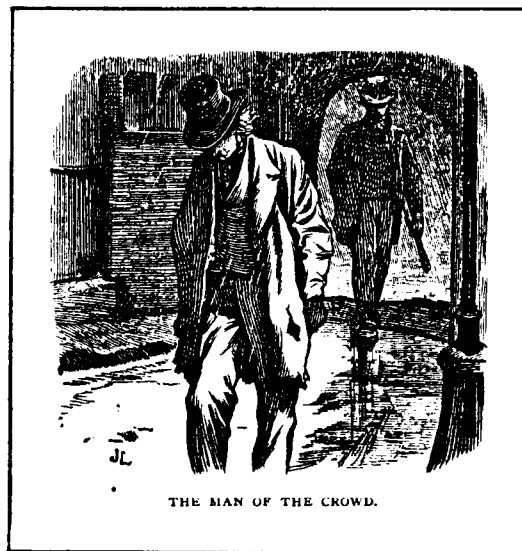


DETECTION AND THE MODERN CITY



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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines detective fiction as a form which has evolved in close relation to the modern city from the nineteenth century to the present.

The argument runs that the link between the urban setting and the detective story is an essential characteristic of the form which has been undervalued in the study of detective fiction. The importance of this relationship to the genre is delineated and emphasized through the use of representative examples, beginning with Edgar Allan Poe and then moving to Arthur Conan Doyle, Dashiell Hammett and finally a number of later writers in the field, all of whom use the city as setting for the narrative, as well as a problematizing element. The city can be a comfortably known environment wherein the detective operates, but it can also be a labyrinth of confusing forces and misleading clues. For the detective, whose goal is the solution of the puzzle, this environment causes by turn reassurance and distress.

In a comparison between these authors, fundamental differences pertaining to the detective as individual and his interaction with the city are explored, and a development is described which sees the detective becoming increasingly unsure of the city and of his position within it. In terms of the genre, this relation shows how the detective becomes a figure who has to be dealt with in ever more complex terms, a shedding of the sureties of the past. On the personal level, the detective becomes a symbol of the modern individual in the city, who tries to make some sense of the living environment which the city offers, and the difficulties which the city creates for perception of the environment and the development of self-realization in terms of this environment.

The study therefore operates on three levels: the formal, where the epistemology of the detective form is traced from early confidence to later manifestations of disruption of these confidences; the socio-urban, where the representation of the city is described as it changes; and the linked concern operating on the individualistic level, the development of the detective as unitary individual and "hero".

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INTRODUCTION

The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the grating of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls.

-- Italo Calvino
Invisible Cities

The City and Detection

The city has been described as moving through three stages: "a New Jerusalem indicating the perfectibility of man; a Babylon punishing him for his dedication to mammon; and a Babel, or decentered city, that seems to thrive on loss of connection and lack of reference to the values of the past..." (William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock, 1987:7). Recent sociological studies which concentrate on the morphology of the city have widely noted that the urban form is becoming increasingly illegible, with the consequence that the urban experience is one that can no longer easily be assimilated or described. As an example of this shift, Steven Marcus writes on "Reading the Illegible: Some Modern Representations of Urban Experience" (1987:232) and Sharpe and Wallock on "From 'Great Town' to 'Nonplace Urban Realm': Reading the Modern City" (1987:1).

Echoes of this conflict between desired understanding and real confusion exist in detective fiction, a genre essentially linked to the city. The portrayal of the city in detective fiction occurs along lines similar to those delineated above -- moving from urban assurance and familiarity to urban doubt, mistrust and insecurity. The change is from a city that the detective thought he could understand, to an urban form which resists comprehension.¹ Tracing this development forms the heart of this dissertation.

The central role that the city plays in the history of the genre is clear from the earliest stories by Edgar Allan Poe. The genre has remained essentially linked to the city, though not in all its forms -- a notable exception being the "classical" style of detective fiction, the British school of Christie and Sayers, where the narrative is usually set in a remote, often enclosed, locale, like a country manor house. The

presence of the city as setting is often overlooked, yet it actually forms the natural boundary between what is known as "classical" and "hard-boiled" detective fiction; the former moving away from the city as an essential component of the form, the latter taking up the new city environment of the Americas with a (often quite literal) vengeance, where the city becomes a constitutive element and a symbol of the society which is seen as rotten. The differences between these forms of detective fiction are usually defined through a comparison of stylistic distinctions, but I argue that this change in setting is of fundamental importance.

A crucial assumption to be examined is that detective fiction desires comprehensibility, which desire becomes its generative thrust, since it forms the impetus for the hermeneutic devolution which the detective story traces. Should one place this assumption in the context of the apparent intensification of the incomprehensible nature of the city, the dynamic conflict between these two phenomena promises to create some interesting tensions, because it is a conflict which goes to the heart of the philosophy that generates detective fiction. How does this fiction deal with the city which is so essentially a part of its form, and how does it cope with a city that is drawing ever further from legibility, seemingly a revolt by so familiar and essential a part of its own structure? These then are the conflicting polarities: a literary form which inherently relies on the order of mystery-investigation-solution, and an urban milieu which is seen to be collapsing into chaos, or disorder.

The importance of the city for the detective story operates on different levels.

