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“WE WANT TO GET DOWN TO THE NITTY-GRITTY”:

THE MODERN HARDBOILED DETECTIVE

IN THE NOVELLA FORM

by

Kendall G. Pack

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

English
(Literature and Writing)

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ABSTRACT

“We want to get down to the nitty-gritty”:

The Modern Hardboiled Detective

in the Novella Form

by

Kendall G. Pack, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2015

Major Professor: Dr. Charles Waugh
Department: English

This thesis approaches the issue of the detective in the 21st century through the parodic novella form. The main body of the work is a piece of fiction about an amateur detective trying to find a solution to an imagined crime. This comes from my study of detective fiction, starting with Oedipus and ending with twentieth and twenty-first century examples, especially in the works of Thomas Pynchon and Chester Himes, where the detective loses power. The novella follows Whitney Sloat as he acts as detective in a world that can't let go of the hardboiled traditions. He and the people around him struggle to connect with reality, pursuing a way of life that cannot exist outside of their world.

(134 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

“We want to get down to the nitty-gritty”:

The Modern Hardboiled Detective

in the Novella Form

Kendall Garrison Pack

My novella explores the character of a detective, Whitney Sloat, who lives and works in the hardboiled tradition, distant from reality. The characters of this fictionalized Ogden, Utah act as they would in a hardboiled novel, but without the actual criminal element of that world.

Whitney and the characters that inhabit the novella are more products of detective fiction than inhabitants of that world. In line with Geraldine Pederson-Krag’s analysis of the primal scene as it applies to detective fiction, Whitney and those he associates with enact the detective fantasy and gratify their “infantile curiosity with impunity.” The world crumbles when the reality of the central crime becomes more difficult to reconcile with the fantasy of the world.

The fiction and theory of the genre seems concerned with sustainability as writers try to continue on in the traditions of the genre. I seek to represent that concern in my work as my detective is only a man attempting to live out his fantasy as he struggles to maintain, along with those around him, a world outside of reality.

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CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

This introduction acts as a roadmap of my process in reading both detective fiction and critical academic work about the genre. By showing my study of the genre, I hope to make clear the ways in which I have followed the traditions of detective fiction as well as where I have made new moves to try to say something fresh within the format.

Foreshadowing and Suspense

Oedipus the King is regarded by scholars as one of the earliest examples of detective work in literature. Sophocles' play seems like a straightforward story with a great twist, but with a second reading the clues come out through subtle (or not so subtle for the Greek audience) foreshadowing, a mark of detective fiction. Before discovering the truth, Oedipus states, "Whoever he was that killed the king may readily dispatch me with his murderous hand," foretelling his own demise long before he blinds himself out of guilt (17). These details act as examples of tragic fate, a common theme of the detective story from the moment of Archer's death in *The Maltese Falcon* to Joe's suicide (or self-homicide) at the conclusion of *Looper*.

Sophocles establishes the game of discovery that Poe and Doyle play so well and Agatha Christie take one step further with the "fair play" approach, allowing the reader to learn the clues as the detective learns them. Oedipus knows the facts: someone has killed

Laius and must be punished. But his downfall comes in his gung-ho approach to detection, pushing to find the answer without considering the connection between his own life and that of the dead king. Oedipus, in his rush to find the killer and prove his innocence, states, “Upon the murderer I invoke this curse...may he wear out his life in miserable doom. If with my knowledge he lives at my hearth I pray that I myself may feel my curse” (20). Oedipus, unaware of the solution to his problem, curses himself in double measure with this statement as he finds at the end of the play only himself to accuse.

