

## Politics and the 1920s Writings of Dashiell Hammett

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At first glance, Dashiell Hammett appears a common figure in American letters. He is celebrated as a left-wing writer sympathetic to the American Communist Party (CP) in the 1930s amid the Great Depression and the rise of fascism in Europe. Memories of Hammett are often associated with labor and social struggles in the U.S. and Communist “front groups” in the post-war period. During the period of Senator Joseph McCarthy’s anti-Communism, Hammett, notably, refused to collaborate with the House Un-American Activities Committee’s (HUAC) investigations and was briefly jailed and hounded by the government until his death in 1961.

Histories of the “literary left” in the twentieth century, however, ignore Hammett.<sup>1</sup> At first glance this seems strange, given both Hammett’s literary fame and his politics. More accurately, this points to the difficulty of turning Hammett into a member of the “literary left” based on his literary work, as opposed to his later political activity. At the same time, some writers have attempted to place Hammett’s writing within the context of the 1930s, some even going so far as to posit that his work had underlying left-wing politics. Michael Denning, for example, argues that Hammett’s “stories and characters . . . in a large part established the hard-boiled aesthetic of the Popular Front” in the 1930s.<sup>2</sup> This perspective highlights the danger of seeing Hammett as a writer in the 1930s, instead of the 1920s. Thus, in his study of Hammett, *Beams Falling* (1980), Peter Wolfe states that Hammett “was wooed by Marxism in the 1920s or 1930s.”<sup>3</sup>

While technically correct, this imprecision obscures the fact that Hammett's literary activity, in the 1920s, and his subsequent political activity in the post-war period are different. Certainly Hammett's importance as a Communist sympathizer was enhanced by his writings, but the proper context in which to place these writings is in the pre-Communist 1920s and not the 1930s.

While many writers started on the radical left and moved to the right in the post-war period, Hammett started as a member of the notorious anti-labor Pinkerton Detective Agency and ended a supporter of the Communist Party. Hammett, perhaps, is the only writer whom both the Pinkerton and the Communists each prominently claim as their own on their respective Web sites.<sup>4</sup> Unlike many famous left-wing writers, Hammett wrote his major works *before* he became a radical. Not only did he oppose "proletarian literature," but also his work is largely *anti-proletarian*: it emphasizes individual action instead of collective effort, and its genre, detective fiction, glorifies a profession among whose jobs is repressing the labor movement.

In examining Hammett's writings against his political evolution in the 1920s, this essay argues against the tendency to *read* Hammett *backwards*. This article argues that Hammett's early stories do not lend themselves to a coherent political reading, much less a radical one. They focus on themes central to the Gilded Age, Progressive Era and the Roaring 1920s: themes such as political corruption, social tensions caused by urbanization and industrialization, and the increasing breakdown of bourgeois respectability. As with other writers of the period, distinctly conservative, perhaps even reactionary, elements can be found in Hammett's writings of the 1920s.

LeRoy Lad Panek has complained about viewing Hammett's early writing from the perspective of *The Maltese Falcon*.<sup>5</sup> One right-wing journalist claims Hammett "portrayed a society that was fodder for anti-capitalists."<sup>6</sup> One scholar argues that even the early "The Gutting of Couffignal" (December 1925), "shows pronounced Communist themes" and that Hammett's "Communist sympathies began considerably earlier" than often believed.<sup>7</sup>

His writings from the twenties should not be considered "Marxist." Beyond the inherently problematic concept of "Marxist fiction" in general (which tends to confound literature with political propaganda and assumes that a writer with particular politics will write in a particular way), there are three problems with reading Hammett's writing from his later politics. Hammett was not a Communist when he wrote his published work; Hammett's work does not articulate, much less argue, Marxist concerns; and, at least in the 1930s, Hammett opposed the concept of "proletarian literature."<sup>8</sup> Karen Connolly-Lane describes Hammett in 1929 as "a not-yet Marxist, a man who, finding himself thoroughly dissatisfied with the current (capitalist) state of affairs, looks at once back to nineteenth-century Republicanism and forward to Marxism in search of some way in which Americans might take control of their lives."<sup>9</sup> In contrast, through the 1920s Hammett was indeed in political transition, his starting point was a conservative, even reactionary worldview that saw the world as fundamentally and

irredeemably corrupt, violent, and irrational. As such, Hammett's writing is much closer to fascism, in the sense of its use of irrationality, than Marxism. Another way of stating the point is Hammett's writings are, in a political sense, contradictory with no pre-determined ideological conclusion.

### Hammett's Pinkerton Experience

Politically, one particularly interesting aspect of Hammett's biography is that he began his career as an anti-labor Pinkerton.<sup>10</sup> He enlisted in the Pinkertons in 1915; although interrupted by military service in the First World War and by health problems, his Pinkerton career lasted until February 1922. This was his first real career, which taught him professional skills and professional pride—themes central to his work.<sup>11</sup> When he joined, the Pinkertons were synonymous with anti-labor repression, based on some six decades of union-busting and strike-breaking. Scottish émigré Allan Pinkerton founded his self-named detective agency in 1855, the first in the U.S., before the creation of most local or national law enforcement organizations.<sup>12</sup> Anti-worker repression was a component of detective work from the start: spying on workers to prevent theft; sabotaging and disrupting trade unions; defending strike-breakers and attacking striking workers.<sup>13</sup> From the 1870s through the end of the First World War, as American industrial capitalism expanded and the labor movement attempted to organize, class struggle waged throughout the country, at times breaking out into open war. According to labor historian Philip Taft, “violence in labor disputes is more common in the United States than in any other industrial nation.”<sup>14</sup> There is probably no major strike in this period which the Pinkertons were not involved in brutalizing the labor movement. In addition to violence, the Pinkertons excelled at framing up labor activists. In the 1870s, a Pinkerton, James McParland, had infiltrated the Molly Maguires, a supposed secret terrorist organization of Irish coal miners in Pennsylvania, and eventually got twenty miners hanged.<sup>15</sup>

From 1866 to 1892, the Pinkertons participated in at least seventy strikes.<sup>16</sup> A key moment was the Homestead strike in 1892, at a Carnegie Steel plant near Pittsburgh. When Henry Frick, the plant's manager, imported several hundred Pinkertons to break a union, strikers and their supporters fought a pitched battle against them, repelling them.<sup>17</sup> At the time, Harvard professor Frank W. Taussig wrote, “the hatred of the labour classes against the Pinkertons, as they are called, is beyond description. They are regarded as vile hirelings, assassins employed by monopolists for the oppression of the labouring man.”<sup>18</sup> The song “Father was killed by the Pinkerton Men” became popular after the strike, the Senate held hearings on the Pinkertons,<sup>19</sup> and Congress passed the “Pinkerton Law” that prohibited the federal government from hiring an “employee of the Pinkerton Detective Agency, or similar agency.”<sup>20</sup> This did not stop the Pinkertons. In 1906-07, McParland helped spearhead the campaign to frame Western Federation of Miners leaders William “Big Bill” Haywood, Charles Moyer and George Pettibone for murdering the governor of Idaho. In fact, “the Pinkerton agency

prospered during the Progressive era,” according to Robert Weiss. From 1892 to 1910, it opened fifteen new branch offices—eight alone between 1903 and 1906—in order to recruit labor spies. “The suppression of strikes,” he continues, “reached an unprecedented ferocity later in the Progressive era, with the years 1911-1916 especially notable.” Furthermore,

By the turn of the century the character of those who were recruited as strikebreakers changed. At first they were chosen from among the honest but destitute and gullible newer immigrant groups, and were usually brought to the scene of a strike under false pretenses. Now these “finks” were recruited from a *class* of professional strikebreakers, a lumpenproletariat with long criminal records who made a profession of their work.<sup>21</sup>

