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1 Introduction

In his study of the genre, *Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction*, Ralph Willet chooses to resort to the *New Encyclopedia Britannica* in order to provide for a quick definition of the subject.

hard-boiled fiction: a tough unsentimental style of American crime writing that brought a new tone of earthy realism or naturalism to the field of detective fiction. Hard-boiled fiction uses graphic sex and violence, vivid but often sordid urban backgrounds, and fast-paced, slangy dialogue. (New Encyclopedia Britannica qtd. in Willett ch.1)

This is an excerpt from an encyclopedia and it definitely gives a short and precise definition of the genre's key characteristics, but is this definition perhaps not an oversimplification? Naturally, the articles of such format are meant to contain nothing more than such a short overview and hence do not claim to offer anything beyond that. But in the context of this thesis, there is certainly a need for an in-depth definition of this kind of this genre¹.

1.1.1 Hard-boiled detective fiction

In the opinion of several critics, 'hard-boiled detective fiction' constitutes its own subgenre within that of crime fiction. These stories and novels feature a sufficient number of differences from the classic British detective stories in the tradition of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes to substantiate this claim. Charles J. Rzepka even speaks of a "direct challenge" to these classical models with their "brusque, clipped and vernacular style" (179)².

¹ For an etymology of the term "hard-boiled" itself see Tamony, Peter. "The Origin of 'Hard-Boiled'". *American Speech*, 12.4 (December 1937): 258-261.

² Andrew Pepper heavily argues against this establishment of the contrast between British, hence classical, detective fiction and American, hard-boiled detective fiction and challenges the notion of a distinctive "hard-boiled [...] genre or subgenre" (Pepper 142). For further details see Pepper, Andrew "The Hard-Boiled Genre".

Contrarily Adams describes the hard-boiled genre as "unmistakably American" (Adams 288) and likens the differences between British and American writing to the differences between a game of cricket and American football (Adams 288).

It has to be kept in mind, that the British school of crime fiction also spawned its imitators (S.S. Van Dine, Ellery Queen for example) in America. American crime fiction was not *a priori* contrasted to the classical model, but hard-boiled detective fiction is what Horsley, amongst others, describes as the "distinctively American contribution" (*American Hard-Boiled Fiction*). For a historical overview of the development of American crime fiction, see Moudrov "Early American Crime Fiction".

The structure of this form of fiction also deviates from that of the classical, “Golden Age”, detective story as it puts more emphasis on the individual characters, action and the places the plot involves rather than on the actual criminal cases themselves. As Julian Symons observes, “these problems [crimes] [...] are the beginning and not the end of the book’s interest” (qtd. in Rzepka 180).

Interestingly, Megan E. Abbot (Abbot, 2002) urges for a further clarification of the term. She states that the stories of the likes of Hammett and Chandler, which are normally associated with this variety of writing, are only one part of the hard-boiled genre, which also encompasses mostly crime fiction which does not feature a detective character as protagonist. Hence she calls for the term 'private eye novel' as the proper term for these texts. Although there are considerable differences to be found between Chandler's Marlowe and, for example, James M. Cain's protagonist of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* or Lou Ford in Jim Thompson's *The Killer Inside Me*, she considers the basis of these characters to be essentially the same as they all involve “a white male loner traversing a modern urban city, crippled by perceived threats to his whiteness, his gender, his sexuality and [...] tantalized by those threats” (Abbot 11). This argumentation appears to be coherent and is further supported by the fact that Dennis Porter (Porter, 2003) chose the heading “The private eye” for his essay, which was included in the *Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction* and is thus invested with much scholarly weight, on the other hand, it is highly dubitable that every fictional private investigator necessarily shows traits of the hard-boiled model.

While it is true that these “new” private eyes altered and shaped the perception and expectations of readers and movie audiences quite dramatically, classical detectives nevertheless remain private eyes as well. Therefore, this nomenclature is to be considered misleading and essentially too limited rather than acknowledging the peculiarities of hard-boiled detective fiction. Nonetheless, the hard-boiled detective is only one of the manifestations of the “hard-boiled man” (Nyman 4) and therefore only forms a part of the genre of hard-boiled fiction.

Notable literary critic George Grella sees hard-boiled crime fiction in the context of the “traditional romance”, whereas classical detective fiction is part of the social comedy canon (see Rzepka 180). Similarly, Cawelti argues that this new character represents “a modern synthesis of Sherlock Holmes with the melodramatic brigand” (Cawelti "New Mythology" 332). The world of the comedy is clearly structured with little space for individual personalities of its stereotypical characters and only the criminal threatens to disrupt this order.

1.2 Thesis Statement

The goal of this thesis is to explore the development of crime fiction, especially that of detective fiction, during the inter-war years of the early 20th century. The starting point of this analysis will be the claim of several notable critics that the hard-boiled detective story is the result of an American answer to the artificiality of the classic detective story³. Therefore, the first part of this work will be dedicated to an outline of the development and nature of crime fiction up to the rise of the detective novel and a more detailed overview of the characteristics of the detective stories of Edgar Allan Poe and his successors, the creators of the “Great Detective” (Lehman 43). The next part will be an attempt at a definition of what constitutes and defines this “quintessential American” (Grella 104) hard-boiled detective and will explore the alleged literary antecedent of the hard-boiled detective, the American literary hero, namely James Fennimore Cooper’s Leatherstocking and other influential protagonists. Next, the direct influences on the detective novel and the resulting changes in the form and probable causes for this development will be examined. It will be shown that there are multiple, and moreover paramount, reasons besides the wish of writers to “Americanize” the form for these changes.

The next section there will be a detailed analysis of the most important protagonists of early hard-boiled detective story and their authors. The final part of chapter 4 will deal with the accumulation of shared characteristics of the three detectives under scrutiny which will be contrasted with the Classical/Golden Age detective character in the last section of this thesis.

³ See for example McCann “The hard-boiled novel” 44.

2 Crime and Detective fiction – an overview

The first part of section will be dedicated to the short outline of the development of crime fiction in from the 18th century onwards up to the emergence of the detective as protagonist in this genre. This will be followed by an overview of detective fiction and then rounded up by a discussion of the character of the detective.

2.1 The development of crime fiction in England and America – from the 18th century to the late 19th century

Crime fiction in 17th and 18th century England largely consisted of the biographies of convicted criminals. The most prominent of these were the *Accounts* produced in Newgate Prison in London which were produced by the Chaplain of the prison and published in the form of “cheap pamphlets” (Worthington 14). These *Accounts* were “overtly and heavily moralistic” (Worthington 14) and featured the criminal history of the inmates and ended in a confession and repentance which “served to validate the death sentence and demonstrate the efficiency of the penal system” (Worthington 14). The purpose of these stories was clearly to give the public hard evidence that crime would not go unpunished. Charles J. Rzepka, referring to Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, points out that “the main purpose of punishment at this time was monitory[...] [and] the state had to scare people into behaving themselves” (Rzepka 53) as it lacked sufficient means to prevent crime and catch criminals. As Heather Worthington notes, these *Accounts* fell on “a ready market [...] [as] literature concerned with crime has always sold well to the public” (Worthington 14). Thus, these pamphlets sold well enough to prompt the publication of compendia which are generically referred to as *Newgate Calendar* (Worthington 14).

Worthington further argues that ultimately not the didacticism and moral lessons they offered but the “entertainment factor, [...] their promise of entertainment” (Worthington 14-15) was the main reason for the *Accounts*’ popularity. The only thing that hindered an even greater economic success of the anthologies was their price. They were rather expensive and therefore their audience was limited

to the wealthier classes. But the hunger for “voyeuristic pleasures of reading about sensational crime and punishment” (Worthington 15) was to be satisfied throughout all social strata. Therefore cheaper versions in the form of “broadsides and ballad sheets” (Worthington 15) were produced to reach the lower-income classes as well. It has to be noted that although most of these *Accounts* were, presumably, genuine, the form of these early criminal narratives allowed for fictional stories as well, as the “entertainment factor” did not depend on the stories’ authenticity.

In contrast to the popularity of the *Accounts* and the Calendar in England, the American populace of the 17th and 18th century indulged in the reading of so-called “execution sermons” (Crosby 6) of Puritan ministers. These execution sermons “typically focused on youthful sins [...] as the precipitating factors in a sinner’s fall into criminality” (Crosby 6)⁴. This means, that in the outset they did not really differ from their Old World counterpart but their focus was explicitly on the younger generations. The biggest difference from the *Accounts* was “the sympathy for the condemned” (Crosby 7), which can be traced back to the beliefs of Puritanism and Calvinism in which every human is only one step away from becoming a sinner, and therefore a criminal, himself (see Crosby 7). Even though these sermons enjoyed much success, a move towards other forms of crime writing was inevitable. Before the end of the seventeenth century, the ministers of the New Englanders used the isolation to “exert an iron-clad hold on local printers” (Crosby 8) which was only challenged by the English Crown retaking direct control of the colony. Thus, “ministerial censorship” was lifted and “more secular crime writing” (Crosby 8) continued its triumphal procession on American soil. The execution sermons, which up to this time were the meeting point of criminals and ordinary citizens, lost their significance to the novels from the 18th century onward.

The further development of crime fiction is “inextricably linked with the rise of the novel” (Worthington 16) on both sides of the Atlantic. The content remained

⁴ Moudrov sees these reports as having “inspired the enduring American tradition of tirelessly exposing crime, which explains the proliferation of crime literature in the colonies” (Moudrov 130).

largely the same but was now presented in a novelistic form. The novels still presented the lives of criminals but did not necessarily end in the conviction and execution of the protagonist but, as in Daniel Defoe's *The Fortunes and Misfortunes of the Famous Moll Flanders* (1722), there was the possibility of a happy ending and more emphasis on the elaborateness of the characters. So the crime narrative left behind the pretense of being an account of factual criminal biographies and officially stepped into the realm of fiction.

In America, the waning of religious influence on the publishing industry ushered in a "renaissance of the rogue" (Crosby 9). These stories, depicting criminals of all kind and "righteous rebels wronged by unrighteous legal authority" (Crosby 9), offered a kind of fictional class resistance and a feeling of rebellion to the lower class audience in both England and America. But American writers focused on a different kind of protagonist, namely "the fiend" (Crosby 9). The fiend character did not just revolt against the prevailing social order but set out to obliterate it and, by exposing exhibiting such "radical evil" (Crosby 9), does not allow for the readers' sympathy. Nonetheless, novels containing such a protagonist proved to be extremely successful. Sara Crosby explains this preoccupation of the American audience "as part of a larger cultural transition from a sympathetic seventeenth-century model of the criminal to an alienating eighteenth- and nineteenth-century paradigm, which cast the criminal as radically other and mysterious" (Crosby 10).

It becomes clear that crime fiction up to this point was exclusively "retrospective" (Worthington 16) as the culprit and his or her crimes are known right from the beginning and therefore there is no need for any kind of detection or solving of crimes at this time. But nonetheless the genre was subject to continuous change. A problem of the transition from broadsides and pamphlet sheets to the novel was the socio-cultural scope of the stories. Crime as displayed in earlier forms of crime narratives was a lower class phenomenon but the audience of the novel was the middle class which was not interested in lower class matters. Hence crime found another literary outlet in the form of the gothic novel in which it moved from "ordinary" transgressions to "apparently supernatural events that [...] are often revealed to be mundane hoaxes concealing some criminal act or

intention” (Worthington 16). Interestingly, it is in these gothic novels that the first detective-like characters appear such as in William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams; or, Things as They Are* (1794).

Such quasi-crime novels were also published in America, as for example Charles Brockden Brown’s *Wieland* (1798) and *Edgar Huntley* (1799-1800). These books are also the first exemplars to be considered detective novels by some scholars.⁵ Early traces of detective fiction are also to be found in James Fennimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) in which the protagonist Natty Bumppo can be regarded “as a backwoods prototype for the urban detective” (Worthington 17). In the following decades, the foundations for the emergence for a distinct detective fiction were laid, but this will be the subject of the next chapter.

In the early decades of the 19th century, a new kind of crime novel developed which continued “the legacy of *The Newgate Calendar*” (Worthington 19) under the generic name of “Newgate novel”. This nomenclature was initially used in a deprecating manner by contemporaries and affixed to any novel that “featured a criminal who came, or might have come from a *Newgate Calendar*” (Worthington 19). Therefore the main point of criticism of these novels was their perceived glorification of criminals in contrast to the earlier criminal biographies who were conceived as a warning against. The authors who are identified with this genre are Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Charles Dickens and Harrison Ainsworth amongst others (see Worthington 19). As Heather Worthington argues, the Newgate novels are to be considered to be highly influential on the further progression of crime fiction as “they represent an increasing interest in the construction and motivation of the criminal; they have an element of detection of feature a detective figure; they bring crime firmly into mainstream fiction” (19). And they were widely successful and because of their mainstream success, and the way they brought crime into the public focus, are said to be at least partly responsible for the creation of the New Metropolitan Police in 1829 (see Worthington 20). The function of this new police force was to prevent crime by their mere presence and not detective work. The detecting business was taken up by the so-called Bow

⁵ See chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion.

Street Runners, “a small quasi-police force” (Worthington 20) which were launched in middle of the eighteenth century. They featured quite regularly in crime-related stories and novels but remained background characters, supposedly because to “their lower-class status and criminal associations” (Worthington 20) rendered them inappropriate to take center stage.

Therefore, the heroes of Newgate novels “either were or were proved to be of a higher class [...], or had natural nobility [...], and in this context the ordinary police officer seemed unlikely material for the hero of a novel” (Worthington 20). As the police force in London was well established in the minds of the people, a small sub-unit of detectives was installed in 1842. Heather Worthington credits this new detective force to be the catalyst for the combination of crime with detection in literature (20). William Russell was the first to produce a fictional biography of such a police man with “Recollections of a Police-Officer” in 1849. He circumnavigated the problem of class by creating a protagonist of noble birth forced to police work by unfavorable circumstances. Also Charles Dickens published such accounts which “raised the detectives’ actually rather prosaic activities to the level of a science” (Worthington 21) and thereby furthered the development of the “detective stories”. However, the zenith of these police detective stories was comparatively short and, as will be shown later on, moved into the background leaving the stage to the amateur detectives like Dupin and Holmes. But their influence on crime fiction in general are nonetheless significant as “they introduced and made central the detective figure and they established the case format which becomes an essential element of the genre” (Worthington 21).

The next step in the evolution of crime fiction was the so-called “sensation fiction [...] which took crime right into the domestic sphere, the very heart of Victorian society” (Worthington 23). In contrast to the retrospective Newgate plots, sensation fiction was set in the contemporary present. More importantly, crime found its way into the upper echelons of society which in turn did not allow for lower-class law enforcement to intrude their spheres. Therefore this form offers “a discursive space for the amateur detective” (Worthington 24).

In America, the 1830s saw different approaches to cater for the crime-hungry public. Trial transcripts and pamphlets pretending to offer accounts of “true crime” were published. Additionally, court room reporters were “invented” in this decade, which were to provide for first hand reports directly from the court rooms of the country (see Crosby 13).

These new developments were directly connected to the “advent of modern mass media” (Crosby 14). The audience of earlier newspapers was restricted to small privileged group but with the establishment of the new so-called “penny papers” this changed dramatically. These cheap daily papers were designed for the “common man” who “apparently wanted sex and death” (Crosby 14). Interestingly, Peleg Whitman Chandler published a collection of court cases under the title of *American Criminal Trials* in 1841 which bore noticeable similarities to the *Newgate Calendar* but differed in one important aspect. As Moudrov notes, the author did not cater for “his reader’s interest in crime but also made an effort to explain the cultural and historical significance of his subject” (129). In his interpretation crime was not only “a mere object of curiosity; it was right at the center of the discourse about American culture, perhaps the only way to understand it” (Moudrov 129). Or as William Ruhlman puts it:

The idea of meting out punishment for sin – assigning the scarlet letter – is peculiarly American and manifest in the private eye novel. Historian David Abraham reports that ‘the Puritan’s use of force ... has influenced our present national attitude’. (8)

2.2 Detective Fiction

Edgar Allan Poe is almost universally regarded “as the father of the detective story” (Moore 7). Some critics, as for example David Lehman, even elevate him to the status of “the most significant figure in the detective story’s history and development” (Lehman xiv). This status is earned through the creation of C. Auguste Dupin, the world’s first literary detective who is introduced in what is perceived to be the first detective story in the history of literature, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841). It is exactly this new protagonist that marked this decisive step in the growth of the genre of crime fiction, namely the inception of detective fiction. This development marks a sharp break in crime fiction’s formula:

the focus shifts from the criminal to his antagonist, in this case the detective. As will be shown later on in this section, there were several other predecessors of Poe who incorporated elements into their stories which should become the characteristic features of this new genre.

As mentioned before, the introduction of detection to the genre and rise of the sensation novel lead almost inevitably to the creation of the character of the amateur detective. In Britain, it is Willkie Collins who is credited to have produced “the first, the longest and the best of modern English detective novels” (T.S. Eliot qtd. in Brunsdale³) with his novel *The Moonstone* in 1868. Heather Worthington instead argues that this novel was “not yet fully-fashioned detection and detective fiction, but the themes and patterns are beginning to coalesce” (25).

Christopher Booker holds that “the earliest example of a detective story [...] had already appeared two decades earlier, as one of the tales of [...] E.T.A. Hoffmann” (Booker 507), namely *Fräulein von Scudery* in 1819. Following a similar argument, Larry Landrum goes back another twenty years and identifies Charles Brockden Brown’s novel *Edgar Huntly, Or, Memoirs of Sleepwalker*, published in 1799, as “America’s first detective novel (Landrum qtd. in Worthington 17). Charles J. Rzepka postulates that “the detective story prototype” (10) was introduced by Ann Radcliffe’s gothic novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) which features a kind of detective in the person of the novel’s protagonist Emily St. Aubert⁶. Similarly, the aforementioned *Caleb Williams* incorporated the future key elements of the genre as for example “the terror and mystery of crime; the obsessive nature of suspicion; the paranoid thrills of flight, pursuit, arrest, and escape; and the daring use of incognito and disguise” (Rzepka 55). Furthermore, some critics think of the book as “a distant precursor of the hard-boiled and crime suspense stories” (Rzepka 56) for its attitude towards “physical evidence”⁷ and the rift between social classes.

⁶ William Marling argues that “[t]he gothic influence is said to account for the dark settings, unfathomable motivations, and preoccupation with brilliant or unexpected solutions in the detective/mystery genre” (“History of the Hard-Boiled”).

⁷ For a detailed discussion of this aspect see Cohen, Michael

Possibly the first documented professional detective⁸ is the Frenchman Eugène François Vidocq as he “established the first recorded detective agency, *Le Bureau des Renseignements*” (Ruehlmann 23) in 1833 and had already published his autobiography *Mémoires de Vidocq* (1828-9). It should come as no surprise that detective fiction debuted in France as there had been “a State-funded policing force since the seventeenth century” (Worthington 17-18), something that had been missing contemporary Britain and America. Detective fiction necessitates a real life exemplar after which to model its protagonists and therefore such developments could not start until the nineteenth century in these two countries.

Before entering the business of detecting and solving crimes, Vidocq led the life of a career criminal and only “volunteered his services as an informer to the police” (Worthington 18) during imprisonment. In 1812, he was made chief of the newly created police detective force, the *Brigade de la Sûreté*, which was actually his own brainchild. The brigade was made up of ex-criminals, like Vidocq himself, who were able to capitalize on “their knowledge of the criminal underworld and quite often its methods to track down or trap their quarry” (Worthington 18). Even though his force was highly successful, he had to resign in 1827 from his position because of allegations of irregularities⁹ and, as mentioned before, set up the first private detective agency. As Philip John Stead argues “Vidocq had organized a counter-police, and in so far as they undertook work which the police would not or could not do” (Stead qtd. in Ruehlmann 23). And this peculiarity, or ability, would be one of the major characteristics throughout the literary life of the detective.

But returning to Poe and his position as “the father of detection” (Symons qtd. in Worthington 22), it can be maintained that he brought the story of the detection and solution of a crime into a form that could be, and evidently was, used as a successful blueprint for this subgenre. His stories are different as they offer “an intelligent analysis of facts that leads to a resolution, a process of inductive thought” (Worthington 22). Dupin actively investigates his cases and derives at

⁸ William Ruehlmann calls him “[h]istory’s first recorded private detective” (21).

⁹ Vidocq amassed a vast private fortune in spite of his “average salary” (Worthington 18).

their solution through his intellectual ability, by the correct interpretation of clues. This emphasis on the detective's *ratio* echoes "the popularization of a scientific interest in inductive logic" (Rzepka 17) and rising general interest in scientific processes¹⁰. David Lehman traces this feature back to Voltaire's *Zadig, or The Book of Fate* which shows "science considered as a systematic habit of detection" (Lehman 21).