On the first, the city acts as the physical setting for the narrative, and the physical obstacles it presents for the detective can be explored in the narrative, for example in the extent of the detective's knowledge of the city streets or the lack thereof -- how does this aid or retard detection? In the early forms of the genre it is imperative that the detective has an intimate knowledge of the city, for he must be able to traverse it efficiently, and should be able to read the encoded signs that trace the movements of the criminal. In this way he is able to be the superior figure that he is, better equipped than the organizational forces of the city in his knowledge of its streets, and in the application of this knowledge.

Another level on which the city operates is the semiotic. The city as sign system was commented on by G.K. Chesterton at the turn of the century. In his "A Defense of Detective Stories" (in Allen, 1974), he describes how every part of the city has its own significance for the careful observer, becoming for the detective signs and clues. This area, the city as sign-system, is central to the third chapter.

The city also takes on a metaphorical function, standing for the mass of individuals that it represents, the "teeming masses," often used in the genre as an opposite to the traditional individuality of the detective (see below). The city has also been attributed various symbolic connotations, as its mythological link to Cain attests.

Johnathan Raban explains:

There was a good reason for Cain, the first murderer, to found the first city. Ancient cities were, before all else, fortifications against hostile strangers; their architecture... began not with the life of the community inside the walls but with the defence against the marauders outside. So slaughter, pestilence, siege, sacking, plunder, and burning -- to use Augustine's own words -- were the city's inevitable fate. (1974:12)

If this is the genesis of the city, if a murderer existed from the beginning, it is congruent that his opposite should accompany him, that the figure of the hunter, the detective should be one of the city's first inhabitants. This link between city and murderer as founder is used to excellent effect by Michel Butor in Passing Time(1961), where the city church's "Cain window" becomes one of the metaphors central to the history of the city and to the narrator's detection.

Lewis Mumford suggests in The City in History that the city is the repository of all time-lines: strands of time past, present, and the roots of time future (1987:118). It is this function that creates a further affinity between the city and the detective story, for the problematics of time are essential to the structure of the genre. Detection is a dabbling with time, and if the city is the point of juncture of the different time-lines then there is a necessary parasitic relationship at work. The city is central to the discovery of clues to a present mystery evolving from a crime past.

The fascination of the detective story has much to do with the way the genre explores time in the form of a mystery. The detective operates along dual time lines: the present and the past. It is in the present that the detective must gather those scattered and hidden clues to a (mysterious) event that has taken place in the past. The event is usually murder, a crime that marks a place in time past. This marker becomes the detective's point of ingress into a flow of time that would usually be unexplored but for this stop. It is the detective's role to restructure the history of this crime and in so doing to isolate the "author" of the crime. And the results of the detective's restructuring will of necessity have repercussions in the future, for the detective is tampering with an element of crime that tries to alter the course of the future to suit its purposes, and the detective intervenes.

This dual time-line is used to full effect by William Hjortsberg in Falling
⁽¹⁹⁷⁹⁾
Angel, a novel which also expresses the central position of the city in regard to these movements in time, as I will show.

Having mentioned the different ways in which the city influences detective fiction, I must point out that I do not intend a comparative study between cities, for the cities which are represented in these novels are vastly different -- in time, place and society -- and impose unique forces upon the detective. I have chosen to scrutinize each detective/city relationship as a separate entity, evolving in a separate socio-political arena, and thereby to read the manner in which the text presents both the society and the individual with respect to the city. The city, it must also be remembered, stands as the metonymic equivalent of the society, standing for the condition of society as a whole (William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock, 1987:6). The detective, by contrast, is the free-standing individual subject.

Chesterton has said that the detective story is the first to have expressed the "poetry" of modern urban life (1974:384). It is a form that must brave the "chaos of conscious forces" that the city represents and try to elicit some order (for this is the functional drive of the detective). This process, as it relates to the city, is my area of interest. Each separate manifestation is a work in its own right, with different informants and obvious or latent ideological structures. But it is in relation to the development of the genre, from the early form of Poe to the latest examples, that I wish to descry the alteration in the relationship between individual and city, and question the reasons for the differing perceptions of the city, as well as the position of the individual within this city.

Detective Fiction

Here I wish to return to the dynamics of the detective story. It is in the cityscape, an area of multiple meaning and of proliferation of clues, offering endless possibility, that the detective operates. The city is the environment, the backdrop to the detective's quest, which is the creation of order, "to reduce a complex and disordered situation to simplicity and clarity" (Mendelson, 1978:123). He must find the thread of the crime and follow it to its conclusion and thereby redress the existing imbalance, (the disorder), which the crime enacts and represents through continuing insolubility.

Detective fiction, as form, becomes a commentary on the social background of its narrative in a unique manner. If one considers the structure of the genre, it takes the shape of basic frame (the story of the crime, the detection and the solution), plus "fillings," elements of delay, of description and elaboration. These elements are part of the hermeneutic code, they serve to confuse the trail by providing misleading clues, which spin out the rush to final dénouement (Kermode, 1983:180-183) -- although the city becomes more than "simple" hermeneutic delay in the later texts that I discuss. City and description thereof usually play the part of additive "colour"; these elaborations are used to enhance the atmosphere as well as give the story a realistic feel, or otherwise they create a certain aura through description.