Not only did Hammett join the Pinkertons when their anti-working-class nature was obvious, but his writings appear to studiously avoid this theme which was established in popular literature about the Pinkertons. As Taft puts it, “From the Homestead strike until the 1930’s, employers who were determined to prevent unionization of their personnel could avail themselves of professional strikebreakers and guards who might or might not be deputized. The appearance of these guards and striker-replacements frequently triggered the worst riots in labor disputes.”<sup>22</sup> This history was reflected in numerous books about the Pinkertons. Allan Pinkerton himself wrote eighteen books. The first, published in 1877, a year of great labor struggle and anti-radical hysteria, describes a Pinkerton’s infiltration of the Molly Maguires. In 1907, Morris Friedman, a disgruntled Pinkerton employee, wrote an exposé, *The Pinkerton Labor Spy*. Conan Doyle wrote a Sherlock Holmes story about the Pinkerton campaign against the Molly Maguires, *The Valley of Fear* (1915).<sup>23</sup> Before Hammett, the most famous Pinkerton author was Charles A. Siringo, an operative from 1886 until the first decade of the twentieth century. Any literate American would have heard of Siringo’s *A Cowboy Detective: A True Story of Twenty-Two Years with a World Famous Detective Agency* (1912).<sup>24</sup> He frankly describes how he decided to become a detective in revulsion against the Haymarket Square “riot” in Chicago in 1886, when police attacked an anarchist demonstration which was demanding an eight-hour day and subsequently arrested and executed several leading Chicago unionists. Siringo describes his role in infiltrating unions and repressing organizers, including the Western Federation of Miners, the predecessor to the radical Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Siringo (like many Pinkertons) spent much time in non-labor-related activities, such as tracking stolen cattle and dealing with other crimes, but repressing organized labor was central to his Pinkerton work.

### Frank Little and Hammett's Political Evolution

Central to the myth of Hammett's conversion to Marxism from Pinkerton is the murder of IWW organizer Frank Little during a copper strike in Butte, Montana. For several years, there had been wave after wave of anti-radical violence, especially against IWW militants, which intersected a fear of radicalism, traditional anti-labor repression, and pro-war chauvinism.<sup>25</sup> Unlike the pro-capitalist leadership of the American Federation of Labor, the IWW was openly hostile to capitalism and, while its leadership was cautious in directly opposing World War I, refused to stop organizing strikes in key war industries like mining. In the summer of 1917, Little helped organize a strike by copper miners in Bisbee, Arizona, which ended after two weeks when after a two-thousand-strong posse forced more than a thousand strikers and sympathizers into boxcars and "deported" them 175 miles away to the sweltering New Mexico desert.<sup>26</sup> Barely escaping, Little was sent to help organize Butte miners. His reception by the Anaconda Copper Mining Company, the pro-company press and the police was as hostile in Montana as in Arizona. Not only did he try to organize workers into the radical IWW, but he spoke against the war. On August 1, he was kidnapped and lynched by armed vigilantes, likely in the pay of the copper company. There was no investigation by any law enforcement agency of this murder.<sup>27</sup>

According to his long-term lover Lillian Hellman, Hammett claimed that the copper company had offered him \$5000 to kill Little:

Through the years he was to repeat that bribe offer so many times that I came to believe, knowing him now, that it was a kind of key to his life. He had given a man the right to think he would murder, and that fact that Frank Little was lynched with three other men in what was known as the Everett Massacre must have been, for Hammett, an abiding horror. I think that I can date Hammett's belief that he was living in a corrupt society from Little's murder. In time, he came to the conclusion that nothing less than a revolution could wipe out the corruption. I do not mean to suggest that his radical conversion was based on one experience, but sometimes in complex minds it is the plainest experience that speeds the wheels that have already begun to move.<sup>28</sup>

Literary historian Rita Elizabeth Rippetoe observes, "The Little incident, if true, may well have influenced Hammett's presentation of the ethical dimensions faced by his protagonists."<sup>29</sup> Crime novelist James Ellroy places Hammett's "mythic refusal" to kill Little at the center of his writing and his politics. His activities as a Pinkerton "made him in large part a fascist tool. He knew it. He later embraced Marxist thought as a rightwing toady and used leftist dialectic for ironic definition."<sup>30</sup> However important, this story is almost certainly false.

Even if we ignore the issue of Hellman's accuracy—the papers at the University of Texas at Austin's Ransom Center reveal her assertive control of Hammett's posthumous image—and the context of Hammett's supposed telling it to Hellman—in which Hammett was trying to court Hellman—we are still left with serious questions about its accuracy. Hammett was not in Montana when Little was killed; he went to Butte in 1920 during (or shortly after) another strike.<sup>31</sup> Of Hammett's biographers, two accept this incident as fact, basing them on Hellman, and one labels it “implausible” even if Hammett likely did tell the story.<sup>32</sup> Karen Connolly-Lane's recent examination of the politics of Hammett's writing credits Hellman's story as “convincing.”<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, many journalists (as opposed to literary scholars) disbelieve the story.<sup>34</sup>

Studies of the Butte strike do not discuss the Pinkertons (despite their decades-long hostility towards the WFM), and those addressing Little's murder do not mention Hammett.<sup>35</sup> Contemporary accounts do not mention the Pinkertons. The initial *New York Times* article on Little's lynching, instead of blaming the Pinkertons (or anybody else acting as an agent for the mining company) blamed the killing on an intra-radical dispute and depicted Little as a possible detective agent; the next day, dropping this outrageous claim, the *Times* quoted a union statement that “the name of five of the lynching party are known” and “‘two of the men,’ it is declared, ‘are gun men,’ and one is connected with law enforcement in the city.”<sup>36</sup> In 1926, the *Labor Defender* (published by the International Labor Defense, a group organized by the Communist Party) issued a memorial edition dedicated to Little; none of Little's former comrades mentioned the Pinkertons.<sup>37</sup> Nor does William Haywood's autobiography, written about a decade after Little's murder.<sup>38</sup>

The Pinkertons engaged in anti-union violence, and Little's murder could have affected Hammett, even if he was uninvolved. Hammett could have been involved in other unsavory, if not infamous, anti-labor actions. In 1920, besides being in Butte, Hammett also was a Pinkerton in Spokane, Washington, which had its own history of militant labor battles and anti-labor repression.<sup>39</sup> Throughout the late teens and twenties, Butte remained in a state of class struggle, from which Hammett drew his vision of “Poisonville” in *Red Harvest*. Because the Pinkerton agency claimed that their files contained no information on his activity, we do not know what Hammett did in Butte,<sup>40</sup> and given Hammett's reputation for secrecy, we most likely will not.<sup>41</sup>

Hammett drew on his Butte experiences when he wrote *Red Harvest*, but he did not write a “Marxist” novel.<sup>42</sup> Stating conventional wisdom, an article in the San Francisco *Chronicle* claims, “The things Hammett saw as a Pinkerton operative also helped make him a Marxist.”<sup>43</sup> Crime writer Joe Gores—who wrote a novel about Hammett<sup>44</sup>—makes Hammett's anti-labor history central to his politics: “He was a strikebreaker, and he was a very good strikebreaker. Then, I think, he had a gradual, genuine revulsion and turned around.”<sup>45</sup> But this was a slow process: he remained a Pinkerton until 1922, retiring only when tuberculosis forced him. It is difficult to determine when he first considered himself a Marxist,

but “it seems likely” that Hammett, according to Richard Layman, “joined the [Communist] party in 1937-38.”<sup>46</sup> A letter to his daughter in late February 1936 indicates Hammett had become sympathetic to the Communists by that time.<sup>47</sup> That is, Hammett did not become a radical until *at least a decade* after quitting the Pinkertons—or, to put it in perspective, Hammett’s entire literary career happened in this window. The radicalization of the 1930s—which propelled many other writers to socialism—probably affected Hammett more than the murder of Little a decade earlier.