The moral corruption of *Oedipus* finds its offspring in *Chinatown*. Roman Polanski and Robert Towne’s neo-noir became a renewal of the detective genre at a time after Hammett and Chandler when Mickey Spillane was the most popular contributor to detective fiction. What makes *Chinatown* so intriguing is the bleakness of the plot accomplished through the established methods of the detective novel. J.J. Gittes is a character haunted by his past but ignorant of the threat of repeating it. As he plays the game of the genre, Gittes comes closer to realizing his oedipal fate (oedipal in the sense that his constant focus on escaping Chinatown and the memories associated only brings him closer). Towne’s script holds the audience in suspense, dragging out the reveal until the ideal moment. This is the game of detective fiction, “on the one hand, it is made up of verbal units that combine to close the logico-temporal gap between a crime and its solution. On the other hand, it also contains at least an equal number of units that impede progress toward a solution” (Porter 330). While the detective moves closer with each clue to the solution, he must also be kept back by invisible forces that we might call “shadow governments” or “the mastermind” but which are in reality the author’s need to maintain suspense for the length of the story. Gittes knows as well as we do that the ultimate

conclusion is in Chinatown, but he cannot start there because, like Oedipus, he thinks that the longer he avoids it the less chance history will repeat itself. To keep us in suspense, Towne, gives us a bevy of subplots of varying intrigue to keep our interest. The film becomes Oedipal in the Freudian sense as we discover the illicit relationships within the Cross family. The more he uncovers the more Gittes tries to change his fate and that of Evelyn Cross-Mulwray. What happens instead is that he ends up in Chinatown, another dead woman he loved in front of him, with his spirit broken. Polanski and Towne's film benefits from limitations. Gittes, from the beginning, mentions vaguely his fear of Chinatown. We know that must be our Chekhov's gun, the weapon that destroys him.

In my novella, I explore this limitation as well, following Whitney Sloat and the parodic hardboiled characters he interacts with who are unable to look past their conclusions. This lead to a forced avoidance of fate to try to keep the plates spinning as long as possible before they inevitably fall to the ground. The solution is clear, as when Teiresias confronts Oedipus. The rest of the novella follows the characters' attempting to disprove truth.

The Game

Early detective fiction in the age of reason seemed obsessed with making a game out of detection. Poe, in his opening to "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," claims that analytical thought, "when inordinately possessed, [becomes] a source of the liveliest enjoyment" (3). Dupin and Holmes only take cases that stimulate them and thus, in turn, stimulate the audience. The same is true of the myriad procedurals shows on television whose killer-of-the-week approach focuses less on the humanity of the criminal than on

their ingenuity in creating a puzzle for the detective to solve. Geraldine Pederson-Krag theorizes that this obsession is a direct connection to Freud's "primal scene." Her analysis helps us to see the enduring popularity of detective fiction, especially of the pulp variety, which the grisliness and strangeness of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" seem to inspire. She states, "In an orgy of investigation, the ego, personified by the great detective, can look...without fear and without reproach in utter contrast to the ego of the terrified infant witnessing the primal scene" (19). The detective story then fulfills a basic (and taboo) desire to engage in that which we suppress, the urge to participate in sex, crime, and so on. There is a morbid sense of excitement in the first few pages of a Sherlock Holmes story or the first five minutes of *CSI* when we see the detective begin their investigation. That's because we're excited to play the game.

Poe maintains his place as the father of the detective story with three short stories, none of which have the refinement (or excitement) of Doyle as Poe's focus seems to be more on proving reason in its most effective forms. Poe spends pages of his stories focused on discussing detection through Dupin's extended monologues with the narrator. While Poe's style can be taxing, it fits with R. Austin Freeman's claim about readers of detective fiction, that "the real connoisseurs, who avowedly prefer this type of fiction...are to be found among men of the definitely intellectual class" (11). Poe's work appeals to the intellectual (and certainly the faux-intellectual) because it engages them in scholarly conversation and presents them with puzzles to solve. Poe's Dupin stories act as evidence of his claims about detection. I don't mean to be critical of Poe, but his work is perhaps more foundational than it is representative of the best of the genre. Poe's genius is in his understanding of the audience. Poe, knowing his stories were particularly macabre, chose

to keep the killing off the page and focus on telling. He gave us the parlor room solution, where, while we rarely see all the clues, he tells them to us in the vicarious comfort of Dupin and the narrator's apartment.

