reading public in 1947 and introduced the hardest of the hard-boiled detectives in the form of Mike Hammer. This was just after WWII ended, as the soldiers and sailors returned to a country that was markedly different from the one they had left. Just prior to the war, the country was still recovering from the Great Depression. WWII saw a full-scale fight on multiple fronts that required a complete effort to combat, leading to the development of destructive methods that were unimaginable a few years before. People had to work toward a common goal of winning the war, which led to permanently altering the social barriers between people of different ethnicities and genders. There was prosperity as the country turned its newfound confidence and industrial might to building and creating, but with this came changes in relations between classes, races and sexes. The topic of sex was about to begin a complete revelation in scientific study and popular media, as evidenced by emergence of publications such as the Kinsey Report in 1948 and *Playboy* Magazine in 1953. The world changed, and Mickey Spillane took many of these sentiments and brought them to the Hard-Boiled detective genre with his first book *I, The Jury*.

¹¹⁷ Spillane, Mickey. "I, The Jury." 1947. The Mike Hammer Collection Volume 1. New York: New American Library, 2001. 5

For Mike Hammer, loyalty to people he cares about is the most important thing in life. He couples this with a grim form of disgust — “as long as I could remember, I hate rats that kill for the fun of it”— to form his morality and judgment.

¹¹⁸ *I, The Jury*, begins with the scene of Hammer being called in after his best friend, Jack Williams, was shot in the stomach and then forced to crawl across the floor until he bled to death. Hammer begins a relentless pursuit of the killer, with the express purpose of being Judge, Jury and finally Executioner. During the pursuit, Hammer discovers that the murderer is involved with a prostitution ring and is a heroin dealer. Entering the picture is a beautiful psychiatrist named Charlotte Manning, who was an acquaintance of Williams’. Hammer begins to fall for Manning and shares with her much of what he learns in the investigation. He learns the prostitution ring is run by a man named Hal Kines whose mode of operation is to get a young woman pregnant, then blackmail her into having an abortion and working for him in the sex trade. Kines works with an ex-bootlegger named George Kalecki. Kines, a prostitute named Mary Wright and Jack’s girlfriend Myrna all are killed in the same manner as Jack while Hammer’s investigation proceeds. Hammer puts the prostitution and heroin trade together and realizes Charlotte is connected with both and was the killer of all the mentioned people. Even though he had planned to marry her, he fulfills his promise to Williams. As he recites to Charlotte his discoveries of various crimes and connections to her, she begins taking her clothes off in front of him. Once she is completely naked, he shoots her.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. 90-91

Spillane famously wrote this book in about three weeks in an effort to earn enough money to build a house. He never wanted to accomplish anything more than write to earn a living, and is quoted as saying, "I'm not an author, I'm a writer." He also said, "I can write a book in a few weeks, never rewrite, never read galleys. Bad reviews don't matter."¹¹⁹ Contemplation of social and cultural aspects were not part of Spillane's work, as he was more focused on writing a story as quickly as possible to generate income. The fact that *I, the Jury* was quickly written is seen in the straightforward plot of one man's personal vendetta. There are no seemingly unconnected sequences, such as in *The Galton Case*, that come together in a conclusion. Nor are there unexplained loose ends as in *The Big Sleep*. Chronologically, *I, the Jury* is in the middle of the books discussed in this thesis, with the first being *Red Harvest* in 1929, and the last being *Devil in a Blue Dress* in 1990. The placement of the novel at the end of the thesis is because of the level of personal relationship Hammer had with the victim, Jack Williams, and later with Charlotte Manning.

Being driven by a vendetta was nothing new to Hard-Boiled fiction, as was seen in *Red Harvest*. The difference between the two books, and reason for *Red Harvest* being discussed first and *I, the Jury* being last, is this level of relationship the detective has with a person or community. Emotionally, Hammer and Jack Williams were closer to being brothers than friends and Hammer believes he has no choice but to avenge the murder. Similarly, but in a different manner, he becomes very close with Charlotte. The Op never has or forms anything in the way of a close relationship

¹¹⁹ "Mickey Spillane." Contemporary Authors Online, Gale, 2009. Reproduced in Biography Resource Center. Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale, 2009.
<http://galenet.galegroup.com.proxy.ulib.iupui.edu/servlet/BioR>

with Personville or any of its inhabitants. The Op would have left town if there had not been a threat on his life. The Op's behavior is one of self-interest, while Hammer's is in response to what happened to a person very close to him.