Detective fiction is not generally a descriptive form, so all elements of description can be seen as delay or alternatively as potential clue. If clue, it is deliberately set into the story and one has to question the role of the clue. If delay, does any "other" or further meaning leak out -- what is being told to the reader in the guise of easily digestible padding? Tzvetan Todorov's distinction between the different forms of this fiction is relevant here, in that he demonstrates how the later form, what

he calls the "série noir" or the hard-boiled form, is actively engaged in the "outside world" of the text. He develops this idea as a distinction between the classical and the later form, in that the classical is self-reflexive, closed in structure, while the hard-boiled draws on the social world in which it is set in a more interactive manner. He considers how the actual mystery which begins the narrative (a separate story leading up to the crime), takes second place as the subsequent story continues (the story of the investigation), one which is situated in the temporal and geographical "present". Mystery becomes "a pure pretext... in order to elaborate a new form of interest, suspense, and to concentrate on the description of a milieu" (1977:52).

Detective fiction is uniquely suited to the examination of issues and details that literature often glosses over or tries to hide. Ken Worpole is alive to the possibilities offered by detective fiction's ability to be fastened to a milieu; he notes how the relationship "between milieux and narrative, between scenery and actors, continues to offer all kinds of radical possibilities. For one kind of disclosure can lead to others" (1984: 55). Detective fiction has the ability to comment on the necessity of the text to question those truths that the reader too often takes for granted, the comfortable world view of intellectual complacency. Kermode calls them our "local and provincial restrictions" (1983:181). This is by nature of the ability which detective fiction displays: to be able to examine areas which are necessarily hidden from the "conventional" (the non-detective) story type. As Fredric Jameson explains, the detective story deals in those areas of perception that are "half glimpsed, half disregarded" and which are "slight"; for this reason it is able to examine that which

eludes the registering apparatus of great literature: make of it some Joycean epiphany and the reader is obliged to take this moment as the center of his world, as something directly infused with symbolic

meaning; and at once the most fragile and precious quality of the perception is irrevocably damaged, its slightness is lost... (1983:125)

This comes about through the detective being an agent who must necessarily be involved in the minutiae of life, aspects that are usually overlooked or disregarded by a protagonist less concerned with detail; for the detective the "details" of life become possible clues to the solution of the crime, areas of potential learning. This I wish to relate to an examination of the city directly. To quote Jameson again:

Such a perception, it seems to me, is in its very structure dependent on chance and anonymity, on the vague glance in passing, as from the windows of a bus, when the mind is intent on some more immediate preoccupation: its very essence is to be inessential... it is as if there are certain moments in life which are accessible only at the price of a certain lack of intellectual focus... the unique temporal structure of the best detective story is a pretext, a more organizational framework, for such isolated perception. (125)

The interest in examining the clues that the narrative presents is multiplied when one looks not only at those clues left by the author in the hermeneutic structure of the story, but also those that slip in unaware, as it were, of the author's central intention (being to write a mystery with clues to its uncovering built into the story). These would be "clues" that refer to the society in which the detective operates, embodied in the city, but which would not be of "direct" use to the detective in his central quest for the criminal, those that do not carry the story forward. These are, for example, the type of clue that is furnished as part of the "realistic" setting of the story -- description and elaboration of scene which, should one interrogate them, show up implicit assumptions as they perform the role of, say, mood enhancement. Thus these clues are more valuable than they at first gloss would seem; they are to the reader as signs to another reality, commentary on the relation between city and individual, for instance. Such clues would be of use to the critical reader in that they exist and

inform, but not as consciously inserted information about the obviously hidden truth or solution on the surface level of the narrative. This is precisely where detective fiction, through its concern for minutiae, is valuable.

The Detective as Individual

The detective is the character chosen to traverse the cityscape. He is also the symbol of the individual, at the early stages writ larger than the later, which in itself comments on the changing perceptions of the individual. As the first chapter describes, Dupin and Holmes were portrayed as the supermen of scientific rationalism. It was an age of the dominance of the Individual in philosophic thought, and this is reflected in the detective fiction. Sharpe and Wallock (1987:3-4) point out that social theorists show how the city bred among the dwellers "a character that was rational, impersonal, alienated, unemotional, and autonomous," and they quote Georg Simmel's insight that the metropolis takes on a new rank "in the history of the spirit" in terms of the independence of individuals and the elaboration of individuality itself. Thus a development in the notion of the individual in the city is marked, the individual being very much a product of the urban environment, one which undergoes change as this environment expands.

The specific relation between the city and the individual is enacted through the detective. Sinda Gregory (1985:26) quotes John Paterson who says that the private investigator is "the symbol of the isolated individual who, in the sense that he has been estranged from the community rather than banished from it, is an exile. He speaks for men who have lost their faith in the values of their society." The detective

has adopted a cynicism which leads to an even more extreme alienation than the average citizen. The detective has learnt, through self-preservatory instincts, to count only on himself, and, as a rule, he is confident of himself. This is a form of alienation and disaffection which would not necessarily apply to the detectives Dupin and Holmes. They were, however, also powerful individualists, as will be described in the next chapter. Theirs is an individuality that is founded in genius and eccentricity.

If detective fiction is contextualized within this growth of the city, what does the developing genre have to relate about the individual in the city? Can the individual retain the position of mastery which the early detective epitomizes, or is he vanquished? Necessary implications for the idea of knowledge of selfhood are also raised and explored as the genre develops.