Dupin's ability to deduce the solution with hardly any visual confirmation of the clues he used to get there seems incredible. Poe doesn't let the reader see much either, keeping us for the most part in Dupin's apartment, the bulk of the story being told to the narrator. We as the audience might suspect Dupin to be a better storyteller than a detective, having retrofitted a series of complex clues to a simple solution. But in Richard Alewyn's argument, the detective of fiction must be "prepared for the reality of the unusual and immune against the deception of the probable" (77). It is *due* to, not in spite of, this unreality that detective fiction works. If the case was ordinary, if the clues were typical, and if the detective thought with direct logic, the work would fail to entertain readers over and over again. Dupin's method works (in the theory of the fiction) by what Poe termed, "ratiocination," an exact reasoning of events that allows Dupin to arrive at a solution. While this seems implausible, we as the readers must suspend our disbelief enough to accept that, in this world, Dupin is right. After all, in Poe's world, so many unusual things work that it is the usual that seems out of place. Poe establishes a framework put into concrete terms by R. Austin Freeman, who claims that the four necessary elements for detective fiction are the crime, the investigation, the solution, and the proof of the solution (14-17). Poe's chief purpose is to establish a seemingly unsolvable crime so that he can spend the bulk of the story showing the genius of a highly analytical individual. Then, rather than putting us beside the detective, Poe sets us beside the narrator, expecting us to accept the fantastic explanations of the case as fact.

As far as the usefulness of the text, of course Poe set the groundwork for the genre: the use of deduction, the everyman narrator basking in the genius of the detective, the protagonist outside the official law who is more observant than those within it. But most importantly, for my purposes, Poe introduced the arrogance of the detective. Like L.B. Jefferies in Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, Dupin is only the hero because he happens to be right, regardless of the insanity of the solution. For Jefferies, it's murder discovered during his daily voyeurism. For Dupin, it's the impossible solution at the Rue Morgue where an orangutan attempts to shave a woman's face. The sheer impossibility of the solution as a way of exempting the detective from his mistakes is what intrigues me.

For my work, this connection between the guilt of the "primal scene" and the id's desire to engage in primal urges pushes Whitney toward living out the reality of the PI. The inhabitants of this fictional Ogden in turn reinforce that reality as they look for meaning. He demands a more complex solution than reality offers, thus pushing at facts until they give way to his definition of truth. Unlike Dupin, Whitney finds his explanations falsified at the end and his methods at best insubstantial and at worst harmful to those he pushes. My hope is to take Whitney from the parlor fantasies of the anonymous narrator, vicariously experiencing crime, to the reality of his own primal self as he pursues his urges too far.

What Whitney fails to recognize is his own guilt over his inability to be successful in independence, a career, or relationships. Not only does that unconscious guilt push back against his efforts, it also forces him to sideline his progress by playing the role of detective instead, "redressing completely the helpless inadequacy and anxious guilt unconsciously remembered from childhood" (Pederson-Krag 20). By living like the detectives of fiction,

Whitney unknowingly builds on the guilt that pushes him back. Even at the end when he realizes his missteps, he is accepted by a group of similarly deluded people who validate the fantasy.

The Detective

In the early pages of *A Study in Scarlet*, Arthur Conan Doyle illustrates Sherlock Holmes' dominance over all previous detectives. In discussion with Watson about the history of popular detective fiction, Holmes claims that both Voltaire and Poe were on the right track with their work but inconsequential when it comes to the true power of deduction. Not only does Holmes reject the impressive abilities of Dupin and Zadig, but, by only commenting on the writers who established the genre and not on his contemporaries, Doyle places his character and writing as heir apparent to the genre of detective fiction. Holmes himself claim that "no man lives or has ever lived who has brought the same amount of study and natural talent to the detection of crime which I have done" (19). We as the audience then expect to be dazzled, which Doyle fulfills. Holmes' abilities seem impossible to Watson but his deductions always land him on the solution. Doyle accomplishes this through Holmes' need to keep his readings of clues to himself, revealing them after the fact in a flash of connections.