Yet, most importantly, he is an amateur. Several critics argue that "the first literary detectives would be inconceivable without the prior existence of professional policemen" (Lehman 58)¹¹. Therefore one would expect that the first fictional characters engaged with some kind of detection would be police men. But nothing could be farther from the truth. Professional law enforcement only served as a "negative example, human fallibility personified" (Lehman 58). They represent the helplessness and the ignorance of common legal and intellectual practices and, ultimately, their inability to properly deal with crime. Their role in detective fiction is therefore limited to "figures of fun" (Lehman 58). Therefore Dupin offers to assist them in the cracking of the cases. Poe in this way also continues the mindset of the Newgate novels, as the police men, as well as the criminals, were generally working-class people who "were perceived as inadequate to the mysteries of the great city" (Rachman 19).

Nonetheless, the romantic appeal of the Robin Hood romance, the story of the outlaw as hero, does not disappear completely from the detective story. Dupin does not fight for the have-nots but he is also quite different from official law enforcement in his pursuit of justice and in this respect is quite similar to the rogue-hero. And thus, the allure of the detective hero is, at least partially, "the appeal of the outlaw" (Lehman 64).

A murder at Road Hill House in 1860 and the following Scotland Yard operation "set off a national obsession with crime and detection [in which] the first subgenre

¹⁰ Poe himself referred to his stories as "stories of ratiocination" (Lehman 16).

¹¹ "Finally, some have argued that detective fiction began with modern policing methods in the early nineteenth century" (Rzepka 16).

of detective fiction was born, the English country-house mystery” (Rachman 25). The early 1860s also saw the introduction of the police detective in Anglophone crime fiction by the pseudonymous Andrew Forrester Jr. in *Secret Service, or Recollection of a City Detective* (1864). But the prominence of the police detective was rather short-lived and police officials continued to be limited to the role already designated in Poe’s stories.

In 1865, another form of the detective story emerged with John B. Williams *Leaves from the Note-Book of a New York Detective* (1865) which also featured the first official American detective hero in Joe Brampton¹². Brampton differed from Dupin in one important aspect: “he is his own agent and selects his own cases” (Worthington 25).

These examples already show the two categories of development of the genre in Britain and America in the later nineteenth century. In America, Pinkerton and his non-fictional accounts of private detective work found a ready audience. Pinkerton is noted only not for establishing the first American detective agency but also for two of his books, namely *The Expressman and The Detective* (1875) and *The Mollie Maguires and the Detectives* (1877). In both novels, the protagonist is “an extra-legal agent who explores a lawless world” (Marling “History of the Hard-boiled”). He does not work from the outside, simply interpreting clues and relying on his intellectual ability, but, in the case of *The Mollie Maguires and the Detectives*, also infiltrates an organization of Irish coal miners and he was not an amateur, but a professional detective of the Pinkerton Agency. Pinkerton’s books were not only important because of their different subject matter but also for their “understated style employing objective descriptions and short, clear sentences” (Marling “History of the Hard-Boiled”) which will later develop into a key feature of Dashiell Hammett’s prose.

In England, the country house mystery grew in importance and the whole genre followed the path laid out by the Dupin stories. The English detective was an

¹² Heather Worthington calls him „perhaps the first American urban detective” (25).

eccentric intellectual who investigated crime out of mere curiosity rather than to earn a living. The prime example for this model certainly is Sherlock Holmes.

Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes enters the stage of crime fiction in 1887 in *A Study of Scarlet* and throughout his literary career features in three other novels and countless short stories. An interesting feature of Doyle's narratives is that he treats Poe's Dupin as a historic figure and has Sherlock Holmes referring to him as "very inferior fellow" (qtd. in Rachman 21). Nevertheless, Holmes employs the same rational methods to solve his cases like Dupin¹³. But it was the character of Sherlock Holmes and the interplay between him and his "assistant" Watson that ensured his unprecedented success (Kayman 48-49). Holmes sets the standard for eccentricities for the detectives to come with his "anti-social Bohemianism and cocaine-taking" (Kayman 49). He is not only able to rely on his abilities to masterfully interpret clues but also relies on his extensive knowledge he has acquired through "systematic study and well-organised filing" (Kayman 50). He is a detective because of his "love of the neutral truth" (Auden 22) and seems that Sherlock Holmes is "more interested in mercy than in justice" (Ruehlmann 39) as he sometimes chooses to let the culprit go rather handing him or her over to the police. W.H. Auden identifies that this "scientific detachment [renders him vulnerable to] melancholia which attacks him whenever he is unoccupied with a case" (Auden 22).

Therefore it can be stated that Dupin is the first in a line of crime fiction protagonists which David Lehman subsumes under the title of "the Great Detective" (43). In the three stories featuring his detective, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" (1842) and "The Purloined Letter" (1844), already established "[n]early all of the conventions of the classic whodunit – from locked rooms to least likely culprits, eccentric sleuths and their admiring companions, dullard cops, and wrongly accused bystanders" (Lehman 71) and the urban setting as "its characteristic landscape is the big city with its

¹³ "The significance of the detective [in the formal detective story], rather, is that he or she sees we do ordinarily – reading the signs of clothing and manner, inventing life histories from casual remarks, reconstructing the tacit drama of society – only with more acuity." (McCann 15).

crowded thoroughfares, its factories, and its slums” (Lehman 117). And thereby Poe set the stage for the further development of detective fiction.

2.3 The Classical Detective Model – the Great Detective

The discussion of the hard-boiled novel as an American answer to or simply a logical successor of the Classic detective, or “Golden Age”, formula necessarily has to start with an analysis of the latter. The expression “golden age” is used to describe a “peculiarly blessed era of crime writing [and] an enduring model for later works” (Rowland 117), namely the Twenties and Thirties of the twentieth century. The departing point for every Golden age detective narrative is a murder which “in the classic whodunit takes place more often than not in an idyllic setting; the scene of the crime is a version of paradise” (Lehman 102). The crime is an act that threatens to destroy an otherwise “perfect” scenery, which is most of the time rather limited in scope, and the only way to restore its natural state is by solving the crime and exposing the culprit¹⁴. Sean McCann puts this in more a more political terms as he states that

[t]he classic detective story, in other words, articulates a tension basic to the classical liberal vision of society. It depicts a world in which the freedom of the individual creates an anarchic or soulless society. It is a society where communal bonds are absent; where human relations are cold and manipulative, or violent and warlike; where the law is corrupt, abstract, or impotent, and people are driven by heedless self-interest or primal urges – only then to reverse that image by banishing a pair of scapegoats (murderer and victim) who embody the worst of those evils.”(8)

The basic setting can also be described as “a closed murder [which is]one committed in a certain closed circle of persons , such as a house-party, in which it is known that the murderer is limited to membership of that actual group” (Berkely qutd in Lehman 102). In Agatha Christie’s *Murder in the Orient Express* (1933) or Doyle’s *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902), the plot is not only

¹⁴ Or, as David Lehman puts it: “It is an exceptional but finally temporary violation of the social order, not the mark of endemic rot within it.” (Lehman 110).

W.H. Auden interprets the form of the detective novel in a similar way, as he maintains that “nearly every example of detective fiction follows that basic outline – a pervasive skepticism, or paranoia, or guilt is dispatched, and life returns to its normal channels when the detective-genius banishes a criminal scapegoat.

limited to a certain location but also to a small number of people. But between Christie's work and the earlier novel of Doyle are a couple of defining differences. The most revealing analysis of Golden Age detective fiction comes from one of its leading writers S.S. Van Dine. Writing under this pseudonym, William Huntington Wright wrote twelve novels featuring Philo Vance, a character later on described by Chandler as "the most asinine character in detective fiction"¹⁵. Wright compiled a list of guidelines to write proper Golden Age detective fiction published under the title "Twenty rules for writing detective stories" (1928). In these twenty rules, Wright exposes, deliberately or not, the nature of the classic whodunit which several critics have labeled the "golden age clue-puzzle" (Rowland 117). He describes this subgenre as "a kind of intellectual game [in which] [t]he reader must have equal opportunity with the detective for solving the mystery" ("Twenty Rules").

In *Detective Fiction*, Charles J. Rzepka compares detective fiction to "a hunt, probably the oldest human activity requiring detective skill" (14). He goes even further in comparison as he likens the detective and the reader to "two hunters in pursuit of the same pheasant [the solution of the case] with the author presiding as a kind of 'master of the hunt', ensuring fair play between the competitors" (14). The list of rules is mostly concerned with how the murder should take place, who is to be amongst the possible suspects and how to ensure this fair play between reader and detective but there are also hints at characteristics of Golden Age detective fiction which drew the most criticism. In rule 16, for example, Wright states that the "detective novel should contain no long descriptive passages, [...] no subtly worked-out character analyses, [...] [as] such matters have no vital place in a record of crime and deduction" ("Twenty rules"). The next rule, number 17, might be the one Chandler had in mind when he praised the realism of hard-boiled detective fiction¹⁶. Here Wright stresses that a "professional criminal must never be shouldered with the guilt of crime in a detective story" ("Twenty rules")

¹⁵ Interestingly, this part of Chandler's essay is left out in the edition used for this thesis but can be found in an online version of the whole text (see Chandler, Raymond. "The Simple Art of Murder" *The American Literature Archive* 15. August, 2010)

¹⁶ "The cold, precise quality of mind was an essential element in the detective-as-aesthete school, the tenor of which inclined more towards fantasy than realism." (Ruehlmann 37).

and concludes that only “amateur” criminals are able to commit a “really fascinating crime” (ibid.).

Because of this “game” character, Golden age detective fiction actually deserves the label “interactive” as the reader is invited, sometimes by asides of the detective, to take part in the solving of the “puzzle”. Rowland speaks of a kind of democratization of the form because of this. Reader and detective are in this respect equal (119). Crime, mostly murder, is therefore just the starting point of mental acrobatics and not something threatening. Or, in the words of David Lehman, “[m]urder, in the golden-age whodunits, had become the literary equivalent of a sophisticated parlor game. And where the puzzle’s the chief thing, the dead body in the library is just the convenient first premise in a brain-teasing problem in logic“(Lehman 148).

Despite all the similarities to the stories of Holmes and Dupin, there are certain differences to be found in this form. Whereas Holmes was able to proceed in a scientific, emotionally detached manner from the initial puzzle to its solution, the Golden age detectives are not able to proceed in this “linear fashion” (Rowland 120), as they have to engage with the suspects and often become emotionally, even romantically, involved with the people they meet in the respective case. Where Holmes progresses by mere observation and subsequent analysis, his successors need to talk their way to the solution by interviewing all possible suspects.

Susan Rowland also ascertains a “feminization of the form” (121) in contrast to Sherlock Holmes, who in her view “resembles ancient male heroes of epics who embarked on a quest, met obstacles, and ultimately triumphed” (Rowland 120). One manifestation of this is the feminization of the detective himself as “they bring into the crime-solving field non-rational, emotive, so-called ‘feminine’ methods to rank equally with hard ‘masculine’ rationality” (Rowland 121). Additionally this form also employed female detective protagonists like, most famously, Miss Marple. On the whole, there is considerable “modification of the typical heroic quest of the masculine knight errant” (Rowland 122) towards of a more “feminine” form.

Following Sean McCann's argument, Susan Rowland also emphasizes the role of the forces of social change, in this case Modernism, or "Modernity" (123) as she puts it, in shaping the form of detective fiction. She argues that

[m]odernity is about competing ideas that constitute grounds for truth, knowledge, reality. Detective fiction is one of the chief spaces where the different grounds for knowledge are debated. What constitutes evidence? Is it the cigarette ash in the garden, the expression on the face of the suspect, the intuitive hunch of the detective? By refracting the modernist debate about knowledge through the grail myth, the golden age fiction refocuses Western understandings of gender and truth. [...] What is particularly modernist [...], is the debate in the feminized detective between knowledge gained by rational discrimination and separation (how the golden age form reads Holmes) and knowledge gained by connection, empathy or ethical feeling (what golden age detectives emphasize). (123)

In order to understand the nature and appeal of the Golden Age detective novel, the contemporary historical circumstances cannot be left out of consideration. Post-World War I society was deeply disturbed by the horrors of World War I. Death was not only a fictional concept but had been reality to a big part of society. Golden Age fiction can therefore be interpreted as "an attempt to heal the wasteland of the post-World War I modern world" (Rowland 123). Susan Rowland argues further that the solution of crime "in an acknowledged *fiction*, death itself is subject to *solution*. All the causes of death in that avowedly fictional world have been solved." (126). Hence the solution of crime and the expulsion of the culprit, who is shown to have no place in normal society, allows for a return to the "Great Good Place" (Auden 19) and "life returns to its normal channels when the detective-genius banishes a criminal scapegoat." (McCann 9)¹⁷. Nicholas Blake goes as far as calling "the murder mystery as modern substitute for a religious myth" (qtd. in Lehman 33).

The role of the police exemplified in Poe's and Doyle's work is continued as the detective "is called in whenever a crime is committed that defeats the ratiocinative powers of the authorities" (Ruehlmann 41) which appears to be every time a crime is committed. The Golden Age detectives "are mental

¹⁷ "Once violence is shown to be 'without motive' and 'absolutely alien from humanity,' society can return to its ordinary workings [...] once the threat of criminal interference is removed." (McCann 9).

supermen, emblems of the aristocratic intellect lording it over the prosaic bourgeois brain” (Lehman 64). They are still amateurs, except for Rex Stout’s Nero Wolfe, who actually works as a detective “but only to support his extravagant tastes” (Ruehlmann 43). But, like Holmes and Dupin, the Golden Age detective almost always is accompanied by a slightly dimwitted companion. Hercule Poirot has his Captain Arthur Hastings, Nero Wolfe works with Archie Goodwin and Philo Vance is accompanied by S.S. Van Dine.

3 Hard-boiled detective fiction

3.1 The American Hero

The hard-boiled detective has been described as “another avatar of that prototypical American hero, Natty Bumppo” (Grella 106). This section will try to discern who Natty Bumppo was and what other “American hero” either succeeded or followed his footsteps up to the emergence of the hard-boiled sleuth.

A discussion of the nature of the American identity and its heroes has to start with the Frontier Myth. As Henry Nash Smith states in the prologue to *Virgin Land: The American West as a Symbol and Myth*, it is

one of the most persistent generalizations concerning American life and character is the notion that our society has been shaped by the pull of a vacant continent drawing population westward through the passes of the Alleghenies, across the Mississippi Valley, over the high plains and the mountains of the Far West to the Pacific Coast. (3)

Frederick Jackson Turner’s statement about the importance of the frontier for the American identity and the imminent closing of it due to the lack of available space in his paper “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” in 1893 remained for a long time the “most familiar interpretation of the American past” (Smith 3). Turner also suggested that the West “was the most important among American sections, and that the novel attitudes and institutions produced by the frontier, especially through its encouragement of democracy, had been more significant than the imported European heritage in shaping American society” (Smith 250). For him, the frontier is the defining line of American cultural identity,

a “meeting point between savagery and civilization “ (Smith 251), and he maintained that only here the true values of democracy could be conceived.

The Wild West, as it came to be called, was the direct counterpart to the “agricultural West [who’s] inhabitants belonged to a despised social class” (Smith 52). The champions of the frontier were regarded to be quite different and were seen “not [as] members of society at all, but noble anarchists owning no master, free denizens of a limitless wilderness” (Smith 52). This glorification of this kind of “paradoxical rejection of organized society” (Smith 52) can be interpreted as the result of the mood of Primitivism, which is inextricably linked with Lord Byron. The most vocal advocates of this “mood of refined hostility to progress” (Smith 52) were young members of the New England upper class who dreamt up this myth of the noble frontiersman.

The first concrete American Hero was Daniel Boone who was immortalized in various books and other works of art, most notably in *The Adventures of Daniel Boone* (1813) by Daniel Bryan and in a sculpture in the National Capitol (Smith 53). Boone was a frontiersman who gained fame as the founder of the Commonwealth, was actually an emissary of culture and civilization but popular belief and myth-making made him the essential man of the woods and portrayed him as “a fugitive from civilization“ (Smith 54). Lord Byron, for example dedicated several stanzas in the eighth canto of his epic poem *Don Juan* (1819-1824):

The General Boon, back-woodsman of Kentucky,
Was happiest amongst mortals anywhere;
For killing nothing but a bear or buck, he
Enjoy'd the lonely, vigorous, harmless days
Of his old age in wilds of deepest maze

Crime came not near him--she is not the child
Of solitude; Health shrank not from him--for
Her home is in the rarely trodden wild,
[...]

'T is true he shrank from men even of his nation,
When they built up unto his darling trees,--
He moved some hundred miles off, for a station
Where there were fewer houses and more ease;
The inconvenience of civilisation
Is, that you neither can be pleased nor please;

But where he met the individual man,
He show'd himself as kind as mortal can.

Although he is celebrated as the prototypical man-of-the-woods despising the stranglehold of civilization, other accounts by contemporaries of his life suggest that it was rather his fondness for hunting that sparked his preference for solitude (Smith 55). But nonetheless, he remains the impersonation of myth of the frontiersman.

Next one in line was James Fennimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo, better known as Leatherstocking, whose adventures were at least partly based on exploits of Boone. Both "these heroes [Boone and Leatherstocking] love the freedom of the forest, both take a passionate delight in hunting, and both dislike the ordinary pursuits of civilized men" (Smith 60). According to Henry Nash Smith, the character of Bumppo impersonates the "antithesis between nature and civilization, between freedom and law" (60) and represents the "most important symbol of the national experience of adventure" (61).

Bumppo is displayed as "a man of venerable age" (Smith 67) who has already lived the best part of his life and is experienced. As regards his relationship to women, he is best described as "hopelessly beloved" (Smith 67). The Leatherstocking persona does not allow for the character to be married. Charles J. Rzepka identifies Bumppo as

the frontier prototype of the American cowboy hero. A defender of civilization and ally of the white settlers and military personnel who represent its advance in the wilderness, he is more temperamentally attuned to the natural world that these forces are trying to subdue, and more emotionally resonant with its 'good Indian' inhabitants. His frontier sympathies tend to align Bumppo with the thief-taker detectives of early crime narratives, who are similarly positioned astride a fuzzy boundary between law and disorder. Cooper's frontier shares something else in common with the earliest detective's stories, something that proved irresistible to contemporary writers of crime fiction, particularly in France. All of his stories feature scenes of tracking and pursuit using acts of empirical induction. (58)

The establishment of the dime novels with the publication of Beadle & Adams *Beadle's Dime Novel Series* in 1860 (Smith 90) marked the beginning of a revolution in publishing and between 1860 and 1865 five million copies of series

were sold (Smith 91). Because of the mass publication and large-scale production¹⁸ standardization of the product to suit customers' expectations both in packaging and content was very important (Smith 91). The basis of their success was "the perfection of formulas which could be used by any numbers of writers, and the inspired alteration of these formulas according to the changing demands of the market" (Smith 91) but in the end they are perceived "subliterary" in status (Smith 91). The rise of competition caused an overemphasis of "violence and bloodshed for their own sakes, to the point of overt sadism" (Smith 92). There was also a renunciation of "the ostensibly Western locales" (Smith 92) and at the end of the nineteenth century the Western dime novel relied almost exclusively "upon conflicts between detectives and bands of robbers" (ibid.).

The Beadle Western hero is "the representation of a benevolent hunter without a fixed place of abode, advanced in age, celibate, and of unequalled prowess in trailing, marksmanship, and Indian fighting" (Smith 92). Not surprisingly, the character of Leatherstocking was taken as the role model for the protagonists of these stories. The writers so closely followed the formula that a great number of "more or less exact replicas of Leatherstocking [...] as [of] seventy-nine dime novels selected [...], forty contain one or more hunters or trappers whose age, costume, weapons, and general functions entitle them to be considered lineal descendants of the original" (Smith 95). This fact certainly accounts for the immense popularity of the Leatherstocking figure as the character became more or less a stock character of Western fiction.

Although the Western hero did not develop in a discernable linear way there was a trend "towards creating a hero-type based on the Leatherstocking *persona* but made younger and more genteel" (Smith 98-99). The most prominent example for this development would be Deadwood Dick. This character did not only combine the qualities of Leatherstocking and "the traditional genteel hero" (Smith 101) but also exhibits traces of the villain, as he himself was once a bandit like his antagonists. In the stories and novels, he almost exclusively takes over the role

¹⁸ Henry Nash Smith quite rightly argues that "[f]iction produced in these circumstances virtually takes on the character of automatic writing" (Smith 91).

of the detective (Smith 101) and is in contrast to his predecessors neither celibate nor deliberately solitary.

The last of the Western heroes under scrutiny is Buffalo Bill. Henry Nash Smith describes him as the “most famous of dime novel heroes” (102) and is modeled after the Honorable William F. Cody, who is best known for staging his own Wild West Show. Those who wrote about the adventures of Buffalo Bill claimed “to be writing chapters in the biography of a living celebrity” (Smith 102). Since Boone, reality has been altered to fit the demands of the myth in fiction and Cody is the first to embrace this fact and was able to make a living from it. Cody became a figure of public interest and influential publishers wanted to place him alongside earlier American heroes and give him equal status among them.