On the Margins

The detective is given a privileged position. He is the seer, the private eye, which is a position of power, of potential knowledge through this privileged vision. He is the character whom we hope will be able to make the city legible because of this advantaged position, which is described by Jameson as follows: "[the detective] visits either those places you don't look at or those you can't look at: the anonymous or the wealthy and secretive" (1983:128). He is able to traverse the social strata of society, acting as a link between the strata. The path he takes brings forth clues as to the nature of the city and society, both in those clues that he works to pick up, and in those that come out as a result of the *frisson* created by his disturbance of the "normal" quiet. It is as if the figure of the detective is able to "break the balance,"

allowing "predetermining courses to run their course suddenly" (Jameson, 1983:144). What is exposed through this disturbance about the society and city is valuable, since it would not normally have come to light (in the sense that it takes the detective's intervention to bring the hidden to light, this is his special talent -- to "stir things up" in the words of Hammett's *Continental Op*).

This is a position of certain danger: a figure on the edge of different social worlds, he is in the no-man's land between the two (or more), and severe pressures are acted out upon him. In a sense, he is in an unnatural position, being in too many social places at once, playing too many social roles, the detective "obliged to move from one kind of social reality to another incessantly, trying to find clues..." (Jameson, 143), but his discoveries are actually aided by this stress enacted upon him. Thus he "invites" trouble, and often the detective is aware of his ambiguous position in society, one which is in sympathy with the trouble that he attracts -- as Lew Archer, Ross Macdonald's detective, flippantly notes: "Everybody hates detectives and dentists. We hate them back" (*The Drowning Pool*, 5). The detective is an outcast by virtue of the fact that he straddles society, playing many social roles and never fully trusted by those who feel themselves to have a unitary sense of themselves and society. He is mistrusted because he represents a breakdown of these barriers that delineate class; he is also regarded with suspicion because of his scrutiny of people's lives, this being an intrusion into the conventions of bourgeois privacy. Walter Benjamin discusses this privacy in terms of the person's house, "the private citizen's universe" and "casing" (1983:169). To break into this world would mean a personal intrusion, a forcing.

The Problematic

As the development of the attitude displayed towards the city in the texts which I discuss attests, the city can be seen as an entity undergoing constant change in the eyes of the detective -- his being a lens of relative epistemological stability (the detective always seeks the answer to the puzzle, always seeks order). It is broadly a movement from legibility, to confusion, and final collapse of any structure, chaos.

It is a development of many facets, because it is true to say that the external form of the city has changed over the time between Poe and Auster (my terminal authors) with corresponding social effect, but at the same time it seems true to say that the city has not changed that dramatically in this period, if one takes history as the measure. Then one agrees with Sharpe and Wallock (9) in saying that "the city that we seek conditions the city that we will find," that it is the perception of, and reaction to, the city that has altered. Perception, and its slow change in terms of the city, is perhaps the dominant informant in this area, perceptions being the point whereupon judgement hinges. Pre-existing schemata in this respect are, as Burton Pike says, slow to change (1981:xi). Both these possibilities are entertained: on the one hand that the city has indeed outstripped the individual subject, on the other, that we have just not altered our perceptive "fixes" in order to describe our cities successfully.

The one truism that can be unequivocally stated is that made by Knight:

And out there the big city remains. And all the people in it. Style and plot spiral inwards, and that self-absorption and self-protection is an urgent necessity because the novels realise so powerfully the urban jungle that the private individual sees out there, embodying the threats to the self in a concrete, dehumanised image that is easier to hate and dismiss than if its inhabitants were all seen as separate individuals. ...The essence of the novels is the dynamic conflict between the one figure and the city, the reification of all the feared others. (In Docherty, 1988:85)

The thesis is built on these two pillars: the city and the individual. How the city influences the individual, and how, in turn, the manifestation of the individual influences our conception of the city. It is in detective fiction that these questions are described, teased out, and (possibly) solved.

The Thesis

If one is to trace the position of the city in detective fiction, it would form a map like the following, being the outline of the dissertation:

Edgar Allan Poe developed, in three short stories, the bare structural bones of the genre, and is generally recognized as the father of detective fiction. His narratives take place in London and Paris, the cityscape is powerfully evoked. The detective, Dupin, has an intimate knowledge not only of the city, its buildings and streets, but also of the inhabitants of the city. This tradition is carried further by Arthur Conan Doyle in the Holmes cycle, wherein London becomes synonymous with foggy streets and gas-lamps, Holmes moving in and out of the haze with an eerie assurance and unfaltering urban knowledge. As he states: "It is a hobby of mine to have an exact knowledge of London" ("The Red-Headed League"). An examination of these authors forms the body of the first chapter.

The next form of detective fiction to explore the city is the American hard-boiled tradition. Here, in dealing with the city, there are clearly different informants at work. Although the Puritan ideal of the City of God did influence the perception of the city, (see the section on Auster in chapter three in this regard), the more powerful drive was towards a movement away from the social entrapment which the city represented for them. The American settlers established their popular myths on

their continual ability to escape the strictures of the urban settlement and seek rejuvenation in the unsettled regions. But, to foreshorten the story, they inevitably ran out of free space, the "territories" that Huck Finn relied on disappeared, leaving the popular hero somewhat embittered, but nevertheless forced to live in the city that turned very rapidly into the megalopolis. On this subject and the related issue of the Americans' agrarian bias, see chapter two, where the effect of American perceptions of the natural environment and the city is examined.

The next generation of detective stories to make use of the city as location and as literary metaphor, is that class of detective fiction which has variously been called "metaphysical," "postmodern," or the "anti-detective" story. Here the city is used as an expression of the confusion that the writers see in modern society. This is developed in the detective form which they adapt to suit their sensibilities and their vision of the world. This area is discussed in the third chapter.²

The conclusion postulates some solutions to the problems which the discussion raises, and develops some of the ramifications of the issues at play. Furthermore, the conclusion takes up the future of the detective form in the city of tomorrow.