### The Pinkertons and Hammett’s Writing

Hammett’s experience as a Pinkerton is central to his role as an author. He modeled his fictional Continental Detective Agency on the Pinkertons and, more importantly, created a literary persona upon his having been a real Pinkerton. The title of an early piece, “Memoirs of a Private Detective” (March 1923), establishes his bona fides. Several months later, in November 1924, *Black Mask* published a short autobiographical note that stated his Pinkerton experience.<sup>48</sup> Unlike his predecessors who knew nothing about the criminal world, Hammett did. In his famous analysis of the detective story, “The Simple Art of Murder” (1944), Raymond Chandler emphasizes that Hammett was among those “who wrote or tried to write realistic mystery fiction”:

I doubt that Hammett had any deliberate artistic aims whatever; he was trying to make a living by writing something he had firsthand information about. He made some of it up; all writers do; but it had a basis in fact; it was made up out of real things.<sup>49</sup>

But how much of Hammett’s thinly disguised Pinkerton experience is real, and how much is made up? His experience helped him avoid various pitfalls that other writers fell into. A review of several contemporary detective novels that Hammett wrote for the *Saturday Review of Literature* (January 1927) establishes both Hammett’s detective credentials and his disdain for the genre in the first paragraph:

In some years of working for private detective agencies in various cities I came across only one fellow sleuth who would confess that he read detective stories. ‘I eat ‘em up,’ this one said without shame. ‘When I’m through my day’s gumshoeing I like to relax; I like to get my mind on something that’s altogether different from the daily grind; so I read detective stories.’<sup>50</sup>

Along with Hammett’s distinctive argot, this experience creates the illusion of verisimilitude. Yet there is reason to doubt the accuracy of Hammett’s stories.

Probably George Thompson is correct that Hammett's "eight years as a Pinkerton detective gave him his material, but finding the right way to use this experience was his ongoing concern."<sup>51</sup> Decades later, Hammett implied that his Pinkerton persona was as valuable for marketing his work as for providing material. "I found I could sell the stories easily when it became known that I had been a Pinkerton man," he told an interviewer in 1957. "People thought my stuff was authentic."<sup>52</sup> One example is bootlegged alcohol. Hammett's characters are constantly drinking; besides reflecting Hammett's own drunkenness, this continual alcoholic theme highlights the corruption endemic in Prohibition society, most obviously in "Nightmare Town."<sup>53</sup> Yet, as Quan Zhang points out, most of Hammett's actual detective experience took place *before* Prohibition.<sup>54</sup> In his history of the Pinkertons, Frank Morn argues, "Hammett's ideal detective experiences and his real ones did not coincide."<sup>55</sup> Instead, Morn argued that most of a detective's time was taken up with boring, meaningless and absurd tasks. Morn suggests that Hammett's "Memoirs of a Private Detective," a collection of twenty-nine short, cynical reminiscences is more typical.<sup>56</sup>

These "Memoirs" are often humorous recollections, focusing on irony—such as number eight: "I once was falsely accused of perjury and had to perjure myself to escape arrest." Such disregard for and lack of interest in the truth would become a trademark of Hammett's writing. Poet George Sterling, writing to *Smart Set* editor H.L. Mencken, captured this in his statement that "'Dashiell Hammett' puzzles me: I find it hard either to believe or to disbelieve his existence. Some of the items [in the "Memoirs"] sound incredible; and it seems impossible to have invented others."<sup>57</sup> However, none of these anecdotes deals with the labor movement—the most important Pinkerton activity. In fact, in Hammett's Continental Op stories, there is one prominent reference to the Pinkertons' infamy as strikebreakers. In *Red Harvest* (1929)—which was Hammett's first novel and adapted from a series of *Black Mask* stories—the Op presents a fraudulent membership IWW card to a local organizer. Detectives do not carry around fake union credentials without a sinister purpose, but the Op's involvement in such classic Pinkerton operations is only hinted at. In other Continental Op stories, the Op occupies himself chasing and dodging various criminals, but not anti-labor activities. This is in stark contrast to previous books by other Pinkertons—including Allan Pinkerton, Morris Friedman and Charles Siringo—which emphasized the anti-labor nature of the agency.

However, as Ron Goulart points out, although Hammett had "work[ed] as a strikebreaker on the sides of the moneyed interests," the Op "never had to club a picket."<sup>58</sup> While Goulart attributes this to Hammett's allowing the Op "to have more scruples," in reality Hammett's fictionalized Pinkerton adventures *whitewash* the Pinkerton's anti-labor activity.<sup>59</sup> Rather than being somehow "proletarian" or "Marxist" writings, Hammett's Op stories disappear the class struggle entirely and present a prettified image of the Pinkertons.



## The Politics of Corruption in Hammett's Early Fiction

It is hard to say whether Hellman is correct that Hammett's experience as a Pinkerton made him grasp the corrupt nature of American society. If so, the wonder is that it took so long for him to discover this. Corruption was omnipresent in American society from the Gilded Age through the 1920s, and writers from across the political spectrum took turns denouncing it when convenient. Republicans denounced Democratic machine politics like Tammany Hall; Democrats denounced corruption in Republican administrations, including Reconstruction and the Crédit Mobilier scandal under Grant and the Teapot Dome scandal under Harding. Cartoonist Thomas Nast denounced corruption in all quarters, as did writers like Mark Twain and Upton Sinclair. Some progressives like Sinclair tied their muckraking to socialism, but anti-corruption politics could have a right-wing character. During the brief period of Reconstruction after the Civil War, when for the only time in U.S. history black people held basic political and civil rights in the South, racist Democrats railed against the corruption of Republican governments, an argument echoed two decades later by Northern historians such as William Dunning. During the 1920s, fundamentalist Protestants and the massive Ku Klux Klan attacked corruption. In 1924, the Indiana branch of the Klan issued the following appeal, which sounds like a description of the world of Hammett's short stories:

Every criminal, every gambler, every thug, every libertine, every girl ruiner, every home wrecker, every wife beater, every dope peddler, every crooked politician, every pagan papist priest, every shysta lawyer, every K [night] of C[olumbus], every white slaver, every brothel madam, every Rome-controlled newspaper, every black spider is fighting the Klan.<sup>60</sup>

In short, any literate American coming of age between 1870 and 1930 would have been aware of corruption, but even if this awareness translated into political action, it could have been of any type.

Corruption in Hammett's short stories took two forms: personal and social. His constant plays on words, irony and satire, where the reality of things and people are as a rule not what they seem, combined with the criminal world the Op navigates, leads Hammett to focus on personal corruption and deception. According to George Thompson, Hammett's "world [is] permeated by deception" and is "an ambiguous one." As a result, the Op himself is corrupted.<sup>61</sup> In "Arson Plus" (published in *Black Mask*, 1 October 1923), none of the characters are who they seem; and the key character, Thornburgh, is a fabrication. In "Crooked Souls" (15 October 1923), both the kidnapper and the Op employ deception: by dressing like a woman and pretending to be an insurance investigator, respectively. In "The Golden Horseshoe" (1924), almost all of the characters are corrupt and deceptive.<sup>62</sup> These and Hammett's other early crime stories are filled with urban

cynicism, corruption and deception. The truth itself becomes corrupt in the early *Black Mask* stories, a motif that Hammett would develop through the *Maltese Falcon*. Increasingly, it is not only a question of things not appearing what they seem, but as in the case of the famous falcon itself, the pretence and deception surrounding people and events *becomes* their reality.

This differs from traditional detective fiction where the detective cuts through criminal deception. At the end of the first Sherlock Holmes story, "A Study in Scarlet" (1887), Holmes highlights the importance of deception: "What you do in this world is a matter of no consequence." Instead, "The question is, what can you make people believe that you have done." Underlying the deception in the traditional detective story is the belief that the world is a rational place and that the detective can reset this fractured reality. At the end of his investigation, Holmes explains the crime to Dr. Watson and makes the world rational again: "The proof of its intrinsic simplicity is, that without any help save a few very ordinary deductions I was able to lay my hands upon the criminal within three days."<sup>63</sup> Or as one recent review of a book about Holmes puts it: "Holmes is the most consoling of literary icons. He cannot always prevent crime or punish the criminal, but he never fails to explain what has happened, and how, and why."<sup>64</sup>

Hammett's Op would agree with Holmes on deception, but not about the "intrinsic simplicity" of solving crimes. *Red Harvest* and "A Study in Scarlet" are opposites. The Op carries a cache of deceptive business cards; he has no worry about lying to his client, his employer or the world in general. Instead of intrinsic simplicity, there is "blood simple," achieved by relentless violence. The Op and Holmes have completely different goals. Holmes wants to solve the crime; the Op, after about a third of *Red Harvest*, gives up all pretense of solving a crime and dedicates himself to playing one corrupt gang of killers against another. There is no rational underpinning of the Op's world: his is a world of manipulation, violent pragmatism and deception.