The cowboy did only become the most recognizable type of the hero of the Wild West emerged only after the successes of Buffalo Bill the last decades of the nineteenth century. Henry Nash Smith states that “[t]he American hired man on horseback did not become a celebrated figure until the range industry spread northward from Texas over the Great Plains in the early 1870’s” (Smith 109). The cowboy was generally perceived as overly violent and therefore not suitable to become a national hero but he was equipped with “a strange, paradoxical code of personal honor, in vindication of which he will obtrude his life as though it were but a toy” (King qtd. in Smith 109). The earliest recorded use of a cowboy as a protagonist in a Beadle novel dates back to 1887. As protagonists in these stories, the cowboy has little to with cattle but instead sees it as his “professional duty [...] to fight Indians, Mexicans, and outlaws”(Smith 111) and because of this only appears to be an update on the earlier heroes of Western fiction.

But there is also another side to the Western. William Ruehlmann, for example, indicates that

[t]he American Western is a morality play whose end is retribution, not redemption. Jack Schaefer’s *Shane* (1949) is the essence of the myth that the gunfighter does not triumph over evil, he merely survives it. The sodbusters may settle on the bodies of the enemies he has killed for them, but his sins leave him no place among them, hopelessly excluded like Moses from the Promised Land. [...] This moral muddiness

indigenous to the Western became by birthright quality of the Eastern – or private eye novel. (6)

The Western did not only provide for the hero-protagonist of American fiction to come but also established the moral dimension that would become a central theme in hard-boiled fiction.

3.2 Origins

The origins of hard-boiled fiction lie in the so-called ‘pulp’, inexpensive fiction magazines printed on cheap wood pulp paper (see Rzepka 181), which succeeded the aforementioned ‘dime novels’¹⁹. They catered for a mainly working-class audience, which longed for tales or for stories to strengthen their belief in the ‘American Dream, especially the tale of “limitless freedom and opportunities for self-reinvention” (Rzepka181). The publishers of these magazines were more than ready to offer support to this faith, as there was good money to be made. And exactly this combination of social Darwinism and the prospect of success for everybody, this “master formula” (Rzepka 182), is what made these stories and hence these magazines as popular and thriving as they were. Belief in these principles especially flourished in these times when the common American was being “victimized by America’s most successful exemplars of self-empowerment” (Rzepka182), at a time when a fundamental helplessness against the powers from above dictated daily life²⁰. So the Westerns and this new form of detective fiction provided for a most welcome escape from the harsh reality of an industrialized society²¹.

The most popular and probably most famous example of these pulp magazines is the *Black Mask*. Founded in 1920 by H.L. Mencken and his partner George Jean

¹⁹ Marling traces the origins back even to the “yellowbacks” of American Civil war (Marling “Summary”).

²⁰ For a detailed analysis of the socio-cultural development of the time of the emergence of the hard-boiled detective novel see Marling, William. *The American Roman Noir: Hammett, Cain, and Chandler*. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1995.

For an analysis of the impact of Hemingway and his literary style see Grebstein, N.S. “The Tough Hemingway and his Hard-Boiled Children.” *Tough Guy Writers of the Thirties*. Ed. David Madden. Carbondale, IL.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968. 18-41.

²¹ In *The Gunfighter and the Hard-Boiled Dick*, Cawelti quite heavily argues for the connections between the western and hard-boiled detective fiction especially their ideological ties. A fact he further stresses in *Adventure, Mystery and Romance*.

Nathan as a scheme to provide for enough money to keep their more 'literary' publications afloat, it experienced its heyday under editor Joseph T. Shaw. During his reign he was able to attract such prominent writers as Hammett, and soon every dedicated writer of detective fiction strove to be published in this magazine. Most of these writers never gained the acclaim of mainstream literary criticism but were stigmatized as being literary workers rather than credible artists (see Haut 3).

Gill and Hart argue that hard-boiled detective fiction evolved from the "adventure detective tales" (634), like those of Nick Carter, which already differed from the classical British detective stories as they were "less concerned with the intellectual process of crime-solving than a good physical challenge and a display of natural cunning" (634). Nonetheless this genre still featured amore gentleman-like protagonist, a "cleaned-up hero"²² as Marling calls him (*Detective Novels*). Several critics have noted that the writing style of this new genre and the "hard-boiled school of writing" in general heavily borrowed from Hemingway and the Naturalists²³.

Besides the myth of Manifest Destiny, already mentioned in the discussion of Turner's writing, Cawelti singles out a "myth of justification" ("Myths of Violence" 530) which, with varying degree, is a feature throughout the genre. He relates that myth to "one of the oldest and simplest human conceptions about justice, the *lex talionis*" ("Myths of Violence" 530). In most of the stories the villain is ultimately brought down by the use of violence and which might expose "a deep underlying commitment to a primitive sense of justice [...] under the veneer of civilization" ("Myths of Violence" 531). Even though the basic hard-boiled formula deviated in certain points from this myth, as will later be shown, it provides a suitable starting point to analyze the appeal and evolution of this genre.

²² "Nick had no vices. He did not drink, smoke or swear and he never shaded the truth save when he was trying to outwit some culprit, at which time, of course, no holds were barred" (Robert Clurman qtd. in Ruehlmann 49)

²³ See Cawelti "The Gunfighter and the Hard-Boiled Dick" 61 and Willett "Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction."

Dennis Porter argues that these stories were as successful in the 1920s and 1930s with good reason, especially in California, as the American Dream slowly began to crumble. The illusion to be able to leave everything behind and 'go west' to forge one's own destiny was nothing more than a myth. The frontier had simply reached its western limits and space was no longer available for free²⁴. Porter further identifies an increased class conflict and, most importantly, the enactment of the 18th Amendment to the Constitution and the following era of Prohibition as additional factors. Thousands of formerly ordinary Americans turned into criminals claiming their shares in the flourishing business of bootlegging which opened the scene for organized crime. America's urban landscape was afloat with violence and crime, and this situation called for a new form of fiction to mirror the harsh reality²⁵.

In his book *Gumshoe America*, Sean McCann tries to draw an analogy between the development of hard-boiled detective and the rise and fall of Liberalism. He states that like liberal theory, the classic detective story was considered to no longer fit "the complex realities of an urban, industrial society [and therefore] needed to be saved from its own worst tendencies" (McCann 19). But there were also other forces at play besides the longing for a "more realistic" take on detective fiction.

Before *Black Mask* turned to publish hard-boiled fiction, it featured a host of Ku Klux Klan stories and articles which, in way similar to hard-boiled fiction, declared "that the only effective response to social ills was a form of vigilante justice that imposed order on the confusions of an urbanizing society" (McCann 40). But hard-boiled detective fiction did not feature the same racial and moral ideology as the Klan and actually directly opposed their beliefs. The Ku Klux Klan ideal was that of a community and the heroes of hard-boiled fiction could not be farther from being "communally minded, and they are rarely [...] good citizens" (McCann 46).

²⁴ For an extensive discussion of the influence of the frontier myth on the genre see Porter, Joseph C. "The End of the Trail."

²⁵ Beekman quite fittingly describes the hard-boiled detective as "an inmate of the jungle of concrete" (Beekman 150).

The writers of the pulps also saw themselves as offering “a refuge of honest, manly labor, independent of the ‘terribly effeminate’ world of [...] the slicks [the high-brow magazine]” (McCann 51).

Taking up the previous argument, the hard-boiled sleuth can be seen as the American answer to the question mark left by the classical British gentleman detective as this model did not really fit in the realities of everyday life in the metropolises of either coast. So their stories came to be known as “accurate portraits of American life” (Grella 105). And even though there appears to be no rigid set of rules for the hard-boiled detective story as it was the case with the “Classical Model” (see Rupp 54), it is possible to identify a distinct formula:

Essentially it describes the detective’s recruitment for a dangerous assignment, carnal and material rewards if he drops the case, "ritual" beatings and threats to his life if he does not, and his persistence and courage in carrying on despite these diversions. The detective is often a "type" - a bachelor, individualistic, unswervingly honest, isolated and classless, who tends to regard most social and political institutions as soft or too amenable to corruption. The hard-boiled genre is a peculiar mix, celebrating American individualism while at the same time denigrating the corruption of American society. As nearly every reader of hardboiled fiction knows, even the style in these stories is formulaic, with the adventure usually related in the first person by the detective himself who, when not given to tortured similes, is usually terse, laconic and objective, simply telling what he sees, hears, thinks, and feels. (Margolies qtd. in Rupp 55-56)

As Rupp states that “[h]ard-boiled ist nicht der Heftchenroman, nicht der Detektiv mit dem Revolver, nicht der Gangster mit der Maschinenpistole – *hard-boiled* ist die Weltanschauung, sind Ideologien“ (53). There are no real rules, in the sense of the classical “whodunit”, to which the writer of hard-boiled (detective) fiction is obliged to adhere but the observation of the correct “atmosphere”. The immediate focus shifts from the mystery/crime and its solution to the depiction of the society and its ills, the detective himself and the “attitude“(Rupp 56).

4 The Classical American Hard-boiled Sleuth

In order to discuss the classical hard-boiled detective novels, there will first be a short discussion of each of the authors of the works under review.

4.1 The authors

4.1.1 Dashiell Hammett²⁶

Hammett is often credited to have been the writer who perfected the hard-boiled detective, if not even being the inventor of this genre. Actually, the figure of this hard bitten private eye first appeared in the form of Carroll John Dally's Terry Mack in *Three Gun Terry*, who was the direct mold for his famous Race Williams character. But as William F. Nolan puts it,

[t]he writing was impossibly crude, the plotting labored and ridiculous, and Race Williams emerged as a swaggering illiterate with the emotional instability of a gun-crazed vigilante. (35)

With Hammett starting to write for the *Black Mask* magazine, realism entered the scene of detective fiction. He certainly did not invent the hard-boiled private eye all by himself, but he provided for a distinct style that came to shape this new genre to mirror the urban culture of the times. The basic factor why his stories achieved more critical acclaim than the ones of Dally appears to be quite obvious. Hammett was no writer trying to fill pages with his fictional hero's adventures. He had first-hand experience in the sleuth business and hence really knew about the reality of a life as a private eye.

Hammett was born on May 27, 1894 as Samuel Dashiell Hammett on a farm in St. Mary's County, Maryland. Although he is said to have been a good student equipped with "native intelligence" (Rzepka190), he was forced to leave school early to support his family. After a series of rather diverse and poorly paid jobs, he joined the Pinkerton National Detective Agency in 1915.

This agency offered services of private security guards and detectives and was established in 1850. The agents came to be known as "Pinkerton's". At first Hammett only worked as desk clerk, and only after some time did he come to work as an "operative" to gather his field work experience which would later benefit his writing career.

²⁶ Most of this chapter will be taken from the chapter on Hammett in Nolan *The Black Mask Boys*, if not indicated otherwise.

He eventually left the Pinkerton's in 1918 to enlist in the U.S. Army. But before he was sent overseas he contracted influenza which seriously damaged his lungs and heart, a condition that would tantalize him for the rest of his life. Hammett then took up the profession of a detective again, but his deteriorating health - he also suffered from tuberculosis - forced him to quit the business in early 1922. It is open to speculation whether there were any additional reasons for him to quit the Pinkerton Agency. The agency had become infamous as strike breakers during the labor strikes of the 1870s. This actually seems to be in stark contrast to his left-wing sympathies which also found their way into his work as a writer and later on also had severe effects on his private life. As Gregory suggests, he may as well have become "disillusioned with the amoral nature of the job, the fact that anybody with enough money could hire their dirty work done" (qtd. in Rippetoe 35). Hammett offers one episode where he, in his role as Pinkerton agent, was approached to work as a hit man to dispose of an annoying unionist. This was a job he naturally refused but the murder was committed nonetheless. Given the condition of his health, these circumstances may not have been the key factors in quitting the agency, but they may have eased his decision.

Having always had great respect for creative writing and being an enthusiastic reader from his youth, Hammett decided to make a career in writing advertising copy. He even registered for training courses in Munson's Business College to be properly prepared (Nolan76). Soon he started to write short poems and satiric texts which he sold to H.L. Mencken to be published in *The Smart Set*. It was obviously this connection to Mencken, although no longer working on the magazine himself, which sooner or later brought Hammett to the *Black Mask*.

His first submission, a crime story called "The Road Home", was immediately bought and after his instant success his "reign" over the pages of the most influential American magazine began.

Besides gaining invaluable practical experience for his new profession, he was also equipped with the proper code of behavior for a detective:

Never cheat a client. Never break a law that violates your integrity. Stay anonymous. Never take physical risks unless absolutely necessary. And,

above all, be objective; never become emotionally involved with the client or anyone else connected with a case. (Nolan qtd. in Rippetoe 34)

If one chooses to work along the outer limits of interpretation of these regulations, one could easily end up being the personification of the hard-boiled sleuth. This suggests that these tough-as-nails private eyes were not simply products of creative imagination but most possibly as real as the crimes they fight.

Although Hammett was the leading writer of the *Black Mask* and practically a literary “star”, money was always an issue for him. He quit the magazine in 1926 to work for a jeweler, and later on, as his financial situation further deteriorated after the birth of his second daughter, he sought employment in advertising. Unfortunately his medical condition rendered him unfit for this kind of office work and he was soon forced to leave his new job because of the symptoms of his tuberculosis.

This turn of events can either be seen as fate or mere chance, but the *Black Mask's* new editor John Shaw managed to persuade Hammett to return to writing crime fiction with the promise of higher wages and extended creative freedom under the condition that he would produce a full-length Continental Op novel. And Hammett delivered – *Red Harvest* was his first published novel, a collection of several novelettes. Until the end of 1930 he wrote no fewer than 3 other novels, *The Dain Curse*, *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Glass Key*, which were to consolidate his position as the cream of the crop.

As his career flourished, his health also improved drastically but Hammett had become a heavy drinker and chain smoker who spent his money in gambling joints and on women.

His successes in writing pulp fiction inspired him to again leave the *Mask* and also his wife, this time to become a highly sought-after screen writer in Hollywood. In his final crime novel, *The Thin Man*, he abandoned the solitary hard-boiled private eye and instead used a crime-solving high society couple. William Nolan interprets this as a “bitter and savage social portrait” and suggests that Hammett “no longer believed that a lone detective [...] could make any impact on a corrupt society” (Nolan 78). So he turned to radical left-wing politics.

He even joined the American Communist Party in 1937, and, at the age of forty-eight, he enlisted in the Army during World War II to help fend off Fascism.

After the war, he tried to resume his writing career with the goal to leave behind the label of being a “crime writer”, a denomination which he came to despise at this time. On the other hand, the royalties which he received for numerous adaptations of his earlier works provided good money to support his lavish lifestyle. Again, he also devoted a large portion of his time to political activism, which during the 1950s era of McCarthyism led to him being blacklisted, and he even had to serve a short jail term. This essentially meant that he was “unemployable” (Nolan79), and after the IRS levied a huge tax bill against him, he was destitute for the remainder of his years. His health was also in steady decline as he suffered a heart attack and later on was diagnosed with lung cancer.

He lived as a recluse for most of the last twelve years of his life and died on January 10, 1961, at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York.

4.1.2 Raymond Chandler²⁷

If Hammett is to be considered the king of hard-boiled detective fiction, Raymond Chandler can easily be labeled as the rightful heir to his throne. The former's achievement was to lend the genre a much needed touch of realism, and it is claimed that the contribution of the latter is of a more subtle kind.

Chandler was born in Chicago on July 23, 1888, to an Irish mother and an American father. His parents' marriage was far from happy as he later referred to his father, who obviously was no family man, as a "swine" (Nolan 224). Divorce was inevitable, and when Chandler was seven, his mother Florence took him to England to live with her relatives near London. According to a friend of his, this was not really improvement to their situation as they were treated badly by his aunt and grandmother (Nolan 225).

From 1900 to 1905, Chandler received a classical education at Dulwich College, which is said to have fostered his love for the English language (Nolan 225). After graduation he did not attend university but rather spent time traveling through Europe. In 1907, he became a naturalized British citizen to take the Civil Service examination which led to a secure government position in the Admiralty. Soon it became clear that the young Chandler did not see his future in this job. He wanted to become a writer and had quite a number of essays and reviews published in various journals. Nonetheless, he was not able to establish a career that could provide for sufficient financial support. After about three years, he was forced to re-orientate himself, and so he went back to the United States. He quickly found work as a bookkeeping-accountant through the Warren Lloyds, members of a Los Angeles oil dynasty.

During the war as a British citizen, he enlisted in the Canadian army "to see some action" (Nolan 225). What he "saw" transcended "action" by far. Acting as a platoon commander at the Western front, he was the only surviving member of

²⁷ Most of this biography will be taken from the chapter on Hammett in Nolan *The Black Mask Boys*.

his squad after being ordered to lead his men into direct machine-gun fire. This was an experience which deeply disturbed Raymond Chandler.

After the war, he had a string of low-wage jobs until, again through his association with the Lloyds, he obtained a job in the Dabney Oil Syndicate. At first he quickly moved up in the business's hierarchy but, allegedly unhappy with working in the oil industry (Nolan 226), he resorted to binge drinking and neglected his work. Unsurprisingly, this led to his dismissal in 1932. He could not have chosen a worse time to be laid off as the Depression had the economy in its stranglehold.

William Nolan claims that after coincidentally picking up a copy of the *Black Mask*, Chandler immediately decided to write for this magazine (Nolan 228). He spent five months on his first story, "Blackmailers Don't Shoot", which was eagerly bought and subsequently published by editor Joe Shaw. The Los Angeles he wrote about was ruled by a powerful crime syndicate including lawyers, politicians and members of the police department. In his stories, Chandler attacked this situation as he found it unbearable.

His collaboration with Shaw had been most stimulating but eventually both men left the magazine and Chandler switched to *Dime Detective*. But, similar to his first venture into the world of writing, the pulps could never provide for a decent standard of living, as Chandler was obviously not able to "churn" his stories out fast enough. Seeking a new mode to make a living from writing, he turned to novels as his source of income.

His first novel, *The Big Sleep*, also the first appearance of Philip Marlowe, was published in 1939. Although criticized for its overly complex plot, it paved the way for Chandler as successful novelist. In 1940, the second book, *Farewell, My Lovely*, appeared, and until 1943 two more, *The High Window* and *The Lady In The Lake*, followed. By then he was firmly established as an author and, like Hammett, he went to Hollywood as a screen writer. This improved his finances dramatically and by 1945 paid "an income tax of \$50,000" (Nolan 228).

In 1946 he quit his life as a “labor nomad”, mostly due to the declining health of his wife, and settled in Southern California. After a screen job for Alfred Hitchcock failed, Chandler decided to again devote all his time to writing novels.

But his wife's condition made it hard for him to conjure up the breezy spirit of Marlowe, and so *The Long Good-Bye* was much darker and arguably his “most ambitious attempt to fashion a work of genuine literature from the restrictive materials of detective fiction” (Nolan 229).

The death of his wife in 1954 put Chandler under further emotional distress, and in 1955 he unsuccessfully tried to commit suicide, which ended with his hospitalization in a psychiatric ward. He then returned to England where he finished his seventh Marlowe novel *Playback*. His relationship to his London agent also deepened considerably, but their marriage never took place as Chandler died of pneumonia on March 26, 1959.

Although Chandler never gained any experience as detective himself like Hammett, his impact on the hard-boiled detective novel was immense. His “special power” was the knowledge about the inner workings of the Southern Californian nouveau riche and the greater Los Angeles area. His protagonist Philip Marlowe is said to differ greatly from the protagonists of Hammett while but Chandler’s novel are still fashioned according the “hard-boiled principles”. As Rippetoe observes, he is one who acts by a code that is more than the professional ethic of the Continental Op, or the fierce determination not to 'play the sap' for anyone” (Rippetoe, 2004, p.61). In this respect, Chandler adheres more closely to the classical model than one would first expect from a writer of hard-boiled fiction. Because of this, Marlowe “does his duty because tradition demands it” (Rzepka202) and does it in a chivalric fashion like the knightly heroes of medieval legends.

4.2 The detectives

This chapter will be devoted to the analysis of a selected set of classical hard-boiled detectives of the aforementioned authors, aiming at establishing shared characteristics. The study will be structured along the categories of “Appearance”, “Character”, “Alcohol”, “Cases”, and “Relationships”.

Naturally, there is a whole array of fictional private eyes that would be worthy of analysis and would also add to the scope of this thesis but in the following only three protagonists will be discussed. The detectives under scrutiny will be Hammett’s Continental Op and Samuel Spade and Chandler’s Philip Marlowe. This choice is due to spatial limits, as mentioned before, as well as academic considerations. These three detectives represent the most important initial literary contributions to the genre and therefore set a standard and defined the hard-boiled sleuths to come. Although Carroll John Daly presented his character Race Williams already in 1923, only months earlier than Hammett, and Spillane’s Mike Hammer has probably become the most-read exemplar of this school of writing²⁸, these two exemplars should not be seen as representatives of a whole genre as the former is too crude a character²⁹ and the latter only represents its extreme violent strand³⁰. Race Williams’ character was too crude and his cases too “plain” while Hammer does stand only for one extreme feature, self-justice and the ensuing use of extreme violence, and thus his appeal does not go far beyond that. On the contrary, the three protagonists, which will be the focus of the first part of this thesis, each added another dimension to the “stock character” while still being consistent with the other key features of this genre. Hence they will be considered to offer enough insight into the private eye “psyche” to manage the task of creating a list of shared features of the different hard-boiled detectives.