CHAPTER ONE: NEW JERUSALEM -
TAMING THE DEMONIZED GAP

Swarming city, city filled with dreams,/ Where the specter in broad daylight accosts
the passerby.

-- Baudelaire
'The Seven Old Men'

Hell is a city much like London -- a populous and smoky city.

-- Shelley
'Peter Bell the Third'
Part 3, stanza 1

POE

Edgar Allan Poe is generally recognized as the first person to have written a detective story which has as its protagonist a private investigator.³ This was "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," published in 1841. This story, and the two subsequent stories which featured Auguste Dupin as detective *extraordinaire*, namely "The Purloined Letter" and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," set the standard for the detective story and the detective novel for years -- indeed until the American writers of the twenties redefined the genre in the twentieth century.

Therefore, Poe's stories are the obvious place to begin an examination of the detective story as it responds to the socio-political force represented by the city. I shall be concentrating on two of Poe's stories, the first being one that is not generally considered part of the detective fiction canon, but which is essential to the understanding of the detective as character and to the relationship between the detective and the city. This is "The Man of the Crowd," published in 1840. The second story examined will be "The Murders in the Rue Morgue".

Walter Benjamin has said of "The Man of the Crowd" that it "is something like the X-ray picture of a detective story. In it, the drapery represented by crime has disappeared. The mere armature has remained: the pursuer, the crowd, and an unknown man who arranges his walk through London in such a way that he always remains in the middle of the crowd" (1983:48). For Benjamin, therefore, this story is important as a precursor to the detective stories that Poe goes on to write, "The Man of the Crowd" predating these. As Benjamin sets it out, there are essentially three elements to the detective story -- the hunter, the hunted, and the setting.

Poe chose the city as the milieu for this story, as well as the later stories involving Dupin, thereby establishing an important relationship between the detective story and the concatenation of person and structure which together equal the city. This is by no means accidental. The city becomes the natural area of conflict between the pursuer and pursued because of its density -- both as the mass of stone and glass which creates a standing physical maze, close and perplexing to the uninitiated; and as a mass of people, the people on the streets, moving and shifting, offering untold opportunities for escape and secretion, and more: the sheer number of people that the city holds within, a shifting maze of humanity.

Into this playing-field he drops the two protagonists, the one relying on his skills of interpretation of the city in order to find a single individual in the masses, the other relying on the crowd to offer safe haven.

One does not have to look far for another obvious reason for the city to become the setting for Poe's tales. This is the extremely rapid urbanization that takes place in the early nineteenth century in Europe, with America soon following. For a city like London, this meant that the total population living in the city could grow from just under a million in 1800, to roughly four-and-a-half million by 1900 (Sirjamaki, 1964:97). This growth was due largely to the industrialization of the major cities and the concomitant labour requirements. For Poe and his contemporaries, it meant a crowded urban reality on a scale hitherto unimaginable. It would be only natural that the city become a focus of attention for the writers of fiction, and an obvious locale for the setting of their stories.⁴ The city was a stimulating, if not irritating, chemical to the human senses, as is evident when Poe describes the street

crowd: "all full of a noisy and inordinate vivacity which jarred discordantly upon the ear, and gave an aching sensation to the eye" ("The Man of the Crowd" 482).

As the title of the story indicates, this is very much a tale of the new urban conglomerations of the nineteenth century. The opposites are set against one another: the individual man and the crowd, the collective humanity. This theme of individual set against mass society, common enough since the city was first formed, took on acute proportions in this modern city of the masses; and, as demonstrated by this story, became a keen topic for intellectual experiment (Biddiss, 1977:30). Colin Mercer points out that the challenge that the crowd offers to the integrity of the individual is illustrated in "The Man of the Crowd". He describes this story as the genesis of detective fiction's ambivalence towards the crowded city, where there is conflict between the "specification of the body and its capabilities" and the threat of dissipation "in the traces of the new social complexity" (1986:64). This theme becomes paramount as the genre develops.

The story begins with the narrator sitting beside a window. He has recently recovered from a sickness, he informs us, and feels his faculties of observation very keen, as when "the film from the mental vision departs... and the intellect, electrified, surpasses as greatly its every-day condition, as does the vivid yet candid reason of Leibnitz, the mad and flimsy rhetoric of Gorgias" (479). His senses, therefore, are extremely receptive to the sensory overstimulation that the city offers, and he is open to scientific observation: "I felt a calm but inquisitive interest in everything" (479).

As he tells us the various observations that he makes from his window (mostly, after a short time, of what passes by outside the window, this being of superior

interest), he demonstrates a position of encompassing knowledge of the persons below him on the street. This knowledge is based on his sharp observation of the people and on his pre-knowledge of the habits of dress and personal conduct of the city denizens. Moving through the ranks of the social strata, from the self-employed to the "ragged artisans and exhausted labourers" (482), he relates to us the occupation and perhaps some of the character traits of the pedestrians. This exercised eye that discerns the specific detail and clue from the people below is never tested or proven incorrect -- we must take his word that the people are what he describes them as. He is guessing, after all, but making the informed guess of an expert, and one whose senses are temporarily heightened.