While Holmes as a character still has a remarkable amount of selling power, his methods, for my purposes, are idiotic. E.M. Wrong states, "Holmes...became overconfident, and was rather lucky that his occasional *non sequiturs* avoided exposure" (29). He notes specific instances in which Holmes deduces the facts from ambiguous clues in ways that could as easily mislead the detective as they could lead him to discovery.

Deduction, as a method, requires a suspension of reality in which each clue opens only two paths, the Lestrade path and the Holmes path, one so reasonable that it only proves the genius of the other. In reality, the clue creates many avenues apart from the one that is correct. The fact that Holmes can see a clue and deduce the one truth in it seems unrealistic, if not impossible, yet audiences love Holmes. According to Wrong, “What one loves in Holmes, in truth, is not his logic but his habits and his colleague” (29). The game for the audience is seeing a likeable character making logical leaps and then proving himself right while more level-headed professionals stumble in the dark. Again, we see Freeman’s essential elements in every Holmes story. The crime and the solution, which occur simultaneously, become the beginning and ending posts of the story, the rest being a testing ground in which Holmes proves his ingenuity through investigation and the summary of his proof. The audience, unaware of the moment of the crime, must follow Holmes blindly, amazed by his every revelation.

Holmes is a character who, like Dupin, has been accused of emotionlessness. It is surprising then that the character has become so popular, seeing yet another series of revivals in recent years. The answer for this may be in Roger Caillois’ discussion of the difference between a novel and a detective novel. He claims, “The first takes human nature as its basis and its subject, while the second only reluctantly admits human nature because it must” (11). The detective novel’s goal is not, by Caillois’ definition, to plumb the depths of the human psyche, like the novel of literary fiction claims to do. He claims, “It is not a tale but a game, not a story but a problem” (10). Caillois believes that, if it could somehow be avoided, detective fiction wouldn’t have humans at all, acting as a puzzle to be solved rather than a thrilling story about deceit and other emotional concepts. Keep in mind,

Caillois published this in 1941, before much had been written about Hammett or Chandler, American writers whose work, by European standards, could hardly be considered “detective fiction.” He focuses strictly on European authors. But if that seems to be the goal, why the enduring popularity of these “inhuman” detectives? Rather than answer that question directly, Caillois states, “It is a strange ambiguity that a genre with such strictly abstract ambitions ends up interesting its readers by such obvious emotional attractions” (12). That, I think, is where the American detective novel takes off from, the idea that a story that is, at its core, a whodunit puzzle can also be a puzzle of human relationships.

For my work, deduction plays a major role in the protagonist’s self-deception, thus allowing me to use the puzzle aspect as a way of unlocking Whitney as a person through his interactions. While Holmes discovers the solution and then explains the process, Whitney sees a desired solution and then fabricates a process of discovery in the hopes that he can prove himself right. He is fueled by his guilt, rather than his desire to discover, and seeks for a way to absolve himself rather than to solve the case. Deduction then is the method by which he forces his perception on “clues.”

This exploration of the detective’s humanity has a precedent in American hard-boiled detective fiction, popularized by Dashiell Hammett. He comes from an interesting background, having been a Pinkerton agent prior to writing *The Maltese Falcon*. With his insider knowledge, Hammett shifts from the usual focus of the detective novel, the crime and the solution, to the detective as a flawed hero. Sam Spade may be less of a detective than Holmes, but Spade is much more human. Hammett’s work transcends its genre by using the elements of another: literary fiction. Raymond Chandler, speaking about the popularity of Hammett, states, “A rather revolutionary debunking of both the language and

material of fiction had been going on for some time...But Hammett applied it to the detective story...it had a basis in fact" (233-234). Hammett doesn't have to write from the perspective of a crime enthusiast, but from that of a human who has engaged in the work he writes about. This offers a closer inspection of what the work does to a human being.