The title of *I, the Jury* is a first person declarative statement that speaks to how the detective sees his role in the story. It deliberately stands in contrast to its source, the first person plural verdict opening, "We, the Jury." In fact, the first three Mike Hammer books follow this same singular idea in the titles; *I, The Jury*, *My Gun is Quick*, and *Vengeance is Mine!* As Mickey Spillane depicted Mike Hammer, he is a one-man wrecking machine who drinks heavily, chain smokes and always has a .45 caliber pistol he calls "Betsy" with him everywhere he goes. His personal relationship to the victim and investigation in *I, the Jury*, which he undertakes on his own time, is contained in the fourth paragraph of the book.

In there. The words hit me hard. In there was my best friend lying dead on the floor. The body. Now I could call it that. Yesterday it was Jack Williams, the guy that shared the same mud bed with me through two years of warfare in the stinking slime of the jungle. Jack, the guy who said he'd give his right arm for a friend and did when he stopped a bastard of a Jap from slitting me in two. He caught the bayonet in the biceps and they amputated the arm.¹²⁰

This quote, which frames the relationship between Mike Hammer and Jack Williams, sets the theme for the remainder of the story. From this, we see how the relationship between the two of them was formed in the war, and how Jack saved his life. There is also the hate of what had happened both previously and when Jack was killed at the start of the book. This kind of mental mindset bent on revenge starts Hammer on his search. Feeding this emotion is a mistrust of the legal system leading Hammer to believe he needs to carry out the execution by his own rules.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 5

Hammer goes to violent extremes in his investigation similar to the actions of Coffin Ed and Grave Digger. All three have a propensity to act with aggression against people that present a threat, since they believe that is the only way to achieve proper justice. For Hammer, though, the source of this mistrust of legal means is different from the detectives in Himes' novel. The detectives in both stories believe they live in a society where the legal system is inadequate for what they need to do. The difference between the two books is that rather than using the unwritten rules of a segregated society as in *Cotton, I, the Jury* uses loyalty to a fellow soldier as the impetus. In a combat situation, the legal process has no meaning and is inappropriately slow. Spillane was writing to an audience that was trying to adjust back to civilian life and would understand these sentiments. To Hammer, the rule of law in a civilian capacity becomes slow and ineffectual leading to his semi-approved vigilantism.^{121,122} The traditional idea of the vigilante is the belief that police functions will not protect people, therefore a single person or a group takes over to dole out a homegrown form of enforcement. However, Hammer is good friends with Pat Chambers, a police detective, throughout the book and he even frequently says the police do good work. Chambers and Hammer collaborate and share information throughout, though Hammer knows Chambers has procedures he must follow. Chambers calls Hammer in at the start of the story, and Hammer tells Chambers what he is going to do. Chambers makes no concerted effort to stop him other than to ask he not carry out the vendetta, resulting in inferred approval to do what he wants; "I

¹²¹ Ibid. 7

¹²² Ibid. 6

could see by the set of Pat's jaw that he wasn't going to try to talk me out of it."¹²³

Hammer is a vigilante while respecting and relying on the police. This pattern of contradiction is a defining trait of Hammer's throughout *I, The Jury*.

The most relevant contradiction is Hammer's simultaneous sexist, respectful and, ultimately with Charlotte, psychopathic reactions towards women throughout the book. Sensational headline topics of the mid to late 1940s, such as drug use, sex, prostitution, and the role of women, are major story elements of *I, the Jury*. Fredrick Whiting points out that, just post war, there was a fascination with sex related crimes and Spillane uses this fascination and the changing role of women to challenge Hammer's sensibilities (much like what was happening in actual post-war culture).¹²⁴ This challenge is seen in Hammer's divided reaction when he finds Eileen Vickers (working under the alias Mary Wright) in the brothel. His response encompasses both a physical reaction to her looks as well as an emotional response to her plight. He sees her worn, looking older than she actually is, and describes her by saying, "Her profession and her past were etched into her eyes. She was a girl you could beat without getting a whimper out of her."¹²⁵ A few lines later the description ends with, "There was nothing startling about her shape. Average. Not very heavy in the breasts, but her legs were nice. I felt sorry for the girl."¹²⁶ This can be read as a sadomasochistic reaction though Hammer does not intend to hurt Mary, and never abuses her in any way. His expression of saying a person could physically "beat" her is not saying she is tough or that he wants to do this, instead it is his way of saying

¹²³ Ibid. 8

¹²⁴ Whiting, Frederick. "Bodies of Evidence: Post-War Detective Fiction and the Monstrous Origins of the Sexual Psycho" *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, volume 18, number 1 (2005): 149–178. 151

¹²⁵ *I, The Jury*. 67

¹²⁶ Ibid. 68

her life has used her up. For someone to be physically hurt without reaction is a sign of reaching the point of helplessness. Hammer puts the blame for Eileen's situation on her father, who disowned her, and Hal Kines, who got her pregnant and forced her into prostitution.