This is our first clue that links this narrator of Poe's to the detective -- the ability to glean from the singular, the small detail, the totality of the situation. Thus from the detail of slightly bent right ears, "long used to penholding" (481), he makes the connection to "upper clerks of staunch firms" (481). In this ability is displayed a clear link, in turn, between the anonymous narrator and Dupin, and on to Sherlock Holmes. They represent the apotheoses of a type of skill that Michel Foucault (1979:141) describes:

A meticulous observation of detail, and at the same time a political awareness of these small things, for the control and use of men, emerge through the classical age bearing with them a whole set of techniques, a whole corpus of methods and knowledge, descriptions, plans and data. And from such trifles, no doubt, the man of modern humanism was born.

This knowledge that the seer wields accords him a certain power, the power of understanding, the superior position that comes of accurate judgement. In this case it is the knowledge of the city masses that implies a power over them, it is a "field of knowledge" that has as its correlative a power relation, in the words of Foucault, the

one directly implying the other (1979:27). Furthermore, it is a subjugation of the individual bodies and the total mass through the subjugation of the individual parts (28). By this display of his intellectual prowess, the narrator is engaged in the control of the crowd, and in turn of an important aspect of the city, the people. As the narrator describes it, "I could frequently read, even in that brief interval of a glance, the history of long years" (483). Here is the nature of the knowledge/power nexus that the man holds: the ability to know individual histories.

This knowledge is proleptic to the detective's select area of knowledge, that of people's pasts. It also indicates the beginnings of the modern state in terms of control over the individual, as Foucault explains, a surreptitious but thorough control through the bureaucratic record and the police force. The detective's is the all-seeing eye, the panopticon. In this light, the detective may play the role of support for the dominant power mechanism, such as the state -- he reinforces the ideology of the "complex and negotiated 'fix' on the individual within the social framework, in the urban space, in the city" (Mercer, 1986:66). For the detective story as a form of popular art, a pleasure develops out of this relation between the detective story and social control, a description of a form of power where the reader may partake in voyeuristic surveillance of the social body.

In the story, this control is emphasized through four pages of demonstrated translation from the particular detail to the general type. Yet, in the one character that the narrator fails to understand, or decode, the whole edifice of his power is threatened. This is the character whose countenance "on account of the absolute idiosyncrasy of its expression" escapes his definition. Interestingly, one of the first observations that the narrator makes about the inscrutable man is to liken him to the

"fiend" (483), thereby drawing the everyday into the realms of superstition: from scientific accuracy to religious dread. Also as if to say: If I cannot discern the type of this man, he must be of another world. This statement comes as the first of two associations which criminalize the man, before the final condemnation. The next association comes when the narrator glimpses upon the man a diamond and a dagger, items which lend the aura of crime, this time worldly and not otherworldly crime. The reader is not given an explicit opinion as to the man's criminality, merely these hints; as the narrator confesses, "my vision deceived me, or, through a rent... I caught a glimpse" (484). This half-perceived detail is carefully placed to make an impact, and besides, we have enough evidence of the protagonist's ability to pick up detail to ignore his suggestion that his sight was flawed.

The story from here on reads like a hunt, with the hunter tracking this enigmatic prey. He moves from nightfall into the darkest night, from a respectable street to the outskirts of town via a route that takes him all the way across the city. The narrator makes repeated avowals of his desire to know the truth of this man: "I was now utterly amazed at this behaviour, and firmly resolved that we should not part until I had satisfied myself in some measure respecting him" (485). The behaviour that so amazes him is the enigma's constant desire to remain in the crowd; when a gathering disperses, the man registers nervous tension and flees in search of another crowd.⁵ This happens for about eighteen hours of the day, when, in final exhaustion, the narrator confronts the man, and reaches the following conclusion:

"This old man," I said at length, "is the type and genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. *He is the man of the crowd*. It will be in vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds. The worst heart in the world is a grosser book than the *Hortulus Animae*; and perhaps it is but one of the great mercies of God that "*es lässt sich nicht lesen*". (487, original emphases)

The question is whether the narrator has classified the man, whether, in other words, he has succeeded in fitting him into the knowledge structure that he possesses, like all the other characters; or whether he has failed, his classification of the man as the "type and genius" of deep crime merely an escape, a useless categorization, a catch-all for the enigma that he still cannot fathom: why does the man follow the crowd? What is the man's secret?

His presented reason for the man following the crowd appears circular: he is a man of the crowd. Therefore, this seems to form a category of person. And further, this type of person is criminal by nature. So we are left with this definition of a type of criminality: the person who remains always in the crowd, but at the same time is alone and uninvolved. He is with people constantly, but is always separate. For the pursuer this is confusing, it offers conflicting signals of communality and singularity. What he then says, in effect, is that the person who remains in the crowd, while simultaneously keeping separate and furthermore never divulging his type of useful categorization (be he a clerk or a thief), is "the type and genius of deep crime". So while he is always separate, the man is never singular enough to be classifiable into any conventional social category, except in the general manner of condemnation. The man is de-individualized.

For all the narrator knows, the man may be a detective following a suspect, or a lover searching escape from loneliness. As with his other guesses, we never know the accuracy of this one. But the interesting point is his phobic response to the enigma of the man. What emerges from his conclusion is that the unforgivable crime that the man commits is the mystery which he is; the act of reticence in giving up the essential secret, be it identity or knowledge, is the real crime. He remains anonymous.

The implication is that people should be open to scrutiny by the panoptic, should be compartmentalized and clearly defined, an open society being most easily regulated. But what is really called into question is the seer's (read detective's) ability to read the city's populace.