²⁸ see Marling, William "Mickey Spillane"

²⁹ see the previously quoted statement from Nolan on page 9 of this thesis

³⁰ "a bloodthirsty manhunter like Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer" (Cawelti *Adventure* 170)

4.2.1 The Continental Op – “Professional” is my middle name

In order to offer an exhaustive analysis of the Continental Op character, the novels *Red Harvest* and *The Dain Curse* as well as the short stories collected under the title *The Continental Op* and *The Dain Curse, The Glass Key and Selected Stories* will be examined. It is to be noted that every story involving the Op is written as a first person narrative, thus the reader can only gather what he or she is told from his limited personal point of view.

The following quote from the short story “The Gutting of Couffignal” perfectly describes the Continental Op’s basic approach to work.

Now I'm a detective because I happen to like the work. It pays me a fair salary, but I could find other jobs that could pay more. [...] And liking work makes you want to do it as well as you can. Otherwise there'd be no sense to it. That's the fix I am in. I don't know anything else, don't enjoy anything else, don't want to know or enjoy anything else. You can't weigh that against any sum of money. (“The Gutting of Couffignal” 129)

He is a worker, one who takes pride in his occupation and strives to perform it as professionally as possible. And nothing else is of the least importance for him as “[t]he Op has no commitment, personal or social, beyond the accomplishment of his job” (Willet “Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction” ch. 2). His loyalty to his employer, the Continental Detective Agency, reaches the point where he identifies himself with the agency completely, as he proclaims in *Red Harvest* that “[w]hen I say *me*, I mean the Continental” (43). The Op “apparently has no life outside his work” (Malmgren 376) and seems to be content with this status quo.

In his essay on the art of writing crime fiction, Raymond Chandler described the quintessential figure of the hard-boiled detective saying that “down these streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. [...] He must be a man of honor. [...] He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world” (“The Simple Art Of Murder” 18). The Continental Op has to make his ways down these “mean streets”, the streets of a city ravaged by corruption, greed and lust for murder. Is he the nameless savior to bring justice to this world where “crime is not a temporary aberration, but an ubiquitous fact” (Grella 111)?

According to J. D. Malmgren's interpretation of Chandler's article, hard-boiled detective fiction expresses "an ethos of the individual, the private 'I', and reinforces a popular American view, namely that justice finally depends more on the individual than on society" (Malmgren376). And Hammett structures his Op in a way that he appears to be this lone ranger who brings law and order to the multiplicity of Sodom and Gomorrah that is the American urban landscape³¹.

The Continental Op actually has no "name", only a job description instead. Therefore he does not act as a person but simply acts out a function. He does not exhibit any traces of having a private life and seems to be completely detached from his fellow men and their deficiencies except for the times he steps onto the stage to bring redemption. This detachment might serve as an indicator of his uncorrupted character without any connection to this corrupted world so that he conforms to Chandler's ideal, but it might as well be professional cautiousness to prevent those he cares for from the revenge of the crooks and criminals he has hunted down. At first glance, one would identify the Op as this "knight in shining armor". But does the Continental Op live up to the expectations his moral code and his nomenclature, or lack thereof, suggest?

4.2.1.1 Appearance

Charles J. Rzepka describes the Op as "short, overweight, middle-aged and easily winded" (188). The detective repeatedly offers descriptions of himself, as for example in "The Big Knockover" (1927).

I'm short and lumpy. My face doesn't scare children, but it's a more or less truthful witness to a life that hasn't been over-burdened with refinement and gentility. ("The Big Knockover" 128)

This statement serves as a kind of summary of all the other accounts of the Op's physical appearance. Other notable reference to his looks are to be found in "The Girl With The Silver Eyes" (1924) ("Little fat detective, whose name I don't know", *The Continental Op* 174) and *Red Harvest* where he is called "a fat, middle-aged, hard-boiled, pig-headed guy" (*Red Harvest* 83).

³¹ For Christianson this scenario is very much reminiscent of the pictures conjured up in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land (A Heap of Broken Images)*.

Otherwise the Op's appearance does not feature prominently in the stories and novels. In the end, the focus of Hammett's narrative seem to be on the Op's character rather than on his visual aspect as he is just an "average Joe", although hardened in both looks and attitude.

4.2.1.2 Character

Even though Willett implies that the Op is a "two-dimensional figure" (Willett ch.2), Hammett's first protagonist is not as poorly equipped in the character department as for example Carroll John Daly's Race Williams. Personville, the town to host the plot of *Red Harvest*, is full of people pretending to be someone else. In that respect, Personville, or "Poisonville to the cognoscenti" (Grella111), is a "realistic" city. It is realistic because, according to Chandler, "the realist in murder writes of a world in which [...] a screen star can be the finger man for a mob, the nice man down the hall is a boss of the numbers racket" ("The Simple Art Of Murder" 17), and bringing realism to the hard-boiled novel is one of the major achievements Hammett is credited with. The Op himself participates in the town's favorite pastime of role-playing without any second thoughts. And although the Op argues that this is "required in his profession [and] [...] enables him to get the job done" (Malmgren373), it is nonetheless a marker of dishonesty and not a sign of honor.

His work in Personville, where he is hired to rid the town of gangsters by the local oligarch, Elihu Willsson, who brought them in himself to break a miner's strike, eventually brings out the worst in him. The novel *Red Harvest* is exceptional as regards the decay of the Op's moral standards as he admits that this town is "poisoned" (156) and that he is going "blood-simple" (157). As will be shown later on, he normally rather takes the role of commenting on and simply giving a detailed account of the events he becomes involved in, as suggested by passages such as the following taken from *The Dain Curse*.

Mrs. Begg said she doubted whether she could tell me anything that would pay me for my trip from the city, but she was willing to do what she could, being an honest woman and having nothing to conceal from anybody. Once started, she told me a great deal, damned near talking me earless. Throwing out the stuff that didn't interest me, I came away with this information: Mrs. Begg had been hired by Leggett, through an

employment agency, as housekeeper in the spring of 1921. At first she had a girl to help her, but there ... (*The Dain Curse* 218)

The general style of this section, and that of most of the stories concerned with the criminal cases of the Continental Op, lends itself to the interpretation of being that of a report which he is to submit to his superiors. Given the fact that Hammett certainly had to file more than enough of these reports himself, this interpretation is not too farfetched. One can argue that this device was consciously chosen by Hammett in favor of increased realism.

George J. Thompson stresses that any judgment of the Operative's acts in *Red Harvest* should take into account the "allegorical nature" (38) of this Personville-Poisonville pun. Initially he is called into town by a man he finds out to have been murdered. The victim's father, Elihu Willsson, obviously wants to capitalize on the current availability of a Continental Operative and urges him "to clear this pig-sty [...], to smoke out the rats" (*Red Harvest* 41). The Op promises him that he will get a "complete job or nothing" (*Red Harvest* 43). This again shows his utter devotion to professionalism. He is an all-or-nothing guy and even refuses to leave the town after he found Donald Willsson's murderer as suggested by Willsson senior. This conviction to fulfill his contracts practically urges him to do whatever is subjectively appropriate to complete his task.

It's right enough for the Agency to have rules and regulations, but when you're out on a job you've got to do it the best way you can. (*Red Harvest* 116)

In this turbulent world of crime and corruption, he is a kind of constant. His professionalism, his "personal code of ethics", although "it is more amoral than moral" (Thompson 44), is something which can be trusted within this framework of deception.

As the novel progresses, he himself becomes more involved in dealing out violence and pulling the strings in the background rather than actively trying to put an end to the "wholesale slaughter" (Malmgren 377). For example, he appears to act as a "peacemaker" and organizes a "peace conference" which is revealed to be a scheme to have the participants eliminating each other. After the

Op has solved the case of the murder of Donald Willson, he is determined to “have [his] fun” (*Red Harvest* 63), the “fun” being taking out his revenge on Personville and its citizens. George J. Thompson stresses that the Continental Op's character is now also shown to be subject to change but that his decision to “take out the trash” does not affect the reader's judgment of him. Instead Thompson argues that the events of the first seven chapters do not allow for any other action on behalf of the Op (see Thompson 45-46). The Continental Op leaves behind his professional code and becomes “more human, and more vulnerable” (Thompson 46). The Op explains the personal nature of his motive in chapter eight:

No. I don't like the way Poisonville has treated me. I've got my chance now, and I'm going to even up. [...] Poisonville is ripe for the harvest. It's a job I like, and I'm going to it. (*Red Harvest* 66-67)

This clearly contradicts other readings of the role of the Op within this vortex of violence, which put the blame on the “system” (Malmgren 377), in this case the Continental Detective Agency. Indeed, the Continental Op has stressed before that he enjoys his work, but this most obviously goes beyond his “job”. According to his code, the design of his revenge has to suit the circumstances. In doing so, “he is as guilty and morally reprehensible as the gangsters he exposes and helps to destroy” (Willett “Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction” ch.2). But, as Thompson points out, the Op has realized that “Machiavellian machination” (Thompson 48)³² is the only way to confront his enemies as “there's no use taking anybody into court, [...] [t]hey own the courts, and, besides, the courts are too slow for us now” (*Red Harvest* 117).

And from the time of this realization, the Continental Op carefully entangles everyone in town in the web of his vengeance, including innocent bystanders. But then again, who can really be considered to be “innocent” in this town of Poisonville? The Op certainly has lost his innocence upon “cleaning up”, that is, if his strict adherence to his code ever kept him from being guilty.

³² Actions which are “characterized by subtle or unscrupulous cunning, deception, or dishonesty” (Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language).

Interestingly enough, he is aware of his own moral corruption that is the result of his involvement in the affairs of Personville, as he admits to his involvement and fears about the possible consequences.

I've got myself tangled up in something and as soon as the Old Man smells it--and San Francisco isn't far enough away to fool his nose--he's going to be sitting on the wire, asking for explanations. I've got to have results to hide the details under." (*Red Harvest* 117)

The Op is not at ease in this situation and with what he has done so far. He knows that if he is not able to pervade his scheme and is not able to show any results, he is "done for" without any chance of redeeming himself. Onetime he states that he feels "so much like a native that even the memory of [his] very un-nice part in the boiling didn't keep [him] from getting twelve solid end-to-end hours of sleep" (*Red Harvest* 114), which clearly indicates that Poisonville has somehow "naturalized" him.

Malmgren doubts that any satisfying explanation for the Op's behavior can be found as he thinks that most of it is "ultimately unfathomable" (Malmgren 378). He advocates the position that the Op in *Red Harvest* is a character whose actions cannot be easily analyzed. As the pragmatist who uses every means at his disposal to complete his task, he later on becomes "the operated", when charged with the murder of Dinah Brand, (Malmgren, 379), the pawn of the town's negative forces.

The dilemma of the Continental Op is that he feels this professional urge to complete his task, the purging of the town, but has to sacrifice his own moral integrity to achieve this. In this respect, as stated earlier, the book portrays the "American myth of the rugged individual who finds his identity in doing what he must do" (Thompson 58). Interestingly, the Op admits in a conversation with Dinah Brand, the novel's femme fatale, that there were other options to choose from, but he chose the one that appeared to be the easiest. He also implies that this "fun" he talks about earlier is "not natural" (*Red Harvest* 156) to him and that the town makes him act this way, a "quasi-Marxian suggestion" of his alienation from his job (Thompson 59).

Finally, the Op may be the best man in this world of Personville, but this status comes at the unreasonable price of sacrificing his humanity and his feelings. And eventually all the violence that takes place in this town does not procure any basic change in its nature. It is still ruled by the man who brought this immense wave of crime and corruption to the city. So the Op's actions finally drain away like the blood he shed. Interestingly enough, Lewis D. Moore categorizes the Op as an example for the "professional/rational" (Moore41) fictional detective although his behavior, at least in *Red Harvest*, would suggest something else.

In the two-part story "Blood Money" (1927), consisting of "The Big Knockover" and "\$106,000 Money", the reader is initially presented a completely different Continental Op. His account of the bank robbery, in the course of which many crooks and policemen lost their lives, is completely devoid of any emotional involvement. It is as if he were retelling a police report he has read earlier. This is an impression that is further emphasized by the description of a woman entering a night club as "nice [...] – I know other words, but we'll stick to this one" ("The Big Knockover" 110). The Op mostly remains faithful to giving detailed accounts of his immediate surroundings, one of the devices Hammett used to increase the realism of this fiction. This story was published two years prior to the respective episodes of *Red Harvest*, so, the lack of character development, or better, the lack of additional dimensions of character, should not be surprising. There are several instances where The Continental Op stresses the degree of his "hard-boiledness" as he explains his indifference to death stems from the "horny skin all over what's left of [his] soul" ("The Big Knockover" 96).

At the end of this story, he is told that the man he just helped to escape was the mastermind behind the heist, and his reaction is not that of the selfless man of honor. He explains his inability to see behind the old man's scheme, that he was practically forced to accept one evil to escape certain death. Either he is not willing to sacrifice himself for the greater public good or he just does not want to admit that he has been tricked.

The first indications of the Op's capabilities in machinating others into solving his moral conflicts surface in "\$106,000 Blood Money". One of his fellow operatives is

in league with the crooks and on several occasions has tried to dispose of the Op. A behavior which is certainly not to be tolerated, especially from a man employed to be a minister of the law. He is also faced with an informant whom he suspects of having killed one of his clients. But instead of exposing the detective and the informant, and thereby hurting the agency's reputation, he excogitates a way to solve his dilemma. A shootout between the affected parties is arranged and the Op is able to kill two birds with one stone without actually taking part in the killing. After his plot worked out, he admits that he is "another Papadopoulos" ("The Big Knockover" 188), the criminal mastermind of the aforementioned heist.

4.2.1.3 Alcohol

Another important factor when discussing the classical hard-boiled detectives is their indulgence to alcohol. As already mentioned before, the respective writers were heavy drinkers themselves, and therefore it should as well come as no surprise that alcohol plays a prominent role in their stories. The "classic" hard-boiled detective almost necessarily relies on his flask of bourbon, which is always readily accessible in the top drawer of his desk.

In *Red Harvest* it becomes obvious that "[w]hatever its other rules, the Continental [Agency] apparently has none about drinking on the job" (Rippetoe 41). As Rippetoe further illustrates in her respective study *Booze and the Private Eye* (2004), such a rule would have made their operatives' work even more arduous. If the Op, with his wallet full of alternative identities, would have to abstain from drinking, "blending into the underworld and befriending criminals" (Rippetoe 41) would become virtually impossible.

The Continental Op can constantly be seen drinking with either his clients or to arrange his thoughts on them. As the plots of the stories he appears in is set in the time of Prohibition, the ease with which alcohol can be obtained and the obvious habit of drinking of all the characters shows that this piece of legislature did not pose any obstacle, economically and morally, to the involvement with liquor. Almost everyone seemed to be involved in the business of bootlegging, either directly or through certain acquaintances and no one actually seemed to care about the illegality of their consumption of alcohol. But there is no serving of liquor in public and the Op sometimes has to retreat to his hotel room in order to

enjoy a drink. And even in Poisonville, the bars offer their drinks only in separate, “private” rooms.

Alcohol meanders through the story like a red thread. The Continental Op is almost continuously imbibing liquor, and once he himself seems to be criticizing his condition when being summoned by Elihu Willsson: “I wish I were sober. His clowning puzzled me. I couldn’t put my finger on the something behind it” (*Red Harvest* 42). He acknowledges that a drunk detective is not always the most attentive one.

Interestingly enough, it is a sober Op who vows to take out his revenge on the town. But it appears that the Op somehow uses his constant drinking as a way “to blot out his consciousness of the results of his actions” (Rippetoe 45). This argument is further reinforced by the Op’s confessions of his discomfiture with the course of events and his own involvement in the bloodshed. In the end, another night of drinking ends in Dinah Brand being murdered and the Op awaking with the instrument of crime, an ice pick, in his hands.

In “The Golden Horseshoe” the Op describes his daily routine as he tries to gain information from a suspect by beating him in a drinking contest, the same tactic he tried to apply to Dinah Brand in *Red Harvest*: “the only time we weren’t drinking was when we were sleeping off what we had been drinking” (“The Golden Horseshoe” 62). This situation, amongst several others lavishly dispersed throughout the Continental Op stories, suggests that a professional detective is more or less required to hold his drink, or at least the methods employed by this particular sleuth demand this “ability”.

4.2.1.4 Relationships

This section will be concerned with the Continental Op’s relationships to both women and to other clients, police and colleagues.

In *Cracking the Hard-Boiled Detective*, Lewis D. Moore offers an accurate précis of the Op’s attitude towards the police: “work with them if possible [meaning, if necessary] although some may be corrupt but respect the honest ones for the

difficult job they perform” (Moore, 40). An example of such an expedient alliance is that with Personville’s head of police, Chief Noonan, which basically consists of arranging for each other’s death. Nevertheless, he has some friends in the police force, most notably Detective Sergeant O’Gar of the San Francisco Police Homicide Detail. O’Gar, as an Irish man, embodies the sociological cliché of the 1920s policeman. He serves as more or less the only figure in Hammett’s stories who actually qualifies as a “friend” of the Op. Although there are several characters to whom the Continental Operative has a kind of amicable relationship, like the writer Owen Fitzgerald in *The Dain Curse*, none of these affiliations go beyond what is required by the current assignment. This is also true of his relationship to the fellow operatives at the agency. They are professionals themselves and treat each other in this way. The only thing that connects them is a working alliance and their respective sense to fulfill their duty.

As for his relationships with women, they appear to be even more superficial than those to the police and his colleagues. Not even once does the Op ultimately fall for the “femme fatale” during his investigations. He might get involved with them on a platonic level as, for example, he shares his fears and inner conflicts with Dinah Brand, when drinking with her. In the end, he never takes the final step and never has sex with them. Moore argues that he might channel his sexual energy into his “lust for killing” (Moore, 2006, 82).

In the aforementioned scene from “The Girl with the Silver Eyes” (1924) which Malmgren describes as “the notorious seduction scene” (Malmgren, 374), the female protagonist tries to use her charm to escape her arrest. As she says:

Little fat detective whose name I don’t know [...] you think I am playing a part, don’t you? You think I am playing for liberty. Perhaps I am. [...] Men have thought me beautiful, and I have played with them. Women are like that. (“The Girl With The Silver Eyes” 174)

She goes on with her attempts to seduce the Op, which he fends off while admitting to struggle with his desires. He acts like a “wooden block of a man” (“The Girl With The Silver Eyes”175), and throughout the whole scene it is clear how hard it is for him to control himself. But the Op manages to keep his professional integrity and does not succumb to the girl’s charms.

So, the Op never enters a sexual relationship with the women he meets during his jobs. The attitude towards women he exhibits meets the expectations that one has upon hearing the term “hard-boiled”. Statements like “[w]omen aren’t always reasonable” (“The Girl With The Silver Eyes”¹⁶⁵) rather heavily reek of this lone-gun-man machismo. On the other hand, it looks like the Op is in some way afraid of women because they pose a threat to his otherwise composed and sober-minded character.

4.2.2 Samuel Spade – The blond Satan

The analysis of Spade’s features will be exclusively based on Hammett’s third novel *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), as this novel offers the best insight into Spade’s character.

The first thing that comes to mind when hearing “Samuel Spade” is probably “Humphrey Bogart”, as he was chosen to play the leading role in the 1941 film adaptation of *The Maltese Falcon*. Hammett’s first protagonist already had a “speaking name” and, possibly not as evident as with the Op, “Samuel Spade” definitely hints at Spade’s character traits:

call a spade a spade - to tell the truth about something, even if it is not polite or pleasant (*Cambridge Idioms Dictionary*)

Dennis Porter offers a concise and comprehensible analysis of this name as he argues that a man “who shares a name with a common tool, and with a proverbially honest tool at that, is a man of the people destined to speak the truth as he sees it, plain and clearly” (Porter 100). Critics agree that Spade, whilst being an improved version of the Op as regards looks, is “even less concerned with questions of morality” (Grella 108) than his predecessor. He has an affair with his partner’s wife and appears to be readily participating in the schemes of the novel’s crooks.

The immortalization because of Bogart’s performance as an actor has earned Samuel Spade the reputation to be the “most developed and memorable embodiment of the private eye type [i.e. the hard-boiled detective] in Hammett’s *œuvre*” (Porter 99). In this respect, Spade might as well be seen as the most

obvious choice for the reference character of a dictionary entry on the hard-boiled detective. As Porter argues, he is the “quintessential lone operator” (Porter 100).

The plot of *The Maltese Falcon* revolves around the tale and the quest for the retrieval of a gold statue of a falcon. Spade is drawn into the sequence of events as a young woman, Miss Wonderly, whose identity changes numerous times throughout the story, enters his office under the pretense of intending to find her runaway sister.

The way in which Spade is presented in this novel has led to rather diverse interpretations of his character. This discussion is especially sparked by his willingness to participate in the criminal’s scheme to retrieve the golden bird because of the prospect of receiving a considerable fee if he is successful. Also his behavior towards his partner, not to mention the affair he has with his partner’s wife, leads to identifying him as “a cold almost cruel man whose code of loyalty redeems him from an otherwise total amorality” (Grella 107). This question of morality or actually the perceived lack of morality in Spade’s actions is what has also driven a further wedge between the critics.