In his attempt at a Marxist analysis of mystery novels, *Delightful Murder*, Ernest Mandel argues that such stories play an "integrative role" for their readers; they legitimate the social order and obscure the class nature of the criminal justice system itself:

The detective story is the realm of the happy ending. The criminal is always caught. Justice is always done. Crime never pays. Bourgeois legality, bourgeois values, bourgeois society, always triumph in the end. It is soothing, socially integrating literature, despite its concern with crime, violence and murder.<sup>65</sup>

Crime novels, therefore, are based on the model of "irrationality upsetting rationality" followed, through the intervention of the detective, by "rationality restored after irrational upheavals."<sup>66</sup> As Sean McCann shows, the classical detective story reflects and reinforces the classical liberal view of a rational,

orderly world ruled by law.<sup>67</sup> As Gramsci puts it, “in Sherlock Holmes there is a (too) rational balance between intelligence and science.”<sup>68</sup> The detective story expresses the values of bourgeois rationality, of a developing capitalism that promises to make the world more efficient and rational.

Yet, this is manifestly not the case for Hammett’s novels. There is no reason; the Op’s world is irrational. Crimes are insoluble. Or when “solved,” their solution is itself irrational. Hammett’s “The Golden Horseshoe” is a good example. The plot echoes Holmes’s dictum about making people believe since both the Op and the main criminal relate to each other through the medium of assumed identities. Yet, there are no deductions or internal logic. The Op, acting as narrator, describes his philosophy: “One way of finding what’s at bottom of either a cup of coffee or a situation is to keep stirring it up until whatever is on the bottom comes to the surface.”<sup>69</sup> Even when the Op solves the crime and the guilty criminal is hanged, the ending is not rational. Despite a confession, the Op cannot prove the murderer’s guilt for the crime he did commit, so the Op frames him for a murder he did not commit. As the Op tells the criminal: “I can’t put you up for the murders you engineered in San Francisco; but I can sock you with the one you didn’t do in Seattle—so justice won’t be cheated.”<sup>70</sup> Later, in the *Maltese Falcon*, the story that Sam Spade tells about Flitcraft illustrates the fundamental illusion of rationality. Flitcraft “adjusted himself to beams falling, and then no more of them fell, and he adjusted himself to them not falling.”<sup>71</sup> As Robert Parker puts it, this episode shows that for Hammett, “the universe is random, that order may be the dream of art, but chaos is the law of nature.”<sup>72</sup>

By the 1920s, bourgeois rationality had itself become irrational. “Reason, by itself,” Mabel Vargas Vergara writes, “was not capable of solving the new problems and the uncertainty that overlapped positivist science. Social reality exposed elements such as violence, corruption, and criminal organizations, against which a lone detective could do little or nothing.”<sup>73</sup> The First World War illustrated this: fought with advanced techniques and technologies, the war stemmed from the failure of the advanced capitalist countries to rationally order the world. Instead, they bled each other dry and killed millions. The war’s European aftermath called into question the ability of capitalism to rationally order the world. This increased the popularity of both Communists, who looked to the Bolshevik Revolution’s promise of international socialist revolution to transcend the bankruptcy of capitalism, as well as fascists who promised to restore capitalist stability and order through violence and repression against the working class.

The U.S. was spared such dramatic polarization; although both the revolutionary left and the fascistic right grew dramatically, the country was marked by so-called “normalcy.” The late teens and early twenties experienced increasing anti-labor, anti-socialist (and racist) violence and repression, but ultimately, the state was able to maintain capitalist stability without resorting to fascism. Order and efficiency were the watchwords of a rapidly industrializing American society. The study of business management attained academic

legitimacy; Fordism—the idea that mass production, relatively high wages and a closely policed work force could sustain capitalist growth and Taylorism—the idea that managers could more efficiently plan production—reflected this emphasis on coercive rationality.<sup>74</sup>

Sean McCann argues in *Gumshoe America* that hard-boiled detective fiction in the interwar period echoed contemporary social science's emphasis on “the gap between the dogma of traditional political theory and the unacknowledged facts of social reality.”<sup>75</sup> These tensions are the core of Hammett's social vision. The rationality of bourgeois society could only be maintained through violent repression; the ordered nature of classical Lockean liberalism had turned into its opposite, Hobbesian violence.

Hammett's Op stories are extremely violent. Although there is violence in traditional detective stories, it is not their core. Instead, the puzzle, the mystery—and hence the struggle to return the world to rationality—is what the novel is really about. Hammett changed this. Violence—and violent people—are Hammett's real subjects. “Hammett took murder out of the Venetian vase,” Chandler writes in “The Simple Art of Murder,” “and dropped it into the alley.”<sup>76</sup> In the Op's world, violence, rather than justice or truth, is the core of society. Steven Marcus has pointed out that:

In Hammett's stories there is a great deal of violence—a great deal of shooting, of hitting, of torturing. Indeed, his detectives get pleasure out of it. Once you see that, you realize that the means Hammett's characters use are corrupting. . . .<sup>77</sup>

His is a society fundamentally corrupted, and the reader is left without the rational ending of a Holmes story.

Hammett's emphasis on social corruption—and his sympathies for the Communist Party in the 1930s—have led some critics to ascribe Hammett's early work with leftist politics. For example, Graham Barnfield describes “Hammett's vision of the city” as “a criminal underworld shot through with a mixture of his political commitments and a possibility of human improvement,” in contrast to more recent writers whose “style has shifted from a humanist perspective on the city to a deeply misanthropic one.”<sup>78</sup> Yet, this reading is problematic. Hammett's radical political commitments came much later and his early stories contain a strain of misanthropy—or at least *machismo*.<sup>79</sup> Italian critic Alberto del Monte characterizes Hammett's world as marked by “corruption, abuse, and violence.” Rather than a world salvageable by political commitment and human improvement, Del Monte writes that “Hammett's innovation consisted in making the detective novel an instrument of realistic representation and principally of denunciation. His realism consists, in effect, of the description of certain aspects of contemporary society from a pessimistic perspective.”<sup>80</sup> James Naremore locates Hammett's power in his “deeply critical and skeptical attitude towards American society” and his endings which “are always bleak.”<sup>81</sup> While Sean

McCann is correct that hard-boiled authors shared something with New Deal liberalism, they shared something with fascism. Hard-boiled fiction is neither inherently radical (or liberal) nor reactionary; one can trace the political evolution of Hollywood's adaptation of hard-boiled stories in relationship to the political mood of the U.S. at the time of production.<sup>82</sup>

### Hammett's Politics, Modernism and the 1920s

Although Hammett is best known for his popular detective fiction, his writings in the 1920s share much with contemporary modernist writers. Both were reacting to the modernization intellectually and industrially. Their overlap includes political ambiguity. Like many modernists, Hammett's writings of the 1920s can be read as either "leftist," "right-wing," or entirely non-political. As the founder of the modern American detective novel, Hammett's early years illustrate the refracted cultural tensions of the United States in the early twentieth century.

Hammett did not originally want to write detective fiction. His first published pieces appeared in 1922 in H.L. Mencken's *Smart Set*; the journal published authors such as F. Scott Fitzgerald, W. B. Yeats, W. Somerset Maugham, Aldous Huxley, Ezra Pound and James Joyce.<sup>83</sup> These *Smart Set* articles, such as his first, "The Parthian Shot" (October 1922), emphasize irony and satire. We can see the outline of Hammett's later work: an emphasis on names, surprise endings, irony and a sense that traditional social relationships (the family in this case) have degenerated.<sup>84</sup> Hammett settled on detective stories because they allowed him to use his own experience as literary raw material.<sup>85</sup> Even after starting to write detective stories for *The Black Mask*, he continued to write other types of stories.