Hammett's background in detection made him an able critic of the detective rather than the ignorant fantasizer of detective fiction who could only think up a fascinating crime and offer a fantastic solution. *The Maltese Falcon* does not lack intrigue, but the focus is Spade and his internal conflicts as he tries to choose which of the many paths before him to follow. Hammett tells us that "the chief difference between the exceptionally knotty problem confronting the detective of fiction and that facing a real detective is that in the former there is usually a paucity of clues and in the latter altogether too many" (422). Hammett saw the work of detection as good employment for complex flawed characters. The act of detection itself he saw as a cluttered field of possible approaches that the detective had to submerge himself in to find a solution.

For my work, I've read *The Private Investigator's Handbook* and involved myself in some detective work in an attempt to understand the character of someone intrigued with detective work rather than just writing as someone himself intrigued. This approach has helped me round out Whitney Sloat as a character concerned less with crime than with his own struggle to perform the role of the detective. What Sloat lacks that Spade maintains is the ability to maintain professional integrity. Sam Spade has an affair with his business partner's wife, hides facts from the police, and sends criminals to their death, but he always upholds his moral law, that no crime can go unpunished. While the novel takes us on a long side road to uncover the mystery of the Maltese Falcon, in truth, following Freeman's

frame, it begins with the crime of Archer's murder and ends with the solution. Even though his methods are different, Spade still acts like a detective. Taking that interior code and making it Sloat's exterior act enables me to explore his internal conflict as he tries to maintain the act, simultaneously failing in his integrity.

Setting

American detective fiction of the twentieth century took off from the British detective, the proper and aloof protagonists of Doyle and Christie, and made the detectives more flawed. Sam Spade retains the ability to deduce, but not in the fantastic way of Holmes or Poirot. Spade figures things out as he goes, following red herrings and then leaving others to follow them as he pursues new leads. His methods seem more realistic than Dupin's, and the environment, San Francisco, feels more palpable. American detective fiction (the good stuff) focuses on the detective in relation to his surroundings. The detective must be, according to Raymond Chandler, "the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world" (237). Chandler sees Spade as this detective, as representative of the hard-boiled tradition. Hammett's San Francisco has no better person than Spade, regardless of his flaws. The characters that occupy *The Maltese Falcon* act as a way for the audience to empathize with Spade as he interacts with people far worse than him. This San Francisco creates the humanity of those inhabiting it. Helmut Heissenbuttel argues that "place has preserved in itself something immediately human...What is human is reified into the location" (87). By having Spade interact with San Francisco, Hammett brings the humanity forward and shows the reader not just the puzzle of the detective story but the puzzle of the detective as a human.

Another view of California comes from *Chinatown*. Regardless of the reality of California, the film is concerned with the California that creates J.J. Gittes. F.R. Jameson says of the world of the detective story that it takes place “in the darkness of a local world without the benefit of the federal Constitution, as in a world without God” (130). It’s easy to believe that the world of *Chinatown* is factual, that the characters are real. But Gittes’ world is constructed purely as a vehicle driving him towards his fate. The same is true in Jonathan Lethem’s *Motherless Brooklyn*, where Lionel Essrog’s association with his environment leads him to both doubt and discover the truth about his employer’s death. As much as the memories he dwells in make him reluctant to see the reality of his situation, Essrog is led by the clues apparent in those memories as he analyzes them in the present to tear his own life apart.