4.2.2.1 Appearance

On the novel’s first page, in the first paragraph even, Hammett offers a detailed description of his alleged alter-ego, as Porter argues for an “unmistakable act of auto-identification” (Porter 99) because of the identical given name. By contemporary standards it is highly questionable if Spade were to be considered an attractive man, but as mentioned before, any discussion of the detective looks’ will ultimately bring up the Bogart analogy.

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

The Maltese Falcon, 1

This portrayal of Spade’s physical appearance has led Ralph Willett to argue that he, just like the Continental Op, is “a stylized character constructed visually in modernist terms” (Willett “Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction” ch.2). George Grella

describes Spade as a “younger and more attractive” version (Grella 107) of the Continental Op. The “satanic looks” have led to the interpretation that “Spade (like Satan) is the ‘good guy’ who is also capable of killing without much compunction, and the emphasis on his satanic appearance leads us to reflect from the outset on his ‘wicked’ side” (Horsley *Hard-boiled investigators*).

Hammett unquestionably wants the reader to judge Spade at least partially “by his cover”, since this description is too explicit to be ignored and cast aside as meaningless description of his protagonist’s looks. Certainly such premature judgment is something that should be generally avoided, but the following section will show that this first impression is definitely not misdirected.

4.2.2.2 Character

George J. Thompson quite nicely sums up the scholarly view on Spade’s character as being an omnium-gatherum of starkly divergent analyses (see Thompson 95). Some describe him as “the only character who has integrity” (Blair qtd. in Thompson 95) whereas others like George Grella perceives him as “a cold, almost cruel man” (Grella 107).

Similar to the Continental Op, Samuel Spade might work on ridding the world of its shady characters but he is himself not immune to the occasional moral misstep. Again this can be put into perspective by referring to Chandler, as the detective’s own moral integrity is to be judged primarily against that of his “world”. And as will be shown in the following paragraphs, there is indeed a world in which a “blond Satan” is able to stand out as the best man.

The plot of *The Maltese Falcon* does not take place in a fictional town as this is the case in *Red Harvest*. The quest for the eponymous bird unfolds in the streets of the rather real city of San Francisco. It is not the whole city which is immersed in criminal activity such as Personville, only those who play a part in the plot show questionable character traits³³.

³³ Nonetheless Pettengell sees this novel as “another pessimistic portrait of American life (Pettengell 48).

In what has become the stereotypical scene for the beginning of a hard-boiled detective novel, Samuel Spade and his partner Miles Archer are asked by Miss Wonderly to save her younger sister from the clutches of the villainous Floyd Thursby. The two detectives agree to help the woman who most readily employs the image of the “damsel in distress”. This is the starting point for another of Hammett’s complicated plots where nothing and most importantly no one is what he/she seems to be.

In the same evening Spade’s partner is killed and the whole sequence of events starts rolling. Miss Wonderly admits that she really is Brigid O’Shaughnessy and that the job she had for Spade and Archer was also invented. And later on Joel Cairo enters the scene and, at first holding Samuel at gunpoint, offers \$5.000 for recovering said bird. Even in this first scenes Spade is continuously lied to and betrayed but even so he appears to be willing to trust those who readily prey upon his almost naïve affiance. He exhibits this behavior even when he obviously acts against better judgment as for example when he hands Cairo back his gun.

During this exchange with Cairo, where he agrees to recover the statue of the falcon, Spade reveals his code of ethics and makes it clear thathe is “ not hiring [him] to do any murders or burglaries for you, but simply to get it back if possible in an honest and lawful way” (*The Maltese Falcon* 51). He will not bend any rules and laws just to help someone to reclaim his rather dubitable ownership of some obscure statute.

The main concern of literary critics, or more exactly their major argument for the immorality of Spade, is the question whether Spade is aware of Brigid’s guilt in murdering in his partner right from the beginning or not. There are several scholars who argue in favor of his knowledge (see Grella 108) and interpret his willingness to help her and the fact that he obviously falls in love with her, as a sign of his own moral deficiency. George J. Thompson contradicts this assumption as he points out that Spade could not have been aware that Brigid is his partner’s murderer, and if he was, one “would be forced to regard him as a fool” (101) as he shows no sign of suspecting her. But then again, since the story is narrated from the third person perspective, we cannot peek inside the private

eye's thoughts and therefore the verdict on this issue will remain pure speculation.

Despite George J. Thompson's argument, there is little doubt that Spade is aware that Brigid is playing some sort of game and is not who she pretends to be, but still he seeks a way to trust her. He confronts her and openly asks her whether she has given him anything besides money to convince him of her "worthiness" to be guarded and, more importantly, trusted.

When his plea for some kind of token of confidence prompts Brigid to offer her body, he becomes "contemptuous and angry" (Thompson 102). Spade is willing to be her guardian angel, but not without reserve. He is a bitter and cynical man, who at least once wants his, quite negative, expectations to be disappointed.

The world in which Spade operates is one which is everything but stable and certain. The anecdote about a former client of his, Flithcraft, emphasizes this notion. Through narrowly escaping death by a falling beam, Flithcraft realizes that his life, although normal and desirable on the outside, was overshadowed by the illusion that everything is stable and predictable and leaves everything behind. The curious thing about the story is that eventually ends up living a life that is surprisingly similar to his former one. This can be seen as an illustration of the "inescapable loneliness and uncertainty of Spade's life" (Thompson 109).

The scene which deals with Spade's initial reaction to the news of his partner's death illustrates how he sets out to deal with life in general.

Spade's thick fingers made a cigarette with deliberate care, sifting a measured quantity of tan flakes down into curved paper, spreading the flakes so that they lay equal at the ends with a slight depression in the middle, thumbs rolling the paper's inner edge down and up under the outer edge as forefingers pressed it over, thumbs and fingers sliding to the paper cylinder's ends to hold it even while tongue licked the flap, left forefinger and thumb pinching their end while right forefinger and thumb smoothed the damp seam, right forefinger and thumb twisting their end and lifting the other to Spade's mouth.

He picked up the pigskin and nickel lighter that had fallen to the floor, manipulated it, and with the cigarette burning in a corner of his mouth stood up. He took off his pajamas. The smooth thickness of his arms, legs, and body, the sag of his big rounded shoulders, made his body like

a bear's. It was like a shaved bear's: his chest was hairless. His skin was childishly soft and pink. (*The Maltese Falcon* 11-12)

This behavior and the ensuing depiction of his appearance does not really support the notion of the “blond Satan” with the “wolfish grin”. In this “Hemingwayesque account” (Willett ch.2) Spade is shown as a man of “controlled and deliberate character” (Thompson 112).

In this environment of uncertainty and deceit he is the only one to create stability for himself through his actions. Nothing in this passage reveals any inner turbulence that would certainly be caused by his friend's death. Instead he acts in a stoic manner, elevating the rolling of the cigarette to almost ritualistic dimensions. On the other hand, this could also be interpreted as the manifesto of Spade's contempt for his former partner. This seems especially reasonable since he has had an affair with Archer's wife, Iva, which he cuts off after the death of Miles. So the murder might also have lifted a ten-ton weight off of Spade's conscience, if there is one to begin with.

Like the Op, it is his job to find the truth and, in order to accomplish this ambitious goal, he has to blend in with his surroundings. He assumes different roles and “becomes an expert at the art of illusion and role-playing” (Thompson 115) In that respect, Hammett's two major protagonists share the same fate, but Spade really masters this “art” as he is able to improvise his roles as he does when the police storm in on him, Cairo and Brigid. But the most important insight on his character in this scene is presented in his reaction to being hit by one of the officers. Spade is able to control his emotions as he reacts by only cursing “obscenely, blasphemously, repetitiously, in a harsh guttural voice” (*The Maltese Falcon* 82) after the policemen have left. He does not appreciate “being hit without hitting back” (*The Maltese Falcon* 82) but accepts this minor dent in his masculinity as a necessary evil on the way to “winning”.

In chapters XVIII and XIX, Spade not only acts as the quintessential tough guy, but also successfully plays off the psychological edge he has over all of the other individuals involved. His situation is almost desperate, but nevertheless he is able

to dominate his counterparts and furthermore acts perfectly as a fellow criminal, requesting a “fall-guy”, who is to take the blame for all the bloodshed in the course of events, he is searching for the answers to the yet unsolved murders and tries to drive a wedge between Gutman, Cairo and Wilmer (Thompson 119). Not surprisingly, Spade is successful. But the first murder remains unsolved still, but as neither Gutman, nor Cairo and not even Gutman’s gun”boy” Wilmer Cook are ruled out, only one possible suspect remains.

Naturally, as we are sure we can eliminate Spade from this list, the only person left is Brigid. The final chapter of the book then reveals the most about the detective’s character as now it is certain that his love interest of this case is the murderer of his partner and is furthermore the personified “femme fatale”. It is made clear that he is not indifferent to this situation because he most likely really loves Brigid, but he will not “play the sap” for her. Reluctantly, she tells him the true story, although she still tends to lie to him about the events that have led up to this scene. At first he seems rather harsh and commands her to tell him the truth. He tells her to quit that “schoolgirl-act” (*The Maltese Falcon* 209) and openly asks her why she has committed the murder.

Spade dissects every single answer of her and accuses her of lying. Obviously, he must be right and must have chosen the right approach to crack her, as with every minute she seems to reveal more and more of the true nature of events. Spade confronts her with a detailed analysis of her actions and motives when manipulating everyone who crossed her on her way towards obtaining the bird. Finally, he tells her that she will be handed over to the police but he also tells her that he hopes that she gets off with life so he could wait for her to complete her twenty-year sentence (see *The Maltese Falcon* 210)..Interestingly, it is Brigid who accuses him of having played with her without having any real feelings. After an argument over their love for each other, Spade states that he does not care for who loves whom, he will not “play the sap” (see *The Maltese Falcon* 215), i.e. the fall-guy for her. He will hand her in himself and will not let her go to escape her fate for now. Spade wants to clear his name and present the police with the real culprit.

After she repeatedly tries to persuade him to let her go, Spade not only offers her seven reasons why he has to act the way he intends to, but also clearly enunciates his personal code of ethics.

When a man's partner is killed he's supposed to do something about it. It doesn't make any difference what you thought of him. He was your partner and you're supposed to do something about it. Then it happens we were in the detective business. Well, when one of your organization gets killed it's bad business to let the killer get away with it. [...] Third, I'm a detective and expecting me to run criminals down and then let them go free is like asking a dog to catch a rabbit and let it go.[...] [I]t's not the natural thing. [...] Fourth, no matter what I wanted to do now it would be absolutely impossible for me to let you go without having myself dragged to the gallows with the others. Next, I've no reason in God's world to think I can trust you and if I did this and got away with it you'd have something on me that you could use whenever you happened to want to. That's five of them. The sixth would be that, since I've also got something on you, I couldn't be sure you wouldn't decide to shoot a hole in me some day. Seventh, I don't even like the idea of thinking that there might be one chance in a hundred that you'd played me for a sucker. (*The Maltese Falcon* 213-214)

This list has sparked the most controversial discussion over the character of Samuel Spade. Some critics argue that this speech is little more than a nicely worded excuse for “self-preservation” (Naremore qtd. in Willett “Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction” ch.2). Grella argues that this is an indication of a code as he turns his lover in “because he owes a certain loyalty to his partner, his profession, and his organization” (Grella108). Willett further states that this dialogue “has been read as constituting a code of honour, morality and professionalism” (Willett “Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction” ch.2), but concludes that it just shows that “Sam Spade has found a job that suits a temperament, which in certain circumstances would allow him to function as a criminal” (Willett “Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction” ch.2). The author of the book *The Noir Thriller* (2001) follows this lead and maintains that this passage essentially allows the reader to “discover the full deviousness of Spade’s character” (Horsley *Hard-boiled investigators*). Again Thompson chooses to deviate from this view and does not see the initial notion of the “blond Satan” confirmed in any way (see Thompson 126-128). In his opinion, these lines are simply the declaration of an individual’s code that is “real, strict, even cruel in its purity” (Thompson128).

Unlike the Op, Spade falls in love and enters relationships with women, but for him, his work, his ethics, his reputation are too precious to be impaired by his affection. His existence as a detective is his everything, without this reaffirmation of his status he would have lost his own stability in this world of lies and deceit.

Later on in this scene, Spade furthers this impression of the incorruptible tough-guy detective as he tells Brigid that she should not be “too sure [he’s] as crooked as [he’s] supposed to be. That kind of reputation might be good for business--bringing in high-priced jobs and making it easier to deal with the enemy” (*The Maltese Falcon* 215). Throughout the novel he has played with this reputation and has entered provisional alliances with the criminals, but ultimately, he stays morally superior to the crooks.

Because he ultimately solves the murder case despite all obstacles, he rightfully tells his secretary Effie: “Your Sam’s a detective” (*The Maltese Falcon* 216). She is dumbfounded because she cannot believe that Spade acted the way he did towards Brigid and tells him not to touch her. But he is a detective, and therefore, in his quest for truth and justice, he is to be above such petty emotions as love. These feelings are not to interfere with his work and code. Therefore, Dennis Porter is right to call him the “quintessential lone operator” (Porter 100), as Spade really impersonates the qualities of character expected of a true tough-guy private investigator.

4.2.2.3 Alcohol

As Rita Elizabeth Rippetoe notes, Spade, like the Continental Op, “has problems with control, although his problems are more with sex than with drugs or alcohol” (52). Because of the different narrative situation compared to Hammett’s earlier work, the reader cannot know why Spade drinks, and one can only observe when and what he consumes.

The one time he indulges in heavy drinking is before the upcoming meeting with the newly-widowed wife of his partner. After the death of Miles, he goes home and drinks three wine glasses of Bacardi rum, which could be regarded as quite a considerable quantity of alcohol, but still considerably removed from the

countless glasses of moonshine the Op devours. As the doorbell rings, it becomes obvious that he wanted to help himself to some liquid courage before having to deal with Archer's wife. But it is not her who wants to see him, it is the police. Spade quickly invites them in and offers both men a drink. According to Rita Elizabeth Rippetoe, this scene "contains considerable information about the contemporary code of etiquette surrounding alcohol" (52). There seems to be no constraint keeping two on-duty policemen from drinking alcohol while confronting a suspect in a murder case. During the whole scene Spade appears to be quite sober but his defiant answer are of "one liner" quality. He acts as one would expect the tough guy to act around "coppers", knowing which lines not to cross and what behavior he can get away with.

The second time Spade can be observed drinking is after the encounter with Joel Cairo in chapter VI.

For half an hour after Joel Cairo had gone Spade sat alone, still and frowning, at his desk. Then he said aloud in the tone of one dismissing a problem, "Well, they're paying for it," and took a bottle of Manhattan cocktail and a paper drinking-cup from a desk-drawer. He filled the cup two-thirds full, drank, returned the bottle to the drawer, tossed the cup into the wastebasket, put on his hat and overcoat, turned off the lights, and went down to the night-lit street. (*The Maltese Falcon* 52)

This time, the drink is not to be prepared for distress to come, but rather to wash away the adrenalin burst the confrontation with Cairo has generated. After the following events he prepares sandwiches and coffee, adding brandy to it, for Brigid and himself and starts to interrogate her. Here the difference between Spade and the Continental Op has to be pointed out as "he does not seem to expect the brandy to loosen her tongue" (Rippetoe 53), as the latter did with Dinah Brand.

Upon meeting with Gutman, Spade is served whiskey and soda and in their second encounter is drugged by some potion added to the drink. He attempts to fight off the effects of the doping but eventually passes out and only wakes up again twelve hours later.

In short, the role of alcohol in *The Maltese Falcon* is considerably smaller than in *Red Harvest* for example, but still, the consumption of alcohol is a factor. A further difference to the Op's drinking habits is the quality and nature of what Spade drinks. He drinks genuine Bacardi rum and pre-mixed cocktails, the former, most likely contraband by nature, being definitely more expensive than the bootleg liquor served in Personville.

The more prominent drug of choice in this novel seems to be coffee, since almost all of the characters in the book readily drink it when offered. Spade himself always mixes it with brandy. He cannot do without alcohol but he hides his urge behind the more socially acceptable drink which seems to act as a kind of surrogate drug.

4.2.2.4 Relationships

As there are differences between the Op and Spade concerning alcohol, there are even more in the private lives. First and foremost, Spade actually has a private life in contrast to his predecessor, who was married to his work so to speak.

The study of Samuel Spade, or to be precise, that of his own motives and thoughts, is more complicated for aforementioned reasons. Therefore the nature of his relationship to Brigid is hard to identify. Does he really love her or does he only use her to obtain the money he is promised? Charles J. Rzepka argues for the former, as he sees the "emotional state" (198) of Spade during the final confrontation with her as indicative of his inner conflict, of which we can only observe through possible outwards signs as "[h]is yellow-white face was damp with sweat" (*The Maltese Falcon* 211) and, instead of having its normal suave softness, his voice becomes hoarse as he utters his final verdict: he chooses duty over love. He "finds himself falling in love with the woman whom he must, in the end, expose as a vicious killer" (Cawelti "Gunfighter" 56). According to Thompson, Spade really is in love with Brigid, which is heavily contested by most of the other critics³⁴, or else this final scene would be "redundant" (121). He

³⁴ See Smith, Johanna M. "Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction: Gendering the Canon".

constantly stresses how evil, how cold-blooded and how brutally calculating, in the end, how unworthy of his affection Brigid really is. She is the “foremost example of [...] the seductress whose fatal embrace tempts as it threatens the tough-guy sleuth” (Lehman 35) and needs to be disposed of. Spade pretends to have seen through her treacherous intent right from the beginning but it appears that he the master schemer, who played out everyone against each other, was caught off guard. It might as well be the wounded pride in his own abilities that makes him reject Brigid in the end.

Nonetheless, their relationship, if not only a clever con game on both sides, is vastly different from Spade’s connection to Iva Archer. Thompson stresses that he is aware “that Iva Archer is a bitch and, though he has been willing to sleep with her in the past, it is clear that he has no feeling for her” (101). Spade drops her like a hot stone as he learns from his partner’s death and one cannot help to get the feeling that he might have used her to channel his contempt for him. Why else would he start an affair with his partner’s wife? Again, his refusal to have any further contact with her after the murder might be motivated by self-preservation, as he is already suspected of being Archer’s murderer. The last line of their first conversation in the book is supportive of this interpretation. He will come to her “as soon as he can”. Is this just a hollow phrase to get rid of her, as his behavior throughout the rest of the novel suggests, or does he really plan on doing so? Iva herself seems to be in love with Spade, as she is absolutely convinced that his longing to be with her made him get her husband out of the way. Interestingly the book ends with her coming to him right after the case is solved. Now is the “as soon as he can” but we are not allowed to observe Spade talking to her without the need to pull his neck out of some noose.

The third and arguably most important woman in Spade’s life is his secretary Effie Perrine. She more or less serves as the only constant in his universe as she is his link to the outside world. Her function could be described as a “motherly mentor”³⁵ and she is the one to whom he turns to pass judgment on the other female characters. He is “her” Sam and she is his “sweetheart” (The Maltese

³⁵ Cooper here uses the term “manly-maternal” (26).

Falcon 1). And the indications that their relationship will go beyond the expected philandering of the boss and his female subjects are few and far between. Their collaboration is ultimately free from any sexual attraction and therefore functions that well “that he pays her the ultimate phallogocentric compliment” (Cooper 26): “You're a damned good man, sister” (*The Maltese Falcon* 180).

The relationship to his late partner can be described to be strained at best. In the final scene with Brigid, Spade reveals what appears to be his actual opinion of his associate:

"Miles," Spade said hoarsely, "was a son of a bitch. I found that out the first week we were in business together and I meant to kick him out as soon as the year was up. You didn't do me a damned bit of harm by killing him." (*The Maltese Falcon* 213)

Again, this could just as well be pretense to verify his toughness to Brigid. Nonetheless he had an affair with his wife. But how does this, what can be considered the utmost affront amongst men, fit into the male sense of honor? Obviously Spade does not see Archer as his equal; he treats him like he was inferior. If they were equal partners why did he sent out Miles to shadow Thursby? The whole first scene in which the two agree to take over the case suggests that Spade feels superior to Archer. The hard-boiled detective is alone in his self-administered isolation and one of the implications of this position is this feeling of superiority. Whether or not Spade really detested his partner or he himself is an opportunistic “son of a bitch” remains subject to speculation.

His relation to the local police is of a kind one expects from a hard-boiled detective. He is connected to some of them by a kind of friendship based on respect and essentially despises the rest of them. A sentiment, which appears to be mutual. Spade's “friend of the force” is Tom Pollhaus, with whom he is on a first-name basis, and the “bad cop” in this case is Lieutenant Dundy. Dundy is the stereotypical cop who does not approve of a citizen interfering with their business, actually stealing it. He tries to draw Spade out at every opportunity to have him confirm his suspicions about him as Dundy thinks that he is the murderer. But to no avail, Spade knows exactly how to deal with him. And unsurprisingly, their encounter leads to Dundy hitting Spade on the head: the

acknowledgment of his own helplessness against the predominance of the hard-boiled detective.