Many of his literary contemporaries shared Hammett's preoccupations, such as F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). Jay Gatz/Gatsby appears an inversion of Hammett's Norman Aschraft/Edward Bohannon from "The Golden Horseshoe," published a year earlier. Gatsby reinvented himself from an American gangster into a wealthy British man of society, while Bohannon has reinvented himself from a British professional into a criminal. Both are thoroughly corrupted, and, in the end, neither can sustain the deception that defines him. Tellingly, both writers have been compared to T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922).<sup>86</sup> Hammett's work also shared the alienation, disjointedness and stream-of-consciousness narrative, and despondency of much modernist writing.

Hammett had an aversion to art-as-politics and avoided a knee-jerk anti-radicalism. As he explains in a June 1924 article in *Writer's Digest*, Hammett sees literature as "good to the extent that it is art, and bad to the extent that it isn't; and I know of no other standard by which it may be judged."<sup>87</sup> At the same time, against the claim that the readers of the sex story are largely "radicals," "social perverts" and "moral lepers," he quips, "In Jack London's day, I understand, there were many good people who thought him a radical!"<sup>88</sup> London—who died

in 1916—was both a literary icon of California and one-time supporter of the Socialist Party. In “The Gutting of Couffignal” (1925), the villains are Russian royals in exile from the Bolshevik Revolution. In 1927, he criticized a mystery novel: “Most of the activity seems purposeless, but in the end of dear old England is saved once more from the Bolsheviks.”<sup>89</sup> Tilton’s conclusion that Hammett interjects “Communist themes” into his early writings seems far-fetched;<sup>90</sup> Hammett’s novels avoided either pro- or anti-Communist sentiments.

Politics for Hammett were not about big ideologies but squalid corruption linked to the criminal world. “Women, Politics and Murder,” (*Black Mask*, September 1924) deals with corrupt local politicians. “Your politician-contractor,” the Op muses at one point, “doesn’t always move in the open.”<sup>91</sup> The town in “Nightmare Town” (*Argosy*, December 1924) was a modern-day Potemkin village to hide illegal alcohol production. A character demolishes the false division between legitimate and corrupt society:

“You can guess how much money there is in this country in the hands of men who’d be glad to invest it in a booze game that was airtight. Not only crooks, I mean, but men who consider themselves honest. Take your guess, whatever it is, and double it, and you still won’t be within millions of a right answer. . . . The word went around that the new town was a place where a cook would be safe so long as he did what he was told. The slums of all the cities in America, and half of ‘em out of it, emptied themselves here. Every crook that was less than a step ahead of the police, and hard car fare here, came and got cover.”<sup>92</sup>

He then explains how the town handled the inevitable investigation:

“We have bankers, and ministers, and doctors, and postmasters, and prominent men of all sorts either to tangle the sleuths up with bum leads, or, if necessary, to frame them. You’ll find a flock of men in the State pen who came here—most of them as narcotic agents or prohibition agents—and got themselves tied up before they knew what it was all about.”<sup>93</sup>

Corruption, deception and disguise appear in most of Hammett’s work, including his novels. *Red Harvest* depicts the corruption of the local police and political establishment; *The Maltese Falcon* presents police and politicians as not interested in truth or justice, and *The Glass Key* (1931) is entirely about corrupt politicians who are involved in bootlegging and other criminal activities. “Business is business and politics is politics,” one gangster with political connections tells a politician with gangster connections in that novel. “Let’s keep them apart.”<sup>94</sup> But the rest of the book proves that for Hammett, this was impossible.

Scholars of European literature have debated the relationship between reactionary politics, including fascism, and modernism. Many European modernist writers—such as Eliot—had reactionary politics.<sup>95</sup> Hammett was not a fascist in the 1920s. To label him politically active, much less a reactionary, would also be false. But some of his preoccupations were the same that drove *some* modernist writers in Europe in a reactionary direction. In the U.S., as T.J. Jackson Lears has shown, there was an overlap between bourgeois reactions to modernization and European fascist concerns. One of these was the role of violence, “the desire to recombine a fragmented self and re-create a problematic reality through aggressive action” which “has lain behind fascism as well as the mass-market murder story.”<sup>96</sup> It is beyond the scope of this essay to tease out the relationship between fascism and modernism in Europe—a task made even more difficult because of the ambiguous definition of each term.<sup>97</sup>

European fascism<sup>98</sup> was at bottom not an intellectual or artist movement. It was a social and political movement. It consisted of extra-parliamentary mobilizations of the petty bourgeoisie, made desperate by economic and social crisis, along with the lumpenproletariat and even a section of more economically distressed workers.<sup>99</sup> Hammett’s writing reflected the same social crises that gave rise to fascism. As Jackson Lears has shown, the same social situation also gave rise to non-fascist cultural movements in the United States.

Modernist elements within Hammett’s stories does not make his fiction “reactionary”—since even *Jews Without Money* (1930), written by the arch-“proletarian” writer Mike Gold, contained such elements.<sup>100</sup> According to John P. Diggins, fascism proved attractive to some American writers who “were attracted to Mussolini’s Italy, in part, as an expression of their own alienation from and indictment against the decadent chaos and frantic tempo of modern American life.”<sup>101</sup> Mussolini’s fascism, although popular among some Italian Americans, did not find fertile ground in the U.S. as a potential mass *American* movement.

There was no significant mass fascist movement in the U.S. that would attract sophisticated intellectuals. If one of the roles of fascists in Europe was to smash the organized workers movement, it should be kept in mind that in the U.S. the organized labor was much weaker than its European counterparts. In the U.S. both public and private forces, including the Pinkertons, had sufficiently weakened the labor movement. The Klan, while popular, did have the same pull among writers and artists that Mussolini did in Italy. While “Americanism,” anti-immigrant xenophobia, racism and anti-Semitism were widespread in the late teens and twenties, they were more the hallmarks of those who resisted the rise of modernization. Modernist writers in the U.S. tended to overlap with leftists, immigrants, Jews, social reformers and urban cosmopolitans—i.e., people not likely to be attracted to the Klan.<sup>102</sup>

In its own way, hard-boiled detective fiction crystallized these same crises that gave rise to fascism in Europe. In her study of *Black Mask*, Erin Smith claims, “hard-boiled fiction between the wars was concerned with rethinking identities in the light of emergent consumer culture, with reconciling a residual

culture of manly, autonomous craftsmen with an emerging commodity culture. As a consequence, hard-boiled stories were loaded with contradictions. They offered the hero as an honest proletarian and a champion of unalienated labor, but their tortured plots followed the logic of scientific management.<sup>103</sup> Yet it is much easier to read Hammett's stories from the right than Smith assumes, since rather than being an "honest proletarian" the Pinkerton agent was a dishonest anti-proletarian. According to one contemporary article, when he was not protecting scabs, a detective carried out "shadow work, theatres, attendance at ball games, social gatherings, and industrial under-cover work" and then wrote secret reports.<sup>104</sup> He was often a small businessman, with an ethos of individualism; if he worked for an agency, his work was still anti-working class. In the case of the Op, who worked for a large agency, petty-bourgeois individualism was increasingly undercut by the growth of industrial capitalism, something that reflected the precarious position of the petty bourgeoisie as a whole. As Smith herself shows, the advertisements in *Black Mask* were geared towards obtaining lower middle-class jobs—salesmen, railway inspectors—and a description of pulp patrons contains as many petty-bourgeois as proletarian jobs: "locomotive engineers, musicians, mechanics, salesmen, clerks, waitresses, writers, editors, schoolteachers, ranchers and farmers."<sup>105</sup>

Most importantly, the (real) detective is not a policeman is not proletarian because a key element of his job is to destroy the organization of the proletariat, through strikebreaking and spying: his job was by definition anti-working class. As a private detective, the Op is an auxiliary to the capitalist state, i.e., he helps increase the repression of workers by capitalists and maintains the system of exploitation inherent in capitalism. In a Marxist sense, he forms part of what Lenin's *State and Revolution* (1917) refers to as "special bodies of armed men placed above society and alienating themselves from it" to protect capitalist property interests.<sup>106</sup>