Hammer has divided opinions of other women in the story, who are for the most part portrayed as independent, intelligent and aggressive. His interaction with Velda, his secretary, would today be referred to as sexual harassment, but he still has a respect for her acumen and skills as an assistant. Mary Bellamy, another acquaintance of Jack Williams, is from a family that is rich enough to where she does not have to work or find a providing husband. Hammer initially turns down her assertive sexual advances, though he gives into her eventually when she tricks him into thinking she is her twin sister. Charlotte Manning, who later is revealed as the killer, brings these powers of seduction and intellect together, and uses them to deceive Hammer as well as other men in the story. Charlotte is a post war creation of a modern woman who becomes the ultimate emasculator. She is a professional psychiatrist who runs her own practice, which she uses to hook people on heroin, and then continue as their supplier. In classic terms, she is a siren who uses her seductive powers to pull men into their own doom, a woman who has "gone into the frailty of men and seen their weaknesses."¹²⁷ At one point, Hammer finds a book on hypnosis in her office, an indication of her need to control other people's actions. Hammer falls in love with her, and they make plans to marry, until he figures out what she had done.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 141

Charlotte Manning is a different kind of villain from others presented in this thesis because she represents a societal change in the role of women. As Sean McCann writes, Charlotte Manning is a threat to the male dominated society.

A familiar example of the emasculating woman, Manning's name indicates her unwillingness to accept the feminine "instinct" for submission, and her method for murder, seducing men and then shooting them in the gut, reflects her determination to reverse the natural hierarchy of sexual authority.¹²⁸

Spillane has Hammer approaching both sides of Charlotte's persona, that is, to both accept her as entering a male dominated hierarchy, while in the end stopping her. Hammer is not threatened nor morally disturbed by Charlotte's success and blatant sexuality. This is an attraction, and he even seeks her professional advice on the investigation at one point in the book.¹²⁹ She then gives her professional opinion of him, saying, "There's so much about you that could be nice if only your mind wasn't trained to hate too fiercely"¹³⁰ an interpretation which he accepts without question and goes to the heart of his divided personality. In the end, though, his infatuation with her is trumped by his loyalty to a man who nearly gave his life for him, leading Hammer to restore the natural hierarchy McCann refers to.

The final scene of the book is a literal and physical unveiling of Charlotte. This scene combines both her seductive powers, with the psychopathic tendencies of both of them. Hammer figures out that Charlotte had killed his friend, performed the other murders and ran the drug operation (Kines ran the prostitution ring). Spillane wrote this final scene with Hammer using two voices, further emphasizing the divide in his personality and opinion. The first voice has him describing her actions as a

¹²⁸ McCann. 202

¹²⁹ *I, The Jury*. 53

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* 53

murderer and drug dealer, and how she had manipulated everyone. Interspersed within this lengthy monologue is another monologue with explicit detail of her removing her clothing one article at a time while moving closer to him. We get both the conscious logical speaking portion of Hammer, as well as a subconscious primal reaction to her performing a slow striptease. Whiting argues that this scene verifies the sexual psychopathic tendencies of Hammer. He says this scene brings together Hammer's previous division between his sexual and homicidal tendencies, while "the narrative aligns the mechanics of detective fiction with those of erotica, or rather pornography."¹³¹ Whiting contends this scene is pornographic, since it combines sexuality and violence. Additionally, Spillane is putting Hammer to the ultimate test of his desire to set things right as he defines it. Charlotte is using all of her ability to divert him by using the only means she has available at that moment, and his speaking and thought processes show the duality of his personality. He shoots her, and he immediately sees that she had been trying to distract him so she could reach a gun on a table behind him. Hammer not only completes the vendetta, but also overcomes this threat of a woman upsetting the male dominated order. As she is dying in the manner that Jack Williams had, the vengeance, and what Whiting calls his psychopathic tendencies, are revealed in the final exchange.

Her eyes had pain in them now, the pain preceding death. Pain and
unbelief.

"How could you?" she gasped.

I only had a moment before talking to a corpse, but I got it in.