4.2.3 Philip Marlowe – The knight in the shining armor

The last of the classical hard-boiled detectives under scrutiny is Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe. The use of the term "classical" is perhaps not too accurate since Marlowe is identified by several critics as belonging already to the second generation of this genre. Nevertheless the highly influential nature of his character for hard-boiled sleuths to come, can, and therefore will not be, ignored.

Philip Marlowe actually met the same fate as his predecessor Samuel Spade: his character found his way to the movie theaters and TV screens around the globe in several adaptations of the novels, with the most prominent being *The Big Sleep* in 1946, starring Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall. So again, the immediate reaction and associations when asked "who was Philip Marlowe?" would most likely "Humphrey Bogart" or "a character personated by Humphrey Bogart". But the movie version of this private eye will play no role in this study, not because of its quality but because it only offers the interpretation of a screen play based on one of Chandler's novels and does not convey all intricacies of the initial plot of the book.

According to George Grella, Marlowe can be identified as the logical development of Hammett's gumshoes, as he added to the required "toughness [...] compassion, honesty, and wit, and a dimension of nobility that Spade and the laconic Op lack" (107). In this assessment we are already at the major topic of any discussion of Marlowe's character, his "nobility", that is his knightly qualities. These qualities are already alluded to in his naming as Chandler quite baldly named him "Mallory" in his first appearance in the *Black Mask* story *Blackmailers Don't Shoot*. Dennis Porter argues that he is essentially a "thoughtfully stylish recasting of the model furnished in particular by Sam Spade" (104) which, if Spade is the next evolutionary step from the Op, furthers said argument. This "style" is most likely to be detected in Marlowe's use of language, which is often likened to "street-wise poetry" (Porter 104). In this respect, he is the "intellectual" amongst his peers.

The most interesting question to be asked about Marlowe is if he manages to live up to the ideals his creator has established. Is he the man of honor, fearless and unblemished who purges the mean streets?

4.2.3.1 Appearance

The five novels contain rather few references Marlowe's physical appearance, which is actually quite astonishing given the general perception of the detective as "stylish". Then again, the reactions of several women that seem to be attracted to him at first sight may speak for themselves. Nonetheless, his attitude towards his own looks has led Ralph Willett to comment on the "vanity and narcissism exhibited by Marlowe" ("Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction" ch. 3) which is best exemplified in the following passage:

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. (*The Big Sleep* 1)

This indicates that Marlowe obviously takes care of himself, but considering his clientele, this appears to be a necessity to secure any cases at all. A police report on him reads as follows: "No visible scars. Hair dark brown, some gray. Eyes brown. Height six feet, one half inch. Weight about one ninety. Name, Philip Marlowe. Occupation private detective" (*The Long Good-Bye* 407).

All in all, the general perception of Marlowe's looks can be summarized as a decent looking, middle-aged and most importantly quite masculine man. He is not of exceptional beauty nor does he strike his fellow men and women as repulsive. But his looks do not reveal any of his character, as it was the case with the Op and Spade.

4.2.3.2 Character

The quick and convenient way to answer the question “who is Philip Marlowe?” would be to simply insert a quote from Marlowe himself.

I'm a licensed private investigator and have been for quite a while. I'm a lone wolf, unmarried, getting middle-aged, and not rich. I've been in jail more than once and I don't do divorce business. I like liquor and women and chess and a few other things. The cops don't like me too well, but I know a couple I get along with. I'm a native son, born in Santa Rosa, both parents dead, no brothers or sisters, and when I get knocked off in a dark alley sometime, if it happens, as it could to anyone in my business, and to plenty of people in any business or no business at all these days, nobody will feel that the bottom has dropped out of his or her life. (*The Long Good-Bye* 437)

This actually would be the perfect dictionary entry for the quintessential hard-boiled detective. Everything that is associated with this character is in its place. Marlowe's a loner, likes his drinks and does not go along too well with cops, although he was one of them himself. One could consider any further investigation superfluous but naturally the truth behind his personality lies deeper and will not be revealed by referring to the protagonist's auto-characterization. Therefore, this analysis will not stop here but will try to go at least two steps further.

As shown before, the most integral part of the hard-boiled detective is not the toughness of his actions and methods and his quest for justice but rather his personal code, which results in this perceived “hard-boiledness”, while the Op's code is his professional ethic and Spade is determined not to “play to sap” for anyone, Marlowe's behavior is motivated by something more. Chandler has devised a special code of honor and “portrays the hard-boiled private eyes as our knightly redeemer” (Rzepka 203). This notion of the chivalric theme and his knightly qualities are not only hinted at in his name but also enters the stage right on the first pages of *The Big Sleep* (1943).

Over the entrance doors, which would have let in a troop of Indian elephants, there was a broad stained-glass panel showing a knight in dark armor rescuing a lady who was tied to a tree and didn't have any clothes on but some very long and convenient hair. The knight had pushed the vizor of his helmet back to be sociable, and he was fiddling with the knots on the ropes that tied the lady to the tree and not getting anywhere. I stood there and thought that if I lived in the house, I would

sooner or later have to climb up there and help him. He didn't seem to be really trying. (*The Big Sleep* 1)

It is significant that this knight dons a "dark armor", which since Arthurian legends has been identified rather as an attribute of the villain than of the virtuous hero of medieval stories. Marlowe sees it as his duty to put on the "shining, white armor" and rescue the damsel himself. Already in this short scene we get the feeling that what Marlowe is really driven by is what he perceives as his obligation and not his desire or even choice. This theme ironically is reversed in the course this novel, as the damsel turns out to be the "Loathly Lady" (Grella, 114). Marlowe is forced to acknowledge that "[k]nights had no meaning in this game. It wasn't a game for knights" (*The Big Sleep* 111).

Marlowe's "toughness" does not stem from how much violence he deals out but rather from his ability or willingness to withstand the toughest beatings while answering every punch with a snotty remark. In this respect he exhibits "the stoic resistance to physical suffering which typifies Leatherstocking [...] refusing to show pain or fear" (Grella, 107). After being asked "a few civil questions" by Captain Gregorius in *The Long Goodbye*, i.e. being hit "on the side of the neck with a fist like a piece of iron", Marlowe does not crack and turns to criticize his opponent and remarks "[n]o man likes to betray a friend but [he] wouldn't betray an enemy into [his] hands" (*The Long Good-Bye* 403). And to add injury to insult, he states that the captain "not only [is] a gorilla, [but also] an incompetent" (*The Long Good-Bye* 403).

His defining quality is his personal integrity, as he would rather endure immense pain than betray someone close to him or a client. The client-patron relationship, his fealty to his client, remains sacred to him.

Consequently, it is suitable to claim that the "rule of *comitatus*, the duty to protect his liege lord's interests, at all times, is the first rule of Marlowe's knightly profession" (Rzepka 209). Marlowe himself underlines this interpretation as he asserts his employer, General Sternwood:

I do it my way. I do my best to protect you and I may break a few rules, but I break them in your favor. The client comes first, unless he's crooked. Even then all I do is hand the job back to him and keep my mouth shut. (*The Big Sleep* 151)

This attitude towards his work also shows that he values the well-being of his client higher than establishing order and justice. He is not willing to work for someone who is “crooked”, but obviously he feels that he already enters some sort of “contract” even after the first meeting with someone seeking his services. Marlowe’s knightly code entails that he values his own understanding of proper professional behavior higher than everything else. This is actually a quite dubitable interpretation of his line of work, but in the end he is “private” and no officer of the law enforcement and therefore the public security is obviously not one of his primary concerns. This becomes even more explicit in *The Little Sister* when he declares: “In my business a fellow does what he can do to protect a client. Sometimes he goes too far” (qtd. in Ruehlmann 85). For him this is more than enough to justify the occasional criminal behavior.

In one respect he is quite similar to the Continental Op as he is not willing to lay off a case just because his client asks him to. In the very same conversation, from which the last quotation is taken from, he tells the General that hiring “a boy in [his] line of work” (*The Big Sleep* 151) does have certain catches. He is not going to stop just because he has achieved what was initially asked of him. The secrets he has unearthed during his investigations still long for further answers and he is determined to get to the bottom of this mess. Or in other words, he “will deliver more than his clients bargain for, implicating them in the crimes they’ve hired him to investigate” (Haut 76). The whole scene is analogous to that of the meeting of the Op and Elihu Willsson. In both cases there is a patriarch who intends to end the employment of “his” private eye and underestimates the determination and “investigative urge” that drives him.

Nonetheless, the setting of the two scenes is quite different as for example the conversation between Sternwood and Marlowe is more subtle and addresses the subject rather indirectly which is not surprising given the differences in character

of the persons involved, especially between Elihu Willsson and General Sternwood.

Another part integral to his ethics is the price he charges for his services as he is “willing to risk getting [himself] in Dutch with half the law enforcement of this country” (*The Big Sleep* 81) for no more than ‘twenty-five dollars a day and expenses” (*The Big Sleep* 81). As a policeman is puzzled by that, Marlowe gives him the following explanation:

“I don't like it,” I said. “But what the hell am I to do? I'm on a case. I'm selling what I have to sell to make a living. What little guts and intelligence the Lord gave me and a willingness to get pushed around in order to protect a client. It's against my principles to tell as much as I've told tonight, without consulting the General” (*The Big Sleep* 81)

Again he expresses his desire to protect his client in every possible way but the relative low fee he charges further stresses his nobleness in doing so. He must be of special, if not superior, moral fabric if he is prepared to put his personal wellbeing in the line of fire for such a small sum of money. Even if common sense tells him that what he does is against any logical reasoning, he believes that he has no other option.

In a conversation with a friend Marlowe articulates how a “sense of duty” (Grella 108) compels him to do what he does for a living. It is therefore more of a vocation than a choice of occupation.

I hear voices crying in the night and I go see what's the matter. You don't make a dime that way. You got sense, you shut your windows and turn up more sound on the TV set. Or you shove down on the gas and get far away from there. Stay out of other people's troubles. All it can get you is the smear. [...] You don't make a dime that way. You wouldn't do it. That's why you're a good cop and I'm private eye. (*The Long Good-Bye* 583)

Considering what he tells General Sternwood about his professional ethics, this paragraph is rather interesting. Here, he portrays himself as being more or less the ultimate investigator, driven to find the truth behind everything that looks remotely suspicious. Actually, that does not really seem to fit in with his previous statement about loyalty to his customer. But Marlowe exhibits one rather fascinating ability, namely that of selective memory. Perhaps he is trying to investigate everything that attracts his attention one way or the other but if he

does not like what his inquiries bring to light, he simply chooses to forget it. Therefore, it is quite surprising that the consensus among critics is to identify Marlowe morally superior to his predecessors when in fact he employs double standards in order to conform to his code. The “professional ethics” of Spade and the Op might not be as noble and laudable but at least enable them to steer clear of hypocrisy. Marlowe’s obsession is not to restore order on the grand scale, at least the part he can affect, but to set things right for his employers who inevitably assume a status of which most of them are not worthy. The first Marlowe novel *The Big Sleep*, especially its ending, perfectly illustrates this argument.

Initially, Marlowe is hired by the elderly patriarch General Sternwood to deal with a blackmailer but is instead drawn into a web of intrigues and lies and finally begins to investigate the murder of Rusty Reagan, the husband of one of the daughters of the General. In the course of his investigations Marlowe is constantly exposed to sexual advances of the two daughters of the General. He is undeniably drawn to the two women and obviously aroused by their attempts to seduce him. But “the rule of *comitatus* is closely linked to his maintaining chastity” (Rzepka 209) and consequently he has to resist their siren’s call. He tells Vivian that “[k]issing is nice, but your father didn’t hire me to sleep with you” (*The Big Sleep* 108) and wards off Carmen by referring to his “professional pride” (*The Big Sleep* 111). For Marlowe, a client, in this case the General, must put some sort of trust in his abilities and his loyalty, else the client would not even seek the detective’s services. This reveals much of his self-image and how he thinks he is perceived by others. He obviously is of the belief that every client shares the same understanding of what one expects of a private detective.

But naturally, as his interpretation of his trade and the ensuing duties is out of place in the world full of lies and deceit that surrounds him, Marlowe’s *Weltanschauung* is to be frustrated every time he is forced to face the harsh reality of his time. Marlowe holds knightly ideals which no one in his world can properly appreciate. As Charles J. Rzepka most rightly remarks, “[h]is ultimate quest [...] is not [...] to find the Holy Grail, but to find a liege lord worthy of his fealty in a world of ignoble and self-indulgent schemers” (209). Even Marlowe

himself has to admit that “[k]nights had no meaning in this game. It wasn’t a game for knights” (*The Big Sleep* 111).

As regards his alleged double moral standards the ending of *The Big Sleep* is most revealing in this respect. During his investigations concerning Reagan’s death, he discovers that Carmen has shot and killed Reagan because he rejected her. Vivian confirms Marlowe’s deductions and tells him that the blackmailer was originally brought in to help her cover up the murder but then turned against her. But does Marlowe hand Carmen over to the police and leave her to be tried before a court? Adhering to his sense of duty towards General Sternwood, he agrees to a “horse-trade”. Carmen will not be handed over to the police but will instead be committed to a mental institution and everything will be forgotten. This is not the strict professionalism of the Op or the fierce determination of Spade to ensure that no trace leads back to the detectives. The client’s integrity and its conservation is sacred to Marlowe and, as mentioned before, he obviously takes a shine to being the one who tempers justice with mercy. But nonetheless he feels soiled by this decision. Marlowe appears to know that, although his case is solved and in the end everything is cared for, is not the “morally correct” solution. Marlowe feels that he is “part of the nastiness now” (*The Big Sleep* 164), but he is immediately concerned with the well-being of his client, in this case the General’s ignorance of all the events, which consoles him at least a little.

The breaking of rules or laws appears to be a given in Chandler’s Los Angeles as even the honest cops have no other option than to conform to what their environment forces them to do: “We break rules. We have to” (*Farewell My Lovely* 303). So Marlowe is not alone in this dilemma but the motivation behind his negligence of the law is a different one. He acts according to his code whereas the policemen are driven by an outward source, namely the need to provide for the stability of society

Marlowe constantly becomes entangled in stories finishing in “loose ends, a detective who fails, and a pervasive sense of individual despair, social chaos, and the triumph of evil” (Peter J. Rabinowitz qtd. in Willett “Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction” ch. 3). Confronted with the assumption that he does “all kinds of detective

work” he responds that he will be bothered with just “the fairly honest kinds” (*The Lady in the Lake* 4). He will not even spend money he earned since “there was something wrong with the way [he] got it” (*The Long Good-Bye* 583).

Admittedly, any analysis of Philip Marlowe as a hard-boiled detective is at least partly biased. Had his creator not published his famous essay “The Simple Art of Murder”, which was already referred to earlier, his position would definitely be easier. But actually demanding not only a “man of honor” but also “the best man in his world” for the character of the hard-boiled private eye raises the bar to almost unreachable heights for poor Marlowe. Even though only the first of the novels was considered, it can be anticipated that he does not live up to the knightly ideals established by Chandler. This should ultimately not be surprising since “his creator was forced by social and cultural circumstances to question many of the assumptions traditionally informing it, including the gender roles assigned its usual cast” (Rzepka 203).

This questioning of the gender roles simply means that, especially the roles of the women, the damsel in distress and the femme fatale, are not clear from the beginning and are revealed to be incorrectly attributed and subsequently reversed as Carmen, initially the “damsel” who throws herself into Marlowe’s rescuing embrace, turns out to be the source of all further killing and treachery.

Marlowe also introduces a further facet to the character of the hard-boiled detective: the hobby. The Continental Op had no need for a leisure activity as he found his ultimate purpose in detection, which fills all of his life, or at least the part of his life we as readers get to access. Samuel Spade also does not reveal that much of his private life or interests but in contrast to the Op there are allusions to a private life, like the affair with his partner’s wife. Nonetheless we are barred from further insight. Philip Marlowe is in this respect a more multi-dimensional protagonist, as it appears that he keeps no secret from his audience. In fact his favorite pastime, chess, allows further understanding of his character. Several critics have arrived at a different interpretation of Marlowe’s ultimate quest, identifying it as his search for subjectivity within the society he loathes, the search for his own identity, which directly relates him to Samuel Spade.

Returning to his hobby, chess is “steeped in rules, logic” (Abbott 62) and represents “the height of masculine hermeticism, [...] an utterly solitary activity” (Abbott 62). It is most significant that he retreats to his home to indulge in this game. Considering the said statement about the insignificance of knights in modern society it becomes clear that Marlowe searches for a world in which his values and ideals, are not out of place. Therefore chess serves as the perfect surrogate reality for him. In this game knights normally do have their place, their right to exist, whereas in the harsh, real life society they are out of place and not more than remnants of long forgotten times.

The way in which he turns to the game of chess in Carmen’s room to escape from her advances is quite telling. The move he makes with the knight is wrong as he fights temptation. In this very moment chess becomes a metaphor for modern civilization and Marlowe’s or the other characters of the story’s struggle to find his place. It becomes clear that Marlowe is not in control of the plots that he is cast into and tries to reassure his subjectivity by trying to isolate himself from the events that surround and challenge him.

Horsley calls this “Marlowe’s neurotic alienation” (Horsley “Hard-boiled investigators”) and sees these fears about one’s own identity as an “expression of characteristically modernist anxieties” (Horsley “Hard-boiled investigators”). He is the mirror image of the fears of the common people overwhelmed by the cultural and economic changes.

Marlowe’s speech acts are worth examining as well. The role of the questing knight demands more than allegiance to one’s master. It also demands a certain mode of conduct a part of which is the choice of linguistic style as well. He is of more “noble” origin than his home and his profession would suggest and possesses a “certain subtlety of mind” (Horsley “Hard-boiled investigators”). Considering what has already been said about the origins of the hard-boiled detective this is quite surprising as these are qualities representative of the classical Doyleian detective. The American answer was the renunciation of overly intellectual investigation and “the tough, hard-boiled populist role

demands an anti-literary stance that conflates culture and decadence” (Horsley *Hard-boiled investigators*). This is certainly not the case with Chandler’s oeuvre. The general atmosphere might suggest a return to classical models, but it is only on the surface. His clients and the social stratum in which he operates may be similar or the same but the perspective of the private eye is completely different. In contrast to the Golden Age British detectives he has no ties or aspirations to the local upper class, as his stance on this class is rather explicit as he exclaims: “To hell with the rich. They made me sick” (*The Big Sleep* 46). Marlowe is part of the service industry and has to support his modest living by doing what he does best. He, like Conrad’s Marlow, descends “into capitalism’s heart of darkness” (Haut 72) and tries to escape from its menacing fangs.

But in the end, who is Philip Marlowe? What does all this tell us about his character, his ideals and his “code”? Haut provides a perfectly accurate attempt to summarize Chandler’s protagonist in *Pulp Culture. Hard-Boiled Fiction and the Cold War* (1995). He describes him as

[a] fallen exile from another era, Marlowe is a man without attachments who lives in rented accommodation, works in a shabby office, is unconcerned about money, choosy about his clients and free to speak his mind.

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Marlowe is distinctly different from hard-boiled detectives from the same period. Simply put, Marlowe is a character, which invited his contemporaries to identify with himself “without fear that they will vicariously seduce virgins or brutalize unarmed suspects” (Rippetoe 63) while still offering the experience of the life of a tough gumshoe.

4.2.3.3 Alcohol

Marlowe’s life is governed by him rigidly following the code he has devised for himself to carve out his place in “the mean streets”. This set of rules also regulates his position on alcohol and its consumption. Therefore he carefully takes note of “who he drinks with, why he drinks and when he drinks” (64). Rippetoe identified three key settings in which the consumption of alcohol is notable: “hospitality, manipulation, and self-medication” (Rippetoe 68). She subdivides each category as for example there can be standard hospitality in

which the host treats his guests according to social norms and there can also be situations which are defined by a total lack of such conduct.

4.2.3.3.1 Hospitality

During the first meeting with General Sternwood, Marlowe is offered brandy and soda, which he readily drinks during the talk about the case. The general air of their conversation is reminiscent "of a gentleman conferring with a business associate" (Rippetoe 68). This is perverted in *Farewell, My Lovely*, as in the beginning of the novel Marlowe is invited to have a couple of drinks with Moose Malloy. A scene, which ends in his "benefactor" going berserk in the bar and leaving without paying for the drinks.

Essentially the detective is not "invited" as such, it is rather that he is forced to comply simply because there seems to be no viable way out of this situation. Here the whole notion of entertaining a welcome guest is subverted. Marlowe is neither a welcome guest, as he just the most readily available "victim", nor are the drinks they consume paid for.

There are numerous scenes in which Marlowe is more or less coerced to drink with shady characters "usually to deflect their hostility or to gain information" (Rippetoe 70). He drinks with Eddie Mars in *The Big Sleep* and Laird Brunette in *Farewell, My Lovely* in order to bond with them in a way that they do not regard him as a threat to their dealings, although with mixed results. The meeting with the Bay City police chief in *Farewell, My Lovely* is an example of accepting fake hospitality, or rather posing as guest, in order to gain information. Normally Marlowe would not share a drink with the chief of a band of corrupt "policemen" but as there is something to gain from it, besides the welcome jag, why not?