Both Hammett's writing and European fascists stressed the irrationality of modern industrial capitalism while emphasizing its corruption. Edward Tannenbaum observes that "from 1919 until 1925, the majority of the Black Shirts [in Italy] were alienated young men, a self-styled 'lost generation,' determined to overthrow the liberal establishment by violent means and restore a 'sick society' to health."<sup>107</sup> The Op combines redemptive violence with sexist, racist and xenophobic views. He dislikes large-scale capitalism, but does not have a socialist vision. What distinguishes Hammett's vision from both Communism and fascism is that he seems not to have *any* vision of a purified society. The stories hark back to the pre-industrial Wild West; hard-boiled detective novels can be read as twentieth-century cowboy stories.<sup>108</sup> (The essential connection between these definitions can be seen in the appropriation of the themes of Hammett's *Red Harvest* to be depicted in the American west by Sergio Leone.)<sup>109</sup> Hammett's *machismo*—Freedman and Kendrick label him as a "paradigm of American macho" while Breu analyzes "hard-boiled masculinity"—also shares much with a right-wing misanthropy at the core of fascism.<sup>110</sup> As a former cadre in a violent



strike-breaking army, as a veteran of the First World War, Hammett would have appeared more likely to have joined an American version of the Nazis than the Communist Party. This is not to say that Hammett was a proto-fascist; Hammett did not become a fascist; in fact, his dedication to Communism was due to his aversion to Hitler and Franco. The reasons for this, however, are *historical*, not *literary*. Judged by his writings in the 1920s alone, Hammett's politics were very ambiguous and should not be seen as leading inevitably to Communism. Hammett's own political ambiguity is also reflected in that of the genre he created. Hammett firmly established the detective story as a form of social criticism, yet he also ensured that the genre could assume different political profiles.

### Hammett the Communist

In the 1930s, Hammett became a Communist. Yet there is nothing in his writings that suggests, much less predicts, this. If Hammett had died of tuberculosis in the early 1930s, his work would not have been classified as Marxist. As Cynthia Hamilton puts it, Hammett's leftist activism "shed little light backward on his fiction."<sup>111</sup> Hammett's political evolution in the 1930s reflected the radicalization of a large portion of the intelligentsia in reaction to the Depression, militant labor struggles, the rise of Fascism and the popularity of the Soviet Union. When capitalism seemed doomed to either collapse or fascism, Communism gained supporters among American intellectuals and workers.

The extent and depth of Hammett's Communist convictions warrant further study. To Wolfe, "his communism remains a puzzle."<sup>112</sup> However, there is no reason to doubt that his support to the Communist Party was genuine. Like many other writers and artists, he became radicalized during the Depression. But he was not a fair-weather friend and maintained his loyalty to the Party through the McCarthy period, including spending several months in prison and being bankrupted by the IRS because he refused to cooperate with anti-Communist prosecutions. Five years after Hammett's death, Hellman wrote that Hammett "was often witty and biting sharp about the American Communist Party, but he was, in the end, loyal to them."<sup>113</sup> Maurice Rapf, another Communist in Hollywood, recalled, "Hammett was the best-educated of us about Marx and Marxism."<sup>114</sup>

An analysis of Hammett's leftist politics would not be a literary analysis, however. Hammett's writing did not drive him towards Communism since he did not publish anything important after *The Thin Man* (1934). Even though Hammett is often seen as having supported Hellman's socially engaged writing,<sup>115</sup> his own work never directly deals with political themes so openly from a left-wing perspective. Hammett's importance to the left in the 1930s was not as a writer, even if, as Alan Wald put it, "he is present on the left scene in the 1930s as a personality, and . . . also did quite a bit of teaching at Party-led schools."<sup>116</sup> It is impossible to draw a political thread from Hammett's early writing to his final days around the Communist Party.

## Notes

1. Neither Barbara Foley's *Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993) nor James Murphy's *The Proletarian Moment* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991) mentions Hammett; Daniel Aaron's *Writers on the Left* (New York: Avon, 1961) mentions Hammett once (397), but not in the context of his writing. Alan Wald's *Exiles from a Future Time: The Forging of the Mid-Twentieth Century Literary Left* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002) mentions Hammett thrice (173, 269, 371), but again not in a literary context. Wald's earlier *Writing from the Left: New Essays on Radical Culture and Politics* (London and New York: Verso, 1994) cites Hammett as a well-known example of a mystery writer who had been a leftist—to urge study of other, lesser known, examples—but contains no political analysis of Hammett's work (79, 104). A more recent article mentions Hammett in passing as one of a list of "writers on the Left," but again does not analyze his relationship to the Left: Alan Wald, "Inconvenient Truths: The Communist Conundrum in Life and Art," *American Literary History* 21 (2009), 368-403.

2. This is especially true about *Red Harvest* which was, in fact, written before the stock market crash of 1929, although it was published later. See Woody Haut, *Pulp Culture: Hardboiled Fiction and the Cold War* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1995), 1; Carl Freedman and Christopher Kendrick, "Forms of Labor in Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest*," *PMLA* 106, no. 2 (March 1991), 209-21. Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1997), 256.

3. Peter Wolfe, *Beams Falling: The Art of Dashiell Hammett* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1980), 5.

4. For the Pinkertons, see the Pinkerton "We Never Sleep": <http://www.pinkertons.com/never.sleep.htm> [accessed 6 November 2007]. For the Communists, see the CPUSA frequently asked questions page: <http://www.cpusa.org/article/static/511/> [accessed 6 November 2007].

5. LeRoy Lad Panek, *Reading Early Hammett: A Critical Study of the Fiction Prior to The Maltese Falcon* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2004), 3.

6. Ron Capshaw, "Remembering a Stalinist," *Front Page Magazine*, 4 January 2007. [<http://frontpagemag.com/Articles/Read.aspx?GUID=00610401-2EB7-4082-8712-64252943D6F1>] Viewed 13 June 2008.

7. Margaret Tilton, "The Pink Pinkerton Agent: Communist Themes in Dashiell Hammett's 'The Gutting of Couffingal,'" unpublished paper presented at the Rocky Mountain Modern Languages Association Convention, October 2003. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be an extant copy of the paper, but the general argument is made clear both in the abstract published on the RMMLA website [[http://rmmla.wsu.edu/conferences/conf03Missoula/GetAbstract4cbc.html?session\\_id=215&present\\_id=1662](http://rmmla.wsu.edu/conferences/conf03Missoula/GetAbstract4cbc.html?session_id=215&present_id=1662) (accessed 13 February 2008)] and Margaret Tilton's correspondence with the author, 18 and 20 January 2008.

8. These ideas are developed at length in J.A. Zumoff, "The Politics of Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest*," *Mosaic* 40 (December 2007), 119-34.

9. Karen Connolly-Lane, "Politics and the Private Eye: Ideology and Aesthetics in the *Hardboiled Tradition*" (PhD diss, University of Minnesota, 2006), 54.

10. The only study to centrally address this transition is Daniel Opler, "From Cannibal to Communist: The Origins of Dashiell Hammett's Radicalism," *Columbia Journal of American Studies* 3, no. 1 (1998), 47-55.

11. The classic study of the importance of detective work as a job is David T. Bazelon, "Dashiell Hammett's Private Eye: No Loyalty Beyond the Job," *Commentary* 7 (1949): 467-472.

12. See Frank Morn, "*The Eye That Never Sleeps*": *A History of the Pinkerton National Detective Agency* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982). A more precise summary of the Pinkertons can be found in Milton Lipson, "Private Security: A Retrospective," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 498 (July 1988), 16-21.

13. The anti-labor aspect of the Pinkertons is covered in Robert Michael Smith, *From Blackjacks to Briefcases: A History of Commercialized Strikebreaking and Unionbusting in the United States* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003). See also Ward Churchill, "From the Pinkertons to the PATRIOT Act: The Trajectory of Political Policing in the United States, 1870 to the Present," *New Centennial Review* 4 (2004), 1-72.

14. Philip Taft, "Violence in American Labor Disputes," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 364 (March 1966), 128.

15. See Anthony Bimba, *The Molly Maguires* (New York: International Publishers, 1932).

16. Elizabeth E. Joh, "The Forgotten Threat: Private Policing and the State," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 13, no. 2 (2006), 364-65; Steven Spitzer and Andrew T. Scull, "Privatization and Capitalist Development: The Case of the Private Police," *Social Problems* 25, no. 1 (October 1977), 22.