"It was easy," I said.¹³²

¹³¹ Whiting. 163-164

¹³² *I, The Jury*. 147

Lee Horsley compared this ending to Dashiell Hammett's treatment of Brigit O'Shaughnessy in *The Maltese Falcon* where Sam Spade turns her over to the police, with the main difference being the cold-blooded manner in which Hammer resolved the conflict.¹³³ Spillane used many of the conventions earlier established in the detective fiction genre. Mickey Spillane started out writing comic books, and this kind of extreme action-oriented plot is evident in the Mike Hammer series. Mike Hammer was supposed to be a comic book character named Mike Danger, before Spillane decided to write this as a book to earn enough money to build his house. The plot of *I, The Jury* is essentially a closed door mystery similar to the golden-age detective stories, in which a body is found in a locked room and the detective follows a relatively straight path to the conclusion. Hammer even has a Sherlock Holmes moment where he holes up in his apartment all day and smokes himself to a solution in the investigation (instead of a pipe and tobacco, Hammer uses cigarettes and beer). Mike Hammer is very similar to Carroll John Daly's detective Race Williams in their disregard of law and civility. They both act as if the civic order is too slow for what they are doing.

At its essence, Spillane grabbed headlines of the day and used them to add a punch to the established standards of the genre. The plot is linear with no real logical challenges that have to be carefully constructed, such as Ross MacDonald did in *The Galton Case* (Spillane and MacDonald were contemporaries, but they wrote for different audiences. Spillane wrote for the returning enlisted men, while, as previously mentioned, MacDonald wrote for the "G.I. Bill intellectual").¹³⁴ What *I,*

¹³³ Horsley, Lee. The Noir Thriller. 111

¹³⁴ McCann. 204

the Jury does do is demonstrate a clear connection between how a potential force, a profound relationship to a person or community, results in a kinetic response, action resulting from judgment and morality. In *I, the Jury*, this results in a story that is a straight line from the discovery of his murdered friend in the first paragraph to his eventual resolution in killing Charlotte. Hammer's judgment and morality comes down to pure action, and he at times seems to operate from emotion rather than thought. The connection to Jack Williams was deep and meaningful to the point where all Hammer wanted was revenge according to his law and no one else's. Love of a woman was not going to sway him in any way. Spillane, by his own admission, did not care how critics and society viewed his work beyond how many books he was able to sell. However, one cannot analyze a book with this much brutal action that was so widely read and not consider the issues it presents. The book uses vigilantism as a solution. Hammer is dichotomous at the least, and psychopathic at the extreme, as seen in his treatment of women. The book tapped into the uncertainty of a changing populous that was not sure how to deal with gender equality in 1947 and continues to struggle with it today. Women in *I, the Jury* can be sexual animals, successful business owners and criminals, yet Hammer both admired this type of forcefulness and fought against it.

Afterword

Stories are about people, and the intent of this thesis was to show a connection between personal relationships and decision-making. The choice of Hard-Boiled detective fiction was done because this genre establishes a defined moral center using the detective around whom the relationships revolve. Each detective is faced with a number of choices, and each has to go back to these relationships and use them to decide and judge his actions. This kind of dilemma and how it was resolved became a way for the authors to express what they believed needed to be conveyed. What they said, in many cases, was controversial and may not agree with some readers, but from there discussion can begin. I intentionally explored each of the author's backgrounds and found their life experiences contributed to the topics contained in the stories.

A consistent part of all detective fiction stories is that they are about deception. With the Hard-Boiled sub-genre, this is true both in what the actual investigation is about and in the tactics of the detective. As the detectives attempt to clear deception away to get to a truth, they use tactics of their own to mislead and manipulate. The Op misleads people to start a mob war to murderous results; Marlowe never tells Sternwood of his daughter's transgressions; Archer lies to people about his identity and purpose; Coffin Ed and Grave Digger turn in false reports and allow a criminal to escape; Easy Rawlins makes up a fictitious story to protect his friends; Mike Hammer breaks into people's residences and locked crime scenes. This tendency to become part of the deception itself is a basic principle of the Hard-Boiled detective, as we see he is a flawed character influenced by and taking part in the

misery around him. The result is little in the way of true redemption for the detectives without a personal loss; he sees this misery, and has to bear a part of it. It is true that many of the stories in this genre do not come to a redeeming conclusion, which further separates this sub-genre from other genres and other versions of detective fiction.

This leaves room for discussing the how and why something happened, and each story remains open to further analysis related to the world we live in. The Op was able to use his lack of personal relationship to infiltrate a criminally controlled society and wreak havoc. Was this a story of the consequences of uncontrolled capitalism and was he advocating revolution? Is corruption such an integral part of our political system that everyone is pulled in as Marlowe thinks? How do people living lies, such as Lew Archer had to unravel, drive people to desperate measures? Is racial discrimination truly unsolvable and to the point of extreme desperation as in Coffin Ed and Grave Digger's Harlem? Easy Rawlins was fully knowledgeable of the murderers he lied for and let escape, but do friendship, loyalty and retribution make this acceptable? Do Mike Hammer's contradicting opinions of the role of women and the wide acceptance of his stories indicate a duplicitous society? These are all interesting avenues for further exploration, and issues that will continue to be written about and discussed.

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