In contrast to these examples of building character through exterior setting, some modern detective fiction experiments with the opposite. In Laird Hunt’s *The Impossibly*, we explore the character through his internal musings. The most setting detail we get is the occasional hydrangea or vague descriptions of buildings. Hunt keeps us in the mind of his character in an effort to make us question the truth of everything. This novel breaks several of S.S. Van Dine’s “Twenty Rules for Writing the Detective Story,” especially his edict that “a detective novel should contain no long descriptive passages, no literary dallying with side-issues” (192). Hunt’s work is almost solely concerned with side-issues, looking at the crime askance, building tension internally. Is the novel successful? The reviews are mixed. It seems more like a good experiment than a good novel. But playing with the tropes of detective fiction in these extreme ways does seem to be the next step for the genre.

In my work, setting is important, but I play with the subjectivity of the main character within that setting. Ogden, Utah serves as the world of Whitney Sloat and as a parody version of the hardboiled worlds of Hammett and Chandler. Rather than carefully reconstruct everything about Ogden, I've chosen to use it as a skeleton for a world in which Sloat and the people around him can act as pulp characters. While the streets and locations have, for the most part, their parallel in reality, I've crafted Sloat's perception of the city as the setting. For Sloat, ghosts exist and the alleyways of Ogden hold unnatural threats. Ogden is supplied with more than enough fodder for the hardboiled PI to live out his desires.

New Perspectives

As the writer of the *Lethal Weapon* series and films like *The Last Boy Scout*, Shane Black first established himself as an expert on buddy cop/buddy amateur detective films, paying homage to the hard-boiled and pulp novels of the mid-twentieth century. With *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*, his neo-noir black comedy, Shane Black made a shift to meta-noir. An actor follows a PI and becomes involved in a murder investigation, thus both observing the detective as a reader might and becoming the detective as the reader fantasizes. This film helped open the conversation about the problems with the classic detective story as it applies to our century. Black responds to the belief that detective fiction is a way of living vicariously for the reader, Pederson-Krag's argument in her discussion of the primal scene. Black plays with that vicarious experience and upsets viewer expectation. In *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*, he uses the framework to lead the viewer to a certain conclusion and then tricks us with a second ending that throws us off. Richard

Alewyn argues that “The reader of the detective novel is subjected to the same catharsis as the viewer of Greek tragedy” (64). But in the same way that Oedipus, while fulfilling all his promises, shocks us with the truth, Black gives us the side plot of the murdered sister. At the end, we discover that she wasn’t murdered, but killed herself because of her sister’s well-meaning lie about her “true father,” fulfilling the need for the femme fatale in an unexpected way.

Black’s approach opens up a new way of thinking about detective fiction in the 21st century. It becomes, instead of the parody of the late 20th century, a meta-commentary, asking why we play the game and how we can play it in new ways. How can we trick the reader by using their own expectations against them? How can we show them something human through the writing of fiction? Of course, this was done before Black by Hammett, Chandler, and others all the way back to the dramatic irony of Sophocles. But his renewal of that questioning gives us, in the 21st century, a new discussion about these human problems associated with the genre.

For my writing, Black’s work acts as a milestone to work from. My focus is on not only how Sloat interacts with the environment, but also how he interacts with the method of the detective novel. By following this method, I mean to discover the effects on Sloat’s humanity and what I can discover about his way of thinking.

A more intense investigation of detective fiction comes from the novels of Thomas Pynchon. His *Inherent Vice* and *Bleeding Edge* not only renew the detective in the 21st century, but they question the validity of the detective in a world that seems to have moved past the golden age of the genre. The detective story has always been concerned with its own effectiveness outside of its specific tropes. Albert D. Hutter, discussing *The*