17. See David P. Demarest, Fannia Weingartner and David Montgomery, *The River Ran Red: Homestead 1892* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992).

18. F. W. Taussig, "The Homestead Strike," *The Economic Journal* 3, no. 10 (June 1893), 312.

19. Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!* (Boston: South End Press, 1997), 75.
20. Joh, "Forgotten Threat," 366-67.
21. Robert P. Weiss, "Private Detective Agencies and Labour Discipline in the United States, 1855-1946," *The Historical Journal* 29, no. 1 (March 1986), 95-96.
22. Taft, "Violence in American Labor Disputes," 133.
23. See Marcus Klein, *Easterns, Westerns and Private Eyes: American Matters, 1870-1900* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), chapter 8. See also, Catherine Wynne, "Mollies, Fenians and Arthur Conan Doyle," *Jouvert* 4, no. 1 (Fall 1999) accessed 24 June 2008, <http://social.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v4i1/wynne.htm>.
24. Charles A. Siringo, *A Cowboy Detective: A True Story of Twenty-Two Years with a World Famous Detective Agency* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1988).
25. See Michael Cohen, "'The Ku Klux Government': Vigilantism, Lynching, and the Repression of the IWW," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 1, no. 1 (2006), 31-56.
26. See James Byrkit, "The Bisbee Deportation," in James C. Foster, ed., *American Labor in the Southwest: The First One Hundred Years* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1982), 86-104.
27. Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the IWW* (New York: Quadrangle, 1969), 391-92. On the lynching of Little, see Arnon Gutfeld, *Montana's Agony: Years of War and Hysteria, 1917-1921* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1979), 23-36; Michael Punke, *Fire and Brimstone: The North Butte Mining Disaster of 1917* (New York: Hyperion, 2006), 202-12; Will Roscoe, "Unsolved Mystery," *Montana Standard*, 7 October 2006, accessed 11 June 2008, <http://www.montanastandard.com/articles/2006/10/08/featuresbigskylife/hjdijjchhgjc.txt>.
28. Lillian Hellman, *Scoundrel Time* (Boston: Little Brown, 1976), 48.
29. Rita Elizabeth Rippeotoc, *Booze and the Private Eye: Alcohol in the Hard-Boiled Novel* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004), 36.
30. James Ellroy, "The Poet of Collision," *Guardian*, 29 September 2007.
31. George Everett, "The Seeds of Red Harvest: Dashiell Hammett's Poisonville," "Only in Butte" webpage, 2004, accessed 11 August, 2007, <http://www.butteamerica.com/hist.htm>.
32. William F. Nolan, *Hammett: A Life at the Edge* (New York: Congdon and Weed, 1983), 14; Diane Johnson, *Dashiell Hammett: A Life* (New York: Random House, 1983), 20. The dissenting biography is Richard Layman, *Shadow Man: The Life of Dashiell Hammett* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), 13. Opler, "From Cannibal to Communist," essentially accepts the truth of the Little story while noting "this claim is disputed by some scholars" (48, 54).
33. Karen Connolly-Lane, "Politics and the Private Eye," 60.
34. Everett, "The Seeds of *Red Harvest*,"; David Walsh interview with Travis Wilkerson, World Socialist Website, 4 October 2002, accessed 30 June, 2008, [http://www.wsws.org/articles/2002/oct2002/wilk-o04\\_prn.shtml](http://www.wsws.org/articles/2002/oct2002/wilk-o04_prn.shtml); Jesse Walter, "The Hammett Episode," *The Pacific Northwest Inlander Online*, accessed 30 June 2008, <http://www.inlander.com/topstory/290998944020752.php>.
35. None of the books cited in note 27, above, mention Hammett in their discussion of Little's murder. Frank Morn's history of the Pinkertons, *"The Eye That Never Sleeps,"* does not mention Little or the Butte strike. Cohen, "'The Ku Klux Government,'" 54, quotes Hellman, but does not analyze the veracity of her claim.
36. *New York Times*, 2 August 1917; *ibid.*, 3 August 1917.
37. *Labor Defender*, August 1926. The issue contains articles by, among others, William F. Dunne, who had been active in the Butte strike and James P. Cannon, a former protégé of Little in the IWW. Both were members of the Communist Party at the time.
38. William D. Haywood, *Big Bill Haywood's Book: The Autobiography of William D. Haywood* (New York: International Publishers, 1929), 301.
39. See Robert L. Tyler, *Rebels in the Woods: The I.W.W. in the Pacific Northwest* (Eugene: University of Oregon Books, 1967).
40. "We have researched our files and find no documentary evidence that he was in our employ. . . . We also know from hearsay that Mr. Hammett did in fact work out of our Philadelphia and San Francisco offices." Eugene C. Fey, president and CEO of Pinkerton's, Inc., to Lillian Hellman, 16 May 1979, in Lillian Hellman papers, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin, 62.4.
41. On Hammett's secrecy, see Wolfe, *Beams Falling*, 1.
42. See Zumoff, "The Politics of Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest*."
43. Jesse Hamlin, "Dashiell Hammett's legacy lies not only in his writing, but in his living—rough, wild and on the edge," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 7 February 2005, accessed 11 August, 2007, <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2005/02/07/DDG3DB68LD1.DTL&type=books>.
44. Joe Gores, *Hammett: A Novel* (New York: Putnam, 1975).
45. Quoted in Mona Gable, "Mystery Man," *Focus* (October 1982), 33; in Hellman papers, box 62, folder 8.
46. Layman, *Shadow Man*, 175.
47. Dashiell Hammett to Mary Hammett, 21 February 1936, Richard Layman and Julie Rivett, eds., *Selected Letters of Dashiell Hammett, 1921-1960* (Washington: Counterpoint, 2001), 98-99.

The letter refers to “our Communist Party” in Germany and indicates he was active in the defense of the Scottsboro Boys.

48. “Three Favorites,” *Black Mask*, November 1924, reprinted in Matthew J. Bruccoli and Richard Layman, eds., *Hardboiled Mystery Writers: A Literary Reference* (New York: Carroll and Graff, 1989), 86.

49. Raymond Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder,” *Saturday Review of Literature*, 1944; reprinted in Raymond Chandler, *The Simple Art of Murder* (New York: Pocket Books, 1952), 189.

50. Dashiell Hammett, “Poor Scotland Yard!” *Saturday Review of Literature*, 15 January 1927, reprinted in Bruccoli and Layman, eds., *Hardboiled Mystery Writers*, 105.

51. George J. Thompson, “The Problem of Moral Vision in Dashiell Hammett’s Detective Novels” (PhD diss., University of Connecticut, 1972), 9.

52. Interview in the *Times Herald*, 1957, quoted in Cynthia S. Hamilton, *Western and Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction in America: From High Noon to Midnight* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1987), 128.

53. This theme is explored in Richard A. Filloy, “Of Drink and Detectives: The Genesis and Function of a Literary Convention,” *Contemporary Drug Problems* 13 (Summer 1986), 249-71.

54. Quan Zhang, “Behind *Black Mask*: The Marketplace and Black Mask Fiction of the 1920s and 1930s,” (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 1993), 155.

55. Morn, “*Eye that never sleeps*,” 157.

56. Dashiell Hammett, “From the Memoirs of a Private Detective,” *Smart Set* (March 1923); republished in Steven Marcus, ed., *Crime Stories and Other Writings* (New York: Library of America, 2001), 905-909.

57. George Sterling to H. L. Mencken, 3 March 1923, in S.T. Joshi, ed., *From Baltimore to Bohemia: The Letters of H.L. Mencken and George Sterling* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001), 176.

58. Ron Goulart, *The Dime Detectives* (New York: Mysterious Press, 1988), 36.

59. See Zumoff, “The Politics of Dashiell Hammett’s *Red Harvest*” for a discussion of this theme in more depth.

60. Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 232.

61. Thompson, “The Problem of Moral Vision,” 5-6.

62. See J. A. Zumoff, “Tijuana the American Town: Images of the Corrupt City in Hammett’s ‘The Golden Horseshoe,’” *Clues*, 26, no. 4 (2008), 35-48.