It is interesting that he is not offered any form of hospitality from Vivian Reagan/Sternwood throughout the whole story of *The Big Sleep* even though they cross paths rather constantly. She does not offer Marlowe a single glass of something which be interpreted as her suspicion that this "greasy little detective" might topple her carefully built house of cards.

But it is not only Marlowe's adversaries and acquaintances who are guilty of perverting the concept of hospitality. At least in one instance he himself is breaking society's moral code when in *Farewell, My Lovely* he more or less capitalizes on the kindness he is offered in the Grayle's residence. After some drinks he and Mrs. Grayle start to kiss as her husband leaves the room. It is highly dubitable if this is compatible with Marlowe's chivalric code. He himself blames the whole situation on the amount of alcohol he consumed, which he describes to be of the kind of spirit that make you "reckless" (*Farewell, My Lovely* ...). Is this an excuse which, of not completely but at least partially explains his transgression?

Does this signify that Marlowe can never fully live up to his aspired role of the detached, knightly hero not prone to the vices of the people he wants to separate himself from? Probably, at the end of the day he is not heroic, morally superior figure as which he likes to present himself.

4.2.3.3.2 Manipulation

The second setting in which alcohol plays an important role is that of manipulation through alcohol in order to get information or to effect a desired behavior of one character. Rippetoe identifies two forms of this which only vary in the degree of pressure exercised on the respective person. One she calls a "strongly negative form" (72) whereas the other is closely related to hospitality.

His behavior towards Jessie Florian, whom he deliberately gets drunk to obtain a photo of Velma, is on one hand disgusting but in the other rather intriguing because of Marlowe's commentary on his own actions as he concludes that this exploitation of the woman's alcoholism makes him feel "sick at[his] stomach" (*Farewell, My Lovely* 188). For Rippetoe this display of "self disgust" actually invalidates any criticism of Marlowe because he is aware of the problematic nature of what he has done. But did he not declare that he might "break a few rules" in order to serve his client? And "rules" certainly implies moral standards and conventions as well. So the explanation he gives the reader (or maybe even himself?) is redundant but may as well serve as an indication of his uneasiness with the consequences of his own code.

In *The Long Goodbye*, Marlowe again tempts an apparent alcoholic by leaving him alone with a bottle of liquor. It can be argued that “[w]hatever form manipulation takes, it is [...] part of the hard-boiled detective’s world” (Rippetoe74). First, he is not limited by legal and moral regulations that would prohibit such methods and secondly, the private eye is the last resort for people who either do not like to involve the police in their affairs or know that conventional investigation will lead them nowhere.

4.2.3.3.3 Medication

The third purpose of alcohol in Chandler’s novels is “medication”. After Marlowe has discovered the body of Geiger, he drinks rye whiskey and later on hot grog at home. This can be interpreted as a counter measure to walking around in the cold rain, physical medication, but also to soothe the strain of having encountered the results of extreme violence, psychological medication. Several other incidents involving people getting shot and fighting the overall frustration because of the lack of progress he makes in the case cause Marlowe to retreat to his office, where he ponders about what he should do and concludes that the status quo would be just as disappointing if he took a drink. Eventually he reaches for his office bottle and “lets [his] self-respect ride its own race”(The Big Sleep, 90). In Marlowe’s world there are times which allow for drinking and there are those which do not and “a man should be aware of his code even if he occasionally allows himself to violate it” (Rippetoe, 74).

Interestingly, he does not drink himself to oblivion, as the Continental Op for example, but the sheer number of drinks he washes down would have this effect on a non-regular drinker. It can therefore be speculated that he does not want to escape reality but rather needs to settle his frayed nerves. Nonetheless, there is one instance where Marlowe drinks himself into stupefaction. After he was more or less saved from the lures of Eileen Wade in *The Long Goodbye*, he grabs a bottle of scotch and downs it entirely. The exact reasons remain subject to speculation but he obviously cannot really come to terms with what has happened. This shows that Marlowe cannot always rely on his code to provide him with an answer is when he is confronted with women, but this aspect will be discussed later on.

Some critics have argued that *The Long Good-Bye* is “at least superficially about drinking” (Tate qtd. in Rippetoe 77). This view is heavily supported by Marlowe offering his own assessment of different types of drinkers as he states that a

man who drinks too much an occasion is still the same man as he was sober. An alcoholic, a real alcoholic is not the same man at all. You can't predict anything about him for sure except that he will be someone you never met before.

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In this novel he also offers an interesting explanation for his normal drinking manners and how he circumnavigates them when drinking in the morning (*The Long Good-Bye* 537).

Rippetoe provides for an interesting interpretation of the relationship between Terry Lennox and Marlowe. She argues that the two share little besides drinks, which would under objective standards hardly be enough to establish “friendship”. Nevertheless, Marlowe helps Lennox escape from the police. So these shared drinks “symbolize a bond, which Marlowe cannot articulate or make sense of in any conventional way” (Rippetoe 81).

4.2.3.4 Relationships

The analysis of the relationships in Chandler's Marlowe series appears to be a considerably more difficult task simply because it spans over seven novels. But the nature of these relationships, especially of those with women, reveals itself to be quite repetitive. The center of the plots almost always revolves around the figure of the *femme fatale* (Horsley *Hard-boiled investigators*) and her threat to his male isolation as they are “aggressive in their (female) sexuality, aberrant in their ‘un-feminine’ rejection of male dominance” (Willett ch.3). These confrontations with “sexually attractive, dynamic women” (Horsley *Hard-boiled investigators*) are what Marlowe fears the most. They are part, if not source, of the “nastiness” he so desperately seeks to distance himself from. Hence, even if he is undeniably attracted to them, he has to distance himself from them in order to preserve his code, which also includes chastity. In *The Big Sleep* he is constantly tempted by the lures of the Sternwood sisters but manages to escape them only through his wisecracks. But his reactions after these encounters show

that has to fight bitter wars with his desires. When he discovers Carmen lying naked in his bed, Marlowe first keeps up his professional façade. After she repeatedly tries to draw his attention to her nudity, he tells her in a dismissive manner: "I've already seen it all. Remember? I'm the guy that keeps finding you without any clothes on" (*The Big Sleep* 111). She can in no way arouse him as he is above being seduced by a "little girl" like her. His reaction, after she has left, suggests otherwise. He tears "the bed to pieces savagely" (*The Big Sleep* 113). Is he disgusted by the fact that a naked woman soiled his sheets or does he need to vent the arousal? In the conversation with Carmen he stresses that his ethics, his business conduct, prevents him from sexually engaging with her, so the former explanation appears to be more feasible.

The sexual encounter with Eileen Wade in *The Long Good-Bye* additionally exposes that Marlowe's code does not clothe him in an indestructible armor against any kind of intrusion³⁶. But he ultimately manages to ward off this threat by deadening every sensual receptor of his body. Marlowe's sense of identity, of his masculinity, the "threat of effeminacy [...] always lurking" (Abbott 79), does not allow for women to enter his private sphere. In the same book he meets Linda Loring who asks him to marry her but, delivered in his trademark tone of bitter cynicism, his answer to her proposal is that "[i]t wouldn't last six months" (646) as he is "spoiled by independence" (*ibid.*). First he argues that she will most probably divorce him like her first husband, maybe exposing a fear of being emotionally hurt, but his arguments quickly change to common chauvinism. Linda is the first woman with whom Marlowe has sex in the course of the seven novels but even though she entered the inner circles of his privacy but he has to remain independent. Although he is often referred to as the "romantic knight", romance, as in love, seems to have no place in the life he chose. Haut writes that "Marlowe is unable to treat women as equals, or become too involved with them" (75) and even when he does, he resorts to his "preferred mode of self-defence" (*ibid.*) to get him out of the situation. Does Marlowe simply accept the fact that he is no "husband" or is he that absorbed in his knightly concept of deliberate isolation,

³⁶ According to J.K. Van Dover (qtd. in Abbot 78) this was Chandler's answer to allegations of homosexuality in his novels.

being too noble for any permanent ties to others? Considering the opinions of several critics on this topic³⁷, the latter reasoning seems more plausible as he already has met “the kind of girl Marlowe would have married if he had been the marrying kind” (Chandler qtd. in Durham 39) with Anne Riordan and he remains a bachelor until his last appearance in *Playback*³⁸.

His attitude towards the police and other law enforcement again does not afford surprises. The previously mentioned maltreatment at the hands of Captain Gregorius is exemplary of the interactions between Marlowe and the police. In *Farewell, My Lovely*, he again falls victim to the brutality of two police men (273-279), even though they are “off duty”. Marlowe’s answer to the violence is the same as to the lures of women: wisecracks. He is aware that he is helpless but he cannot flee from the beatings as he can flee from the women. He mockingly calls one of them “Hemingway” but “the effort falls flat” (Marling "Major Works").

His code clearly limits his interaction with the outside world. As shown before, this is true for women and the police, but does it also restrict the possibility of friendship? Like Spade and the Continental Op, he works alone and only occasionally consults external sources during his investigations. But from his time working at the D.A.’s office, he as well has a police man, Bernie Ohls, as his mandatory “friend on the force” who helps him out of trouble from time to time. But, there is another character who could be called a friend of Marlowe as he proclaims: “Terry Lennox was my friend. I’ve got a reasonable amount of sentiment invested in him” (*The Long Good-Bye* 399).

4.3 The Hard-Boiled Detective

The analysis of those three hard-boiled detectives, which can be rightfully identified as the prime examples for this new form of the American detective story, shows that there are considerable differences between them. Therefore the

³⁷See Abbott, Megan E. *The Street Was Mine. White Masculinity in Hardboiled Fiction and Film Noir*.

³⁸On the last pages of *Playback*, Marlowe receives a call from Linda Loring urging him to visit her in Paris to revive their love. In *Poodle Springs* they are married and Marlowe no longer is the stereotypical loner. But as Chandler never finished the novel himself, the book is denied the status of being the eighth installment of the series. Hence general scholarly criticism still treats Marlowe as the “lone wolf” as which he started his literary life.

next chapter will be concerned with the attempt to define their shared characteristics.

4.3.1 General Discussion

If one hears of hard-boiled detectives, one cannot help to think of a sleazy, even shady half-crook who lingers in a cloud of smoke and his own whiskey breath, while slouched behind his desk, listening to some blonde damsel's plea to find someone dear to her. Most of the time it turns out that the poor client was herself the murderess and coincidentally the detective's way to realize that she was the one he searched for on about two hundred pages is the sorry excuse of a plot to justify a large amount of cursing, killing, drinking and violence of all sorts. This impression, a gross oversimplification in itself, is supposedly largely due to the second and third generation incarnations of the hard-boiled private eyes as for example Spillane's Mike Hammer. And considering the three detectives that were discussed up to now, this is largely a misconception.

There are certainly enough theories about what motivation and reasons drive the constant production of crime stories, as listed in the first part *Detective Fiction* (Rzepka 9-48), which would definitely go beyond the scope of this thesis. Certainly the "puzzle element" plays a major role in explaining the attraction of this genre together with the fictional contest between the reader and the detective protagonist to solve the mystery, the crime, first. Charles J. Rzepka, summarizing the views of several scholars, describes detective fiction as "a form of wishfulfilment" (21), the fulfillment being realized through the "identification of one or several characters" (21). Michael Cohen (Cohen 2000) rightfully asks the question, why stories that "almost always involve murder and frequently depict the shedding of blood [...] entertain us" (14). He offers several possible answers of which one is perfectly applicable for the purpose of analyzing the hard-boiled detective novel which he labels "the achievement of a kind of catharsis". He argues that "the violence in fiction mirrors one real aspect of our world that we would like to see removed" (15). This nicely fits the aforementioned explanations by Porter and Chandler for the emergence and success of hard-boiled detective fiction. The world in which this new genre, or arguably sub-genre, was born was one of omnipresent violence and not that of etiquette and fine manners.

If the criminal, or better, his nonchalant interpretation of law and order are more appealing, combined with the perception of the common man of the law as being equally corrupt and reprehensible, then the consequences for detective fiction are quite obvious. In order to keep detective fiction interesting, why not introduce a protagonist that combines the “best” of both worlds? A man who would be capable of bringing justice, at least in a form that corresponded to readers’ sentiment, to an otherwise already rotten world. And exactly this was realized with the introduction of the hard-boiled private eye.

A man working to solve crimes fully equipped with a shady reputation and questionable connections to the underworld. An outlaw wrapped in a suit of moral integrity able to resort to methods and sources of information regular law enforcement could only dream to access. Despite his mode of work and his acquaintances, he remains a law-abiding citizen in the end and sees his goal in fighting at least some of society’s ills. In several cases, again with Spillane’s Mike Hammer as the prime example, the position of the PI is not at all easily identified. He for example appears to be nothing more than a brute, consisting rather of brawn than brains, fighting anyone who dares to threaten his way of life.

Thus the situation of the “common” hard-boiled detective being an ex-cop or someone able to bend some rules, which would otherwise stand in his way, seems only natural. He is able to tell right from wrong but also knows that, in order to fight the wrongs, it is sometimes necessary to take steps, which would not fall into the “right” category. He works to establish law and order but is himself not free from all vices and shortcomings, just as the average Joe. He drinks, he fights, he curses and additionally does those things, which the reader of these stories would not dare to try.

4.3.2 The “Stereotype”

In the introduction to *Trouble Is My Business*, a collection of short stories, Raymond Chandler describes the world which gave birth to the hard-boiled detective. It was

a world gone wrong, a world in which, long before the atom bomb, civilization had created the machinery for its own destruction and was learning to use it with all the moronic delight of a gangster trying out his first machine-gun. The law was something to be manipulated for profit and power. The streets were dark with something more than night.

Trouble Is My Business vii

Later on he concludes that in this environment only a “very determined individual” (*Trouble Is My Business* viii) is able to stand his ground and be a source of stability. But he also complains about the rigid formula of this genre, which in his opinion prevented some writers and their protagonists to reach their full potential. The identification of this formula is therefore one of the most important aspect of this work, as it will provide a foundation from which further analysis can commence.

But who is the hard-boiled detective? Is he the devoted professional like the Continental Op, the cynical master-schemer Samuel Spade or the knight in the shining armor, Philip Marlowe? Although the Op has been described the quintessential manifestation of the hard-boiled private eye, he nonetheless lacks certain characteristics of his successors which came to be identified as basic features of this character. Samuel Spade on the other hand is “a stylized character” (Willett ch.2) who suffers from the same problems as his predecessor. According to some critics the stereotypical hard-boiled private eye would be Philip Marlowe (see O’Brien 74).

Hence it is Marlowe himself provides for a decent summary of what being a hard-boiled detective demands:

So passed a day in the life of a P.I. [...]. You don't get rich, you don't often have much fun. Sometimes you get beaten up or shot at or tossed into the jailhouse. Once in a long while you get dead. Every other month you decide to give it up and find some sensible occupation while you can still walk without shaking your head. Then the door buzzer rings and you open the inner door to the waiting room and there stands a new face with a new problem, a new load of grief, and small piece of money.

The Long Goodbye, 489

This actually is a perfect synopsis of the aforementioned "formula": a detective who is no stranger to violence, a loner living in the margin between right and wrong whose "daily grind" is disturbed when someone enters his office with a plea to deliver them from their misery. And as he is governed by his code, he will follow their request, willing to put his life on the line for a fee, which actually is not worth it in the first place. And this is exactly the situation we encounter with Spade and Marlowe whereas the Op is different. He is salaried at the Continental Agency, he is constantly sent out to solve cases in the name of his employer. While he also dwells on the margins of society, he is not "private" in the truest sense of the word. Nonetheless he is allowed to work according to his methods, which in turn are rooted in his personal code.

Another rather accurate, but also quite cynical, account is given by Andrew Vachss as he speaks of the "heavy-drinking private eye who takes cases out of the goodness of his heart every time a swell-looking babe walks into his low-rent office, then thumbs the safety off his revolver and stalks down the mean streets seeking justice, never dissuaded by the inevitable gunshot wounds and blows to the head by blunt objects" (Vachss "Autobiographical Essay").

As several critics have noted(seeRippetoe176) the most important characteristic of hard-boiled fiction is the code of the detective³⁹, which is already alluded to by the cowboy protagonists in Western fiction. While this cannot be ignored, this argument has to be expanded, as devising a work ethic for oneself is nice but

³⁹ Cawelti also heavily stresses the importance of the code as the essential distinguishing feature (Cawelti "Myths" ch. 4) as well as Marling (Marling "Characteristics of the Genre").

more important is the dedication they exhibit, the ungovernable willingness to adhere to their respective codes⁴⁰. The code can be described as “an unwritten law, engraved only on the hearts of its adherents, it is, nevertheless, a stringent set of moral rules concerning, above all, the proper uses of individual violence” (Cawelti “Myths” 536).

There seems to be no fun in their occupation, except for the Continental Op possibly, but none of them is ready to follow a different trade.

But what characteristics make the hard-boiled sleuth so appealing to the audience? For Grella and several other critics the hard-boiled detective represents “another avatar of that prototypical American hero, Natty Bumppo” (Grella, 106). This corresponds to an earlier statement that the hard-boiled novel is in its values and allure “quintessentially American”⁴¹. The Golden Age detective relied heavily on the British and Continental European interpretation of the “gentleman” as its foundation. This interpretation is nothing more than a set of ethics and form of conduct that is generally agreed upon by the whole of a society. The hard-boiled detective is a-social or at least perceives himself to be in this position and therefore it is necessary to devise his own individual code. The factor of individualism is exactly this essential American ethic that was previously impersonated by Natty Bumppo aka. Leatherstocking aka. Hawkeye. So the hard-boiled detective really is just an updated version, created to give the national myth a contemporary “avatar”⁴². But no matter how diligent the urban cowboy is in his detachment, he is still on the same “plain” as his society.

⁴⁰ In “The Gunfighter and the Hard-Boiled Dick”, Cawelti attributes the features of this code to “the Puritan sense of pervasive evil to be overcome only by the most sustained and austere self-discipline, and, in the final sense, by an act of violence” (61).

⁴¹ Ogdon offers a quite different “mythic hero context” (Ogdon 80) as she draws analogies to the German *Freikorps* literature, hence challenging the pure “American-ness” of the hard-boiled detective. For further details see: Ogdon, Bethany. “Hard-Boiled Ideology”. *Critical Quarterly*, 34.1 (1992): 71–87.

D.H. Lawrence on the other hand supports this argument as he proclaims that the “essential American soul is hard, isolate, stoic, and a killer” (qtd. in Cawelti “Myths” 529).

⁴² Breu sees the hard-boiled detective as “a phantasmatic adaptation of this ideology [the frontier hero], via the figure of the lone detective or urbanite” (55).

Because he chooses to be detached from society he is *per definitionem* an “outlaw”. Hence he can operate outside of the boundaries of both moral and legal conventions, but on the other hand also has to suffer from his choice. Once he stylizes himself as an outcast, he is practically condemned to the life of a loner. Additionally he is almost “indistinguishable from the crooks with whom he has to deal” (Horsley "Hard-boiled investigators"). Cawelti affirms this verdict but he stresses that the hard-boiled detective is “a man of complete morality who never needs to assert it in words, who can even act like a crook without any question of his honor arising” (Cawelti "Myths" 536). So, despite questionable methods and behavior, his moral superiority is inherent and withstands any doubts that might arise.

This also corresponds to the image of the lonesome cowboy riding into the setting sun accompanied by the longing looks of the maidens of the frontier town he has just rescued from whatever band of robbers terrorized it and his loyal horse. The hard-boiled detective is normally less lucky in this respect. There are few women who mourn the departure of the gumshoe as at the end of the story he might have not brought justice to the criminals but he has unsettled the lives of almost everyone involved, including his own.

Samuel Spade is in fact not on his own from the very beginning but he treats his “partner” in a way that has very little semblance to that of Holmes and Watson. But he relies heavily on both professional and moral support from his secretary. All of the three would actually be not able to solve their cases without relying on the help of others but their cooperation does not qualify to be categorized as “teamwork”.

Their trade and their code most often does not allow to for them to “put on heroics” (“The Whosis Kid” 227). The first rule of the dedicated individualist is self-preservation and not being the fall guy for people who are not worth the sacrifice. Nonetheless the detectives and their ethics are continuously put to the test by money and women, even if Ruehlmann states that “[t]he detective cannot be led astray by love, but he can by responsibility; it is morals, not women”

(Ruehlmann 86)⁴³. Spade has to persuade himself to give up the woman he fell in love with as a tribute to his code and out of self-defense naturally⁴⁴. He is drawn between his desire and what he perceives as his duty. Nyman identifies the character of the hard-boiled detective as “a curious mixture of surprisingly contradictory strains: detachment and compassion, humanity and inhumanity, reason and emotion, rationality and idealism” (32). Considering the previous chapters on each of the three protagonists this statement can only be fortified.

Rupp identifies another characteristic: the “tough mask” (60) which not only bars the reader from seeing the hypothetical human emotions of the detective but also hides the lack thereof. Nonetheless he states that hard-boiled detective fiction reveals more of the human side of the detective

Finally, it is again Grella on whom we fall back on for an almost perfect summary of the hard-boiled detective.