This is a central issue which links this story to the detective story -- the essential enigma which needs to be uncovered to reach completion, or attain success. And as a precursor to the detective form, the story stands as a model of unfulfilled or incomplete detection through a mystery which is in the end unfathomable. For the pursuer (the detective) the encounter with a face that refuses reading causes extreme anxiety (Brand, 1990:224). This anxiety causes him to link the unintelligibility with a moral judgement of criminality. Dana Brand goes on to say that this conjunction "demonizes the gap in the urban text," the gap in knowledge becoming fraught with suspicion: "By linking urban unintelligibility with 'deep crime' the narrator fuses the chief source of epistemological anxiety in the city with the chief source of physical anxiety" (224). Tony Bennett agrees, and adds, "the opacity of the urban crowd ceases to be merely confusing [and] becomes actively threatening" (1990:215). It is his anxiety over an intellectual failure, in effect, which leads to the warning of "deep crime" and the related physical fears (one recalls the dagger).

For the detective, this man represents the ultimate nightmare, in him is the possibility of the perfect crime, "the featureless, deindividualized crime that anyone could have committed because at this point everyone is the same" (Moretti, 1983:135). Everyone is the same because, through this one failure of classification, all his previous identifications are called into question, and everyone is potentially something that the detective never understood in the first place.

Another (related) reading of the unexplained enigma of the man of the crowd may be found in Brand's classification (1990:224) of the narrator as the *flâneur* and the man whom he follows as the *badaud*. These terms are taken from Walter Benjamin's study of Baudelaire (1983:69). These types of people are both products of the city. The latter describes a person who loses his identity in the multiple stimuli offered by the city and its crowds. Such a person constantly searches^{for} new stimulation and becomes extremely agitated should excitement be difficult to find. The *badaud* is a creature of the crowd in an unthinking manner, merely reacting to the stimuli. In this way the *badaud* is the opposite of the integrated individual who is the pinnacle of civilized society in the nineteenth century -- the *badaud* never stands alone from the crowd. In these terms, the reaction of the pursuer in the story is one of disgust at the realization that this man is nothing but a receptacle for external stimulation. It becomes a criticism of the society that helps create such people.

The *flâneur*, on the other hand, is very much a unitary persona.⁶ Equipped with learning and reason, such a person is able to decode the city and its peoples, and moves with purpose through the streets. His gaze

establish[es] epistemological and aesthetic control over an environment commonly perceived to be threatening and opaque. By reducing the city to a legible model or emblem of itself, and by demonstrating his control over his reduction, such a subjectivity assumes a paternalistic or heroic role in relation to an urban literary audience. He comforts city-dwellers by suggesting that the city can be read and mastered, despite all appearances to the contrary. (Bennett, 1990:214)

The *flâneur* acts out the assurance of the "physiologies" that Benjamin describes, these being pamphlets that "assured people that everyone was, unencumbered by any factual knowledge, able to make out the profession, the character, the background,

and the lifestyle of passers-by" (1983:39). Though one may debate this lack of need for factual knowledge (Poe and Conan-Doyle's detectives display that this is necessary), the narrator of the story acts out the assurance which is given here, the assurance that "[i]f that sort of thing could be done, then, to be sure, life in the big city was not nearly so disquieting as it probably seemed to people" (Benjamin, 39).

As the *flâneur* of the story so often repeats, he is determined to understand the man of the crowd, whose social type he does not recognize. When he then discovers that the person is actually a "non-person," a puppet, he condemns, relegating the man to abstract criminality: his crime is the refusal to be categorized, and the anxiety that this creates for the narrator. The irony is that the man, in resisting typification, remains essentially individual. This is a paradox: he does not belong to any socially accepted class of person, hence is a non-person; but in his resistance to classification he remains in a class of his own, which is ultimate individuality (and which makes the narrator highly uncomfortable). Here is formed the link between criminal and detective, since both remain individual.

It is also the crowd and its use that links the *badaud* to the criminal. For the criminal, the crowd offers safe haven from eyes. For the *badaud* it is a source of stimuli (Brand, 1990:224). It is therefore easy for the *flâneur* to link the two, which is exactly what happens in this story. A man not necessarily criminal is named so for his reticence in giving himself to the gaze of the *flâneur*, for whom the crowd is a text, since he has the ability to "lift the veil of anonymity" (Bennett, 214) that the crowd offers.

I mention this description of the *flâneur* to draw attention to the social role that the *flâneur* plays, a role which creates of him the beginnings of the detective. For

the detective is the one who has (is supposed to have) control over the elements within the city. He is also a supreme individualist, resembling the *flâneur*. As will be discussed further in scrutiny of Dupin and Holmes, the detective as "Individual" forms an important element of the nineteenth-century detective story, and also later. Poe already goes a long way in the glorification of the individual and in "developing the forces of bourgeois individualism" (Knight, 1980:40).

And it is interesting to note that criminality is so powerfully linked to individual identity, that it clings to the individual. For the *flâneur*, the crime must be connected to a recognizable individual, so that the question, as Foucault formulates it, may be asked: "when one wishes to individualize the healthy, normal and law-abiding adult, it is always by asking him how much of the child he has in him, what secret madness lies within him, what fundamental crime he has dreamt of committing" (1979:193) -- here a man refuses this knowledge because of the inability on the part of the *flâneur* to interpret.