63. Arthur Conan Doyle, “A Study in Scarlet” (1887), in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (Ware, 1992), 60-61.

64. Dinah Birch, “The Ghosts of Arthur Conan Doyle,” *TLS* 7 November 2007, accessed 15 November, 2007, [http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/the\\_tls/article2823942.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/the_tls/article2823942.ece).

65. Ernest Mandel, *Delightful Murder: A Social History of the Crime Story* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 47-48.

66. Mandel, *Delightful Murder*, 44.

67. Sean McCann, *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2000).

68. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*, edited by David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 368. Gramsci favored the writings of C.K. Chesterton over Doyle, seeing the former transcending the strict rationalism of Holmes (see Anne Showstack Sassoon, “Gramsci and the Secret of Father Brown,” *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 8, no. 4 [December 2005], 395-405.)

69. Dashiell Hammett, “The Golden Horseshoe” (1924), in Dashiell Hammett, *Crime Stories and Other Writings*, 250.

70. Hammett, “Golden Horseshoe,” 263.

71. Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992 [1929]), 64.

72. Robert B. Parker, “The Violent Hero: A Study of the Private Eye in the Novels of Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler and Ross McDonald” (PhD diss.: Boston University, 1971), 114.

73. Mabel Vargas Vergara, “Michel Foucault y el relato policial en el debate Modernidad/Posmodernidad,” *Cyber Humanitatis* 35 (Winter 2005), accessed 11 June 2008, [http://www.cyberhumanitatis.uchile.cl/CDA/texto\\_sub\\_simple2/0,1257,PRID%253D16159%2526SCID%253D16179%2526ISID%253D576,00.html](http://www.cyberhumanitatis.uchile.cl/CDA/texto_sub_simple2/0,1257,PRID%253D16159%2526SCID%253D16179%2526ISID%253D576,00.html).

74. On Fordism, see Stephen Myer, *The Five Dollar Day: Labor Management and Social Control in the Ford Motor Company, 1908-1921* (Albany: State University Press, 1981); on Taylorism, see Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capitalism: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974).

75. McCann, *Gumshoe America*, 17.

76. Chandler, *Simple Art of Murder*, 190.

77. Wayne Pond, "Hard-Boiled Writing from a Private Eye: A Conversation with Steven Marcus," *Ideas* 5, no. 1 (1997), accessed 9 December, 2007, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/ideasy51/marcus.htm>.
78. Graham Barnfield, "Hard Boiled Cities: Dashiell Hammett's Democratic Moment and Beyond," *Diatriba* 1, no. 6 (1996), 68.
79. On the question of gender in Hammett, see Christopher Breu, *Hard-Boiled Masculinities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005). See also James Naremore, "Dashiell Hammett and the Poetics of Hard-Boiled Detection," in Bernard Benstock, ed., *Art in Crime Writing: Essays on Detective Fiction* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 51-53, 67.
80. Alberto del Monte, *Breve Historia de la Novela Policiaca* (Madrid: Taurus, 1962), 174-75.
81. Naremore, "Dashiell Hammett," 62.
82. Dennis Broe, "Class, Labor, and the Home-Front Detective: Hammett, Chandler, Woolrich, and the Dissident Lawman (and Woman) in 1940s Hollywood and Beyond," *Social Justice* 32, no. 1 (2005), 167-86.
83. Karen Leick, "H. L. Mencken," *The Literary Encyclopedia*, accessed 23 September, 2007, <<http://www.litencyc.com/php/speople.php?rec=true&UID=3079>>.
84. The story is reprinted in Dashiell Hammett, *Lost Stories*, ed., Joe Gores (San Francisco: Vince Emery, 2005), 68-70.
85. Thompson, "The Problem of Moral Vision," 8-10.
86. See for example, Mark McGurl, "Making 'Literature' of It: Hammett and High Culture," *American Literary History* 9, no. 4 (Winter 1997), 714; Stoddard Martin, *California Writers* (London: Macmillan, 1983), 125-26; Naremore, "Dashiell Hammett," 67-68; Roger L. Pearson, "Gatsby: False Prophet of the American Dream," *The English Journal* 59, no. 5 (May 1970), 641.
87. Dashiell Hammett, "In Defence of the Sex Story," *Writer's Digest*, June 1924, reprinted in Bruccoli and Layman, eds., *Hardboiled Mystery Writers*, 97.
88. *Ibid.*
89. Dashiell Hammett, "Poor Scotland Yard!" *Saturday Review of Literature*, 15 January 1927, reprinted in Bruccoli and Layman, eds., *Hardboiled Mystery Writers*, 105.
90. Tilton, "The Pink Pinkerton Agent: Communist Themes in Dashiell Hammett's 'The Gutting of Couffingal,'" 91.
91. *Crime Stories and Other Writings*, 193.
92. *Ibid.*, 300.
93. *Ibid.*
94. Dashiell Hammett, *The Glass Key* (New York: Vintage, 1989 [1931]), 69.
95. See for example Paul Morrison, *The Poetics of Fascism: Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Paul de Man* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).
96. T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), 137.
97. On this complicated subject, see, for example, Susanne Baackmann and David Craven, "An Introduction to Modernism—Fascism—Postmodernism," *Modernism/Modernity* 15, no. 1 (January 2008), 1-8; and Roger Griffin, "Modernity, Modernism and Fascism: A 'Mazeway Resynthesis,'" *ibid.*, 9-24. Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism: The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Jeffrey Herf *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
98. In the discussion that follows, "fascism" refers to various national movements, not just Italian fascism. It is beyond the scope of this article to analyze the similarities and differences among these.
99. Just as not all modernists were fascists, not all fascists appreciated modern literature or art.
100. See Mark Schoening, "T. S. Eliot Meets Michael Gold: Modernism and Radicalism in Depression-Era American Literature," *Modernism/Modernity* 3, no. 3 (1996), 63.
101. John P. Diggins, "The American Writer, Fascism and the Liberation of Italy," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 4 (Winter 1966), 600.
102. See Lynn Dumenil, *Modern Temper: American Culture and Societies in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 200-50; Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000), 147-77.
103. Smith, *Hard-Boiled*, 168.
104. Jeremiah P. Shalloo, "The Private Police of Pennsylvania," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political Science* 146 (1929), 56.
105. Smith, *Hard-Boiled*, 25 (list of jobs), 58 (advertisements).
106. V. I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution* (1917), in *Collected Works*, vol. 25 (Moscow: International, 1964), 394.
107. Edward R. Tannenbaum, "The Goals of Italian Fascism," *The American Historical Review* 74, no. 4 (April 1969), 1204.
108. See Marcus Klein, *Easterns, Westerns, and Private Eyes: American Matters, 1870-1900* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994); Julian C. Chambliss and William L. Svitavsky,

"From Pulp Hero to Superhero: Culture, Race, and Identity in American Popular Culture, 1900-1940," *A&S Faculty Publications* 2 (2008), 5, accessed 14 May 2010, [http://scholarship.rollins.edu/as\\_facpub/2/](http://scholarship.rollins.edu/as_facpub/2/).

109. This is also shown in both the title and content of one of the most famous books written by a Pinkerton agent before Hammett: Siringo's *Cowboy Detective*. On the close relationship between Hammett and westerns, see Robert B. Parker, "The Violent Hero," 97.

110. See Friedman and Kendrick, "Forms of Labor," 211; Breu, *Hard-boiled Masculinities*. It should be noted, however, that *machismo* is not the exclusive property of the right, and other American writers, including left-wing writers, expressed it in the 1920s and 1930s.

111. Hamilton, *Western and Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction*, 126.

112. Wolfe, *Beams Falling*, 8.

113. Lillian Hellman, "Dashiell Hammett: A Memoir," *New York Review of Books*, 25 November 1965, accessed 15 June, 2008, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/12676>.

114. Hellman papers, box 62, folder 8.

115. See for example Joan Mellen, *Hellman and Hammett* (New York: Harper, 1997), 131-43, for Hammett's role in writing *The Little Foxes*.

116. "The Urban Landscape of Marxist Noir."