The American detective hero has [...] pronounced physical ability, dealing out and absorbing great quantities of punishment. Like Hawkeye, he is proficient with his gun and seldom goes anywhere without it. Like the lonely man of forests, he works outside the established social code, preferring his own instinctive justice to the often tarnished justice of civilization. The private detective always finds the police incompetent, brutal, or corrupt, and therefore works alone. He replaces the subtleties of the deductive method with sure knowledge of his world and a keen moral sense. Finding the moral contract vicious and debilitating, he generally isolates himself from normal human relationships. His characteristic toughness and his redeeming moral strength conflict with the values of his civilization and cause him [...] to flee the society which menaces his personal integrity and spiritual freedom. (106)

⁴³ Lehman here refers to money and sex as the inescapable temptations that the hard-boiled detective is bound to face (139).

⁴⁴ This character trait is more visible in later version of the sleuth, namely Mike Hammer and especially in the novel *I, The Jury*.

4.3.3 The method of investigation

Although most of the hard-boiled detectives defining features have been elaborated, his methods of detection have only been touched upon. He has his own code that dictates his life and work and therefore he is, consciously or not, located outside society. As said before this entails, that he is not bound to society's moral and legal limitations. Hence, when it comes to crime solving, he is has a distinct advantage to the normal police who themselves are confined by the legal system. A police man taking matters into his own hands and employing methods the social contract prohibits is looked down upon as he should be aware that truth and justice should arrive through investigation adhering to the law. The private detective is in itself perceived as a shady character and throughout the stories and novels it becomes clear that people seeking the services of these detectives, do not trust in normal legal mechanisms or simply are not able to go to the police. In *Red Harvest* for example, Willsson resorts to hiring the Continental Op simply because the police are already deeply entangled in the bloody mess of Personville. In the end he does not wish for justice in the true sense of the word, but only for his own interpretation of it. Brigid O'Shaughnessy cannot turn to regular law enforcement to get the falcon sculpture because she herself is a murderess and a thief. And the whole of Marlowe's clients feel more comfortable if the public is kept out of its private sphere as much as possible.

In this respect they all try to step, or have consciously stepped, outside the social order, if only in this instance and therefore in a way resemble the hard-boiled detective. They turn to the private eye because he can offer his services in this separate reality. He himself does not wish to get involved with the police who mostly treat him no better as a crook. As mentioned before, Philip Marlowe takes this attitude to the extreme as he values his clients integrity, if there is some, higher than the law.

The most common depiction of hard-boiled sleuth is that of an irresponsible drunkard deliberately shooting and beating up anyone to achieve his goals. As the preceding shows, this image is quite far from the reality of the stories. It might be true that the detective drinks, sometimes a little too much, he uses force to

gets the information he wants and does not exhibit gentlemanly behavior. But he is not a brute without any brains and sense of right and wrong, at least in these early examples of the genre.

He surely exhibits certain behavior and does know all the “wrong” people but while superficially being similar to the felons that populate his world, he is not one of them. The gumshoe knows his way around the criminal underworld. He knows whom to contact to get the right clues and who could be involved in what dealings. The detective floats in the gray area between the two poles of society. On one hand, as mentioned before, he is an exile from the “right” side but on the other, he does not belong to the petty crooks and villains either. And either side is aware that he is not one of them and suspects him to be working for the other. But still he manages to balance out his existence between these two poles and succeeds to make a living from it.

It has to be established that the view that all crimes in early hard-boiled fiction could have been solved by simply going on a rampage and have violence, and good portion of chance, solve the case, is an utter affront to plots and its creators⁴⁵. The statement its protagonists merely act following “a gut reaction favoring macho simplicities” (Grenander 49) does only scratch the surface. It cannot be denied that quite a large portion of texts, which bear the label “hard-boiled”, correspond to this oversimplification but this exactly why they are left out of such an analysis.

Nonetheless the *grande finale* of the stories, the inevitable clash of the detective and his antagonists, is reminiscent of “the climactic shutdown of many westerns” (Cawelti *Adventure* 143), i.e. some of these encounters end in bloody violence. This is radically different from the classical crime fiction formula and is accounted for by the “greater personal involvement” (Cawelti *Adventure* 143) of the gumshoe.

⁴⁵ Or as Frederick Isaac puts it: “the story is viewed as [...] little more than murder followed by mayhem, a series of bloody episodes punctuated by gunfire and brawling. Wherein the hero interrupts his massacre of the bad guys only to take a drink or six, and to bed one or another of the beautiful dames he has met along the way.” (Isaac 24).

The question if the hard-boiled detective solves cases either by his distinct ability to interpret evidence or simply because of his experience is not easily answered. Certainly, if one is confronted with ever-similar crimes he begins to see that there seems to be an underlying pattern which relates all of them and, over time, he will know how solve them with little effort. But then again, there must be some reason, why he has chosen to take up this occupation, that made him more suitable for this kind of work than for anything else.

His mode of work is that of active involvement⁴⁶. Considering Sherlock Holmes for example, he is outside micro universe in which the crime happened and “simply” has to gather clues and piece them together to solve the mystery. The hard-boiled detective almost always becomes part of the action and is forced to become personally involved to solve his case, either by the circumstances of the crimes but more often because of his code. The cases are not just “jobs” for him as they each represent a part of his everlasting crusade to eradicate all vice from society. Spade poses as a fellow crook in order to solve the mystery of the black bird and to hunt down the murderer of his partner. If he did not act this way, he would not be able to actually solve his case. He exhibits a kind of pragmatism and single-mindedness that almost borders on stupidity and demands a certain disposition towards masochism as the next beating is most probably waiting around the corner or behind the next door. But the hard-boiled detective does not recede in the face of another confrontation, physical or psychological, even though he might be afraid of it, and washes away its marks with a bottle of cheap liquor.

But, as mentioned before, his occupation with the immorality of his surrounding society only provides for a solution that is both temporarily limited and, more importantly, confined to only a small part of this society and is not capable of restoring order on a wider scale. After this contact with corruption the dominant culture and the acceptance of its supremacy, he chooses to withdraw to where he feels comfortable. He returns to his office, his “world”, like the lonesome hero of

⁴⁶ “The tough guy [i.e. the hard-boiled detective] does not analyze, he acts “ (Madden qtd. in Rupp 61).

the Western is inevitably drawn back to the comfort of the unpeopled desert (Cawelti *Adventure* 151). In the same breath, Cawelti brings to mind that essentially “the private eye always wins” (*Adventure* 157) as he normally is paid quite amply for his services and earns the admiration of some of the female characters, and therefore reaffirms the ideology of the American Dream of success for everyone.

4.3.3.1 The Vigilante

Because of the mostly questionable nature of this actions, the hard-boiled detective runs the risk of being likened to the character of the “vigilante”, a protagonist who is “generally an isolated individual who must cope with the weakness and corruption of the community as well as the violence of criminals and outlaws” (Cawelti “Myths” 533) and most often does so by means of extreme violence. But as mentioned before, the hard-boiled detective distinguishes himself in this respect, as his use of violence is strictly governed by his code. Whereas the vigilante seeks mostly justice for himself and therefore only really cares for himself, the hard-boiled sleuth quest for justice is directed at the greater evil of society and is characterized by a “willingness to place his life on the line” (Cawelti “Myths” 536) in order to achieve his goal. Most essentially, he works by order of a third party as he is hired to investigate and not to avenge a crime without any “personal interest or concern in the outcome” (Cawelti “Gunfighter” 55-56), and hence does differ greatly from the vigilante in this respect. Nonetheless, as illustrated in *Red Harvest*, the case, or the ensuing events, in which he engages might lead the detective to exert extreme violence in order to get “his” revenge and resorting to self-administered justice⁴⁷.

The violence the detective invariably encounters and is forced to deal out is due to the fact that he “is forced to take over the basic moral functions of exposure, protection, judgment, execution” (Cawelti *Adventure* 152) as he is the only entity in his world that is suitable for these functions. He cannot be bribed and he will not back down, hence he is to be threatened himself and eventually disposed of.

⁴⁷ In the case of the Continental Op, Pepper identifies “traces of a personality predisposed towards violence” (Pepper *The Contemporary American Crime Novel* 23), therefore the Op’s readiness to take such extreme measures should not be surprising.

Nevertheless this ubiquity of violence is to be labeled as a “fashionable right-wing preoccupation” (Jameson 181) that seems to be a conventional theme of American crime literature and neatly ties in with the emphasis on individualism discussed before. The most interesting interpretation of this theme is to be observed in *Red Harvest*. Hammett, being an outspoken communist himself, managed to do the splits and created the Continental Op as an example of “idealized average American-ness” (qtd. in Pepper *The Contemporary American Crime Novel* 21), as neither the gun-wielding enforcer⁴⁸ nor the “champion of the people” (Pepper *The Contemporary American Crime Novel* 21). But according to Lehman, he is the living “proof that violence is needed to contain violence” (140). The perfect embodiment of this concept is Bruce Willis’s character John Smith in the movie *Last Man Standing*, a title which should be self-explanatory, and which can be seen as an indirect film adaptation of *Red Harvest*.

4.3.4 The relationships

Although it has not been spelled out but the hard-boiled detective fiction is a genre which dwells on the fantasies of white masculinity and the constant reaffirmation of its patriarchal values and machismo from its beginning. The fact that during the second half of the last century also female protagonists came to populate the pages of the books shelved in the “hard-boiled” section does not conceal the misogyny inherent to and almost celebrated in this variety of crime fiction. Cawelti even states that the “real hostility of the hard-boiled story is directed toward women and the rich” (*Adventure* 158). Is it not the most gentlemanly of the three detectives under scrutiny who wishes the rich to hell and who has the most questionable relation to women? But why?

Even though Lehman states that he is not the “champion of the people”, he is exactly that. He is the champion of the common people, he is the valve for all those “who face the most frustration and powerlessness in their actual lives” (Cawelti “Myths” 531). Is this not the kind of view on the world of those who would be most quickly identified as readers of the pulps? Those who are open to such oversimplifications of the world are historically the easiest prey for such

⁴⁸ See Cawelti “The New Mythology of Crime” for a definition of that term.

sentiments. This aspect of the genre, the populist leanings, has to be kept in mind when analyzing the appeal of this genre and might even be the key to such an study.

All the women who are in one way or the other attractive to the detective are somehow connected to the crime of the respective story. They are the murderesses, the traitors, the thieves who seek to capitalize on the vulnerability of the sleuth to their lure. But as the hard-boiled detective seems to be ultimately immune to their siren song, they are either killed or exposed and handed over to the police. The only women who may coexist with the detective are those who do not use their femininity for their own ends. Effie Perrine, Spade's faithful secretary, survives as her role is that of the "secretary" and not that of a woman. There might be a sense of flirting between her and her boss but it remains crystal clear that Spade is her superior.

The women at eye level with the hard-boiled detective elicit a "fear of feminine aggression and domination" (Cawelti *Adventure* 154). They are also dangerous for him and his position as the hyper-masculine individual. The villainous women, the *femmes fatales*, of hard-boiled fiction continuously threaten his "sexual identity and masculine certitude" (Cawelti *Adventure* 157)⁴⁹. The detective needs to protect his status and therefore is not allowed to get involved with them on less superficial level by his code. Certainly, the detective is no asexual being unaware of the attraction of the opposite gender, yet, he need not succumb to them. Sex is almost always displayed as something aggressive, something that urges to invade the sphere of inviolability that defines his personality. Samuel Spade has his sense of justice reign over his personal interests and desires as "the fulfillment of romantic dreams is submitted to a masculinized objectivity in which reason rules over emotion" (Nyman 5).

⁴⁹ "The woman represents the threat of the man's repressed femininity" (Robin Wood qtd. Robert Lang 33).

Nonetheless, a proper discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of this thesis and is subject to several brilliant studies⁵⁰ but it has to be noted that the dissemination of a questionable vision of the gender roles and heightened emphasis on the aforementioned “masculine hermeticism” is an undeniable element of hard-boiled fiction⁵¹ and has to be kept in mind for further consideration.

As regards the relationship between the hard-boiled detective and the police, there is also little room for deviation in the classical, genre-defining stories. Although the detective might have neutral to friendly connections to the police, he might even have a cop friend, his attitude towards the better part of them is undeniably negative to hostile. But those few friendly acquaintances remain the exception to the rule. The detective is more often than not at the receiving end of the corrupt fist of the law. Marlowe, for example, falls victim to the questionable tactics of law enforcement. He believes himself to be superior to them as they are, in most cases, part of and sometimes even accessories to the flood crime that submerges the urban landscape. They are not as fit to fight the vices that plague society as he is. The hard-boiled detective, or rather his perception of reality, is again slave to his code and his strict, at times religious, adherence to it. As with two of the three protagonists under scrutiny we are confronted with a first person narrative, therefore the detective himself chooses on how the police is presented to the reader. But even in *The Maltese Falcon*, the one novel making use of third person narration in this analysis, law enforcement is not displayed as incapable of solving the actual crime. This corresponds to the aforementioned populist view of the corrupt police as they guard the law and the law is what prohibits them from achieving what should be rightfully theirs. Only a character like hard-boiled detective can bring justice, whatever one’s own perception of it may be.

⁵⁰ As starting points for such analyses see Nyman, Jopi *Men Alone: Masculinity, Individualism, and Hard-Boiled Fiction*. New Costerus Series 111. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997 and Abbott, Megan E. *The Street Was Mine. White Masculinity in Hardboiled Fiction and Film Noir*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

⁵¹ In the words of Samuel Spade as a prime example of this sentiment: “He is connected to some of them by a kind of friendship based on mutual respect.” (*The Maltese Falcon* 27).

5 Conclusion

The detectives of the nineteenth century and of the Golden Age were mostly gentlemen solving crimes out of curiosity or out of tedium. They were amateurs who rather engaged in intellectual mind games than doing “dirty” detective business. Their world is an upper-class society which is thrown into chaos by some outcast who has to be expelled.

The hard-boiled novel in general stands in stark contrast to this as its world is one “at the verge of disintegration [...] in which no one is to be trusted and all must be tested” (Rzepka 180). The goal of Sherlock Holmes’ investigations was to straighten out the minor perturbations in a world which needs and most importantly deserves to be saved. The aspect of relationship was also subject to change. The companion like Dr. Watson or Captain Arthur Hastings is discarded and the hard-boiled detective becomes the “lonesome cowboy” of the city. The hard-boiled detective as the lone ‘hero’ is confronted with a society that is already beyond repair and therefore can only save his “personal integrity in the face of repeated temptations and deceptions” (Rzepka 180), namely organized crime and corruption of both government and police.

In this respect, the hard-boiled novel is also necessarily darker and more depressing than its predecessors as at its end the order is never fully restored and the detective is only able to intervene on a small scale and, if any, only partial redemption is possible. George Grella identifies this mindset of increased emphasis on personal autonomy as “quintessentially American” (see Rzepka 180). It should therefore not be surprising that this form of detective fiction was the brainchild of American writers⁵².

The term “realistic” seems to be invariably linked with the comparison of Golden Age and hard-boiled detective fiction. It has to be noted that this approach is not undisputed, as for example David Lehman declares that these novels only “convey the *illusion* of realism” (149) and that the novelty “wasn’t an increase in

⁵² Beekman offers a different explanation for the “Americanness” of the hard-boiled novel, namely the different “attitude toward violence” (Beekman 151).

realism but an insistence that plausibility” (150). He concludes that “[t]he hard-boiled novel, done right, just *feels* real” (150). Sean McCann similarly argues that the hard-boiled detective story is “no less a popular fantasy than ‘the old cut-and-dried type of detective story’ it sought to replace.” (“The hard-boiled novel” 43). He goes on to claim that hard-boiled detective fiction

displaced one popular fantasy (emphasizing status competition and what was then called ‘brain work’) with another, combining two themes that had assumed increasing resonance in the US in the years following World War I: the tension between bureaucratic organization and personal autonomy, and the violent struggle, as Shaw put it, between ‘civilization’ and ‘barbarity’” (“The hard-boiled novel” 44)

Although the hard-boiled detective novel jeopardized the form of classical detective fiction, it never disposed of its most basic ingredient, the challenge of the puzzle element, which is to captivate the readers’ attention⁵³. And the writers sought to further appeal to the audience by writing about crimes that the people could relate to. While classical British and Golden Age detectives operated in an upper-middle class to upper class universe, the American sleuth worked amongst his fellow working class citizens. As Chandler wrote in his famous essay on the hard-boiled novel in 1950 that the writers, in this case Dashiell Hammett, “gave murder to the people that commit it for reasons” (14). And these were reasons beyond personal disputes, the crimes were driven by lust and greed. Death was no longer something that would only be delivered in the most delicate ways, there was no Professor Moriarty plotting extravagant schemes.

Crimes were committed with the instruments of the common people, like guns for example, and violence was an essential ingredient of this world and not an exceptional monstrosity⁵⁴. The readers were not deterred by this world as it was part of their daily routine. So for Chandler the arrival of hard-boiled fiction marked a departure from artificiality and a turn towards realism in detective fiction. Because of this more realistic approach, there was also considerable change in ‘narrative style’ according to Porter (Porter, 2003). The language of classical

⁵³ Beekman argues that “the Traditional Detective Novel is not a novel at all but an intellectual game” (1).

⁵⁴ As Herzogenrath perfectly puts it: “The criminal is no longer seen as perverse element in an otherwise untainted society, but as a representative of that corrupt society” (23).

detective fiction was no longer appropriate and the “spoken language of ordinary people themselves” (Porter 97) was the only way to communicate the experience of these “unlovely streets of modern urban America” (Porter 96)⁵⁵.

The Golden Age detective was a “intellectual superman” and a great part of the appeal of the hard-boiled detective is that his skills “are available to ‘everyman’ - toughness and tenacity, of course, but also a distinctive kind of verbal combativeness” (Horsley 73). Their target audience was also directly opposed. Golden Age fiction catered for the refined tastes of a middle-class readership while hard-boiled fiction is motivated by a “working-class populism” (McCann “The hard-boiled novel” 47).

As mentioned before, Golden Age detective fiction sought to soothe the feelings of confusion and loneliness of the post-World War I era. Hard-boiled fiction followed a different course to address the problems of the age and hence provided a different solution. A return to a stable and secure society is not possible as there simply is no security in the world.

In the essay “The Hard-Boiled Detective Novel”, George Grella quite nicely sums up the nature and peculiarities of the hard-boiled detective novel:

The detective in the hard-boiled novel generally solves his mystery in a hurried, disordered fashion in the last few pages of his book, with little effort to clear up all points or tie up all loose threads. That the progress of the quest is more interesting than its completion further distinguishes the hard-boiled thriller from the formal detective novel. Because he does not suit his society and its rules and because his quest once again fails to achieve the Grail, the American detective experiences none of the admiration or satisfaction that accompanies the transcendent sleuth’s success. *He has solved little, he has cured nothing* [emphasis added]. (Grella 115)

⁵⁵ The keyword for the description of the tone of the hard-boiled genre is definitely “cynical”, as almost all of the relevant critics fall back on this term. For an in-depth analysis see Christianson, Scott R. “Tough Talk and Wisecracks: Language as Power in American Detective Fiction.” *Journal of Popular Culture*, 23.2 (Fall 1989): 151-162.

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German Summary

Ziel dieser Diplomarbeit ist es, die Entwicklung der Kriminalliteratur, insbesondere die der Detektivromane der Zwischenkriegszeit, der sogenannten "hard-boiled novels", zu verfolgen. Der Ausgangspunkt dieser Analyse ist die Behauptung mehrerer namhafter Kritiker, dass die "hard-boiled" Detektivgeschichte das Resultat einer amerikanischen Antwort auf die „Künstlichkeit“ der klassischen Vertreter der Detektivromane ist. Daher ist der erste Teil der Arbeit eine Darstellung der Entwicklung und das Wesen der Kriminalgeschichten bis zum Auftreten des Detektivromanes. Des Weiteren folgt ein detaillierter Überblick der Charakteristika der Detektivgeschichten Edgar Allan Poes und seiner Nachfolger, der Schöpfer des "Great Detective" (Lehman 43). Daran schließt eine Definition des "quintessential American" (Grella 104) Detektivs an, die auf dem vermeintlichen literarischen Vorläufer, *den* Held der amerikanischen Literatur, nämlich James Fennimore Coopers Leatherstocking, und weiteren einflussreichen Protagonisten, basiert. Als Nächstes werden der direkte Einfluss und die daraus resultierenden Veränderungen in der Kriminalliteratur und auch mögliche Gründe für diese Entwicklung untersucht. Es wird hier gezeigt, dass diese Gründe vielzählig sind und weit über einen Versuch der "Amerikanisierung" der Form hinausgehen.

Im nächsten Abschnitt folgt eine detaillierte Analyse der drei wichtigsten Protagonisten der frühen "hard-boiled"-Romane und ihrer Autoren. Der letzte Teil des vierten Kapitels ist die Sammlung der gemeinsamen Charakteristika der drei Detektive, die dann im letzten Abschnitt der Arbeit mit denen der klassischen Detektive verglichen wird.

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