Moonstone, thinks that detective fiction's main concern is "the problem of knowledge, a problem only intensified by the urban upheaval of the world in which they move, by the disorder, the multiplicity of detail, the constant impinging presence of other people, other accounts, other viewpoints" (235). Pynchon's Doc Sportello is a hippy at the end of the hippy era, struggling to adjust to life in a post-Manson world where he has become a feared outsider. These new "viewpoints" mean that he cannot move as freely as he once could among the law-abiding citizens, the police, or the criminals. Rather than staying one step ahead of everyone, Sportello always seems lost, his knowledge catching up with everyone else's. In the 21st century, detectives have lost their edge as technology has made it simpler to do the work yourself. In *Bleeding Edge*, Pynchon gives us Maxine Tarnow, a fraud examiner with some experience in technology. But even with her abilities, she remains hopelessly outmatched as she scrapes the surface of Deep Web in an attempt to discover hidden truth. Unless the detective manages to become a true expert, the criminal can always hide things a little deeper. Both Tarnow and Sportello end up solving few of the mysteries they are presented with, and none of the ones that have any real bearing on the world.

Not all 21st century detectives are obsolete, but they must be written according to new circumstances. A recent take on the detective in the technological world is Michael Mann's film, *Blackhat*. By casting Chris Hemsworth, a known action star, as an expert hacker, Mann ties the world of the hard-boiled detective to that of the technological investigator. Hemsworth seems out of place as most of the action occurs on computer screens, the tapping of the keyboard replacing the bark of a gun. Mann seems to be toying with the same ideas as Pynchon, though his detective has more success. What Mann

appreciates is the absurdity of the detective in any context, making it apparent through casting that the audience must accept the fiction to accept the solution presented. Hutter talks about this essential element of detective fiction, the suspension of disbelief, as a balance of contradictions, claiming that they “cannot be overcome by pure logic but require the force of imagination” (240). Mann’s film requires us to accept that a computer hacker and an action hero can be one person and still solve the mystery. This is the same thing that Doyle asks of us with Holmes, whose physical prowess allows him to survive a fight with the equally brilliant and battle-ready Moriarty. Audiences may be more accepting of Holmes, Spade, and Marlowe because they express their contradictory sides minimally. But Mann forces us, by the visual presence of Hemsworth, to accept this new detective’s dual sides.

My novella explores the character of a detective and his world as they become obsolete. Whitney’s inability to progress within the world because of his outsider status draws him to act out violently, responding as Mike Hammer might, rather than as he himself should. We see a precedent for this in the African American detective fiction of Chester Himes and Walter Mosley whose detectives are so marginalized that they can only do their work by acting, in some instances, criminally. The duality of the detective works when his abilities are respected by those he interacts with, as with Holmes’ interactions with the police and the public. But when he is unable to gain a high status, that duality becomes a roadblock, tearing him in two directions: solve the crime through criminal means or maintain the moral code and be impeded from finding the solution. Himes’ detectives, Grave Digger Jones and Coffin Ed Johnson, “just get pissed-off with all the red

tape...We want to get down to the nitty-gritty” (77). Their desire to enact hardboiled violence is stalled by their promise to uphold the law, keeping them in a static state.

I show this struggle with duality through Whitney Sloat, who tries to be the detective of fiction while still being human. His obsession with his physical appearance as a “tough guy” makes him quick to threaten bodily harm while he restrains his mental abilities as reason forces him to slowly realize the complete lack of a crime. The “force of imagination” is what ends up driving Sloat and those he interacts with to pursue a murderless case.

Narrative Form

In the tradition of detective fiction, I’ve made the text a series of clues. Rather than make those clues about the crime, I’ve made them about the character. Through the use of modular design, I attempt to help the reader understand Sloat’s motivations through his influences. Whereas Dupin might read a newspaper or a scientific study, Sloat reads a book on investigation and old case reports from the investigators he looks up to. Furthermore, we see his state of mind as he writes portions of a screenplay that express his fantasies.

The goal with this method of design is to signal the reader to changes and motivations of the main character which will help them map out his process. This approach is not unprecedented and we can see as far back as *The Moonstone* a modular approach to detective fiction (Collins’ work having each section as a different report by a different writer). By modifying this to point towards the mystery of the main character rather than the mystery of the crime, the goal is to reveal something about the genre itself and the humanity of the detective.

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