Again, this illustrates a theme that will become crucial to the "classical" detective story of the Victorian era. For this society, with its reliance on the concept of the Individual, the nightmare is criminality which cannot be individualized -- the criminal who remains anonymous. This implies an inherent criminality in society; whereas, should the criminal always be identified, that person may be removed and the illusion that society is inherently "good" may continue. If crime remains a wholly individual aberration, it can be excised. Random crime is an unspeakable horror. Detection becomes synonymous with interpretation, naming and symbolic cauterization so that evil does not remain "at large" (Cranny-Francis, 1990:159). Decipherment equals solution. This treatment of crime necessarily shows up the

ideological informants at work. For, as Stephen Knight notes, the "crime and the resolution are without history, without recurring roots. This powerful and frighteningly delusive notion is still with us that desocialized, unhistorical understanding can, by deciphering isolated problems, resolve them. The whole tends towards an individualist intellectual quietism..." (1980:44). I return to this issue in the Holmes section.

So the criminality works on two levels: the social crime of the *badaud*, and the moral crime of the malefactor, with these two personae often becoming confused. The detective becomes, in turn, a moral as well as a social critic.

What finally distinguishes this story is the ultimate open-endedness -- the criminal is judged, but not eliminated from society. And as to the question of whether the man *is* identified (if the naming of him as criminal is solely because he refuses reading), it would seem to point to a negative. Nothing is proven. So the seer fails in this instance. The city retains elements of inscrutability -- doubt remains. As Brand points out, this failure allows the possibility that "no man or woman in the crowd can be read as the narrator has presumed to read them. The entire crowd, according to this formulation, threatens the physical and epistemological well-being of the narrator" (225). This is the demonization of the city -- within this gap in knowledge, where interpretation fails, lurks insecurity. It is important that one finds this problem so early in the detective story, indeed in a story that is not yet defined as a detective story *per se*. Moving on to Poe's next fictional creation, Auguste Dupin, we see how this doubt is allayed. For with Dupin this incompleteness, the tatters of loose ends, is tidied up by Dupin's hyper-effective detection. Dupin is a master of control, but, as I shall show, the doubt resurfaces. All the detections of Dupin, and later Holmes, with

their rhetoric of infallibility are simply attempts, not always successful, to ward off the reality of an increasingly opaque and uncontrollable cityscape. The furtive man of the crowd is a ghost that cannot be laid to rest, for as Gavin Lambert says: "'The Man of the Crowd' symbolizes everything that Dupin will never decode" (1980:51).

* * * * *

"He boasted to me, with a low chuckling laugh, that most men, in respect to himself, wore windows in their bosoms, and was wont to follow up such assertions by direct and very startling proofs of his intimate knowledge of my own" (126). So the unnamed narrator of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" describes the inimitable Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin early in the narrative. He then goes on to recount a lengthy anecdote wherein the analytical powers of Dupin are demonstrated to him, Dupin using the narrator himself as a subject of analysis. Needless to say, the narrator is left awed and convinced. The similarities between Dupin and the anonymous analyst of the previous story are immediately obvious. Both practise the knowledge of the city crowd, they both purport to have the power of explanation of the signs that are offered up for their visual and intellectual examination. Just as the protagonist of the earlier story professes to be able to identify every individual in the crowd, so too does Dupin assert an ability to be able to identify the hidden secrets of a person.

His secret tool is observation. Where the proto-detective used the signs that the individual displays and leaves, the details on the individual, to identify him (recall the bent ear), so Dupin also admits that "observation has become with me, of late, a species of necessity" (128). Observation, coupled with the ability to know what to

observe (which arises from practice, but also, as the narrator asserts, a strictly analytic mind {124}) is the essential ingredient for semiotic and practical success.

The ability to know what to observe is also nurtured by education, necessarily a wide-ranging one. This Dupin does not lack, as the narrator relates in admiring tones: "I was astonished, too, at the vast extent of his reading; and, above all, I felt my soul enkindled within me by the wild fervour, and the vivid freshness of his imagination" (125). Dupin represents the acme of the scientific, rational man of the nineteenth-century, the century wherein observation and education were ably championed by Darwin, amongst others. As examples of Dupin's learning, one notes his knowledge of Cuvier in identifying the criminal, his knowledge of literature (Crébillon, 127), Greek mythology (the goddess Laverna, 156), and recent society (the account of the theatre, 129). In a world perceived of as being constituted by fixed elements, Dupin is a skilled archivist. His memory is far-ranging and ordered, the perfect match for his world, the city.

Further, Dupin acts as the epitome of the scientific man in his absolute reliance on the fact, observable and studied. He does not presume. An example of this would be the police's reaction to the windows of the house on Rue Morgue, which, because of two nails, appeared to be permanently shut, and therefore they presumed that the murderer could not have used the windows as escape route. But Dupin, working by elimination, comes to the realization that the "impossibility" of the windows being used was incorrect. He then examines them and finds the broken nail which allows the opening of the window. So Dupin does not stop at the obvious presumption which the police make (142-143). Dupin is "the disinterested observer without prejudice or ideology" (Cranny-Francis, 1990:148), the perfect scientist.

Through a number of pages these abilities are impressed on us before the narrator begins the tale of the crime. Again, this air of scientific method is later strongly echoed by Holmes, who firmly advocates observable clue or fact before theory.

Yet Poe ascribes to Dupin also an element of the "irrational," this being imagination. His is the ability to embody both the "creative and the resolute" -- the "Bi-Part Soul". It is his imagination, seemingly, that allows him to make leaps of the intellect and come to some startling conclusions, conclusions which would be obscure to lesser mortals (an example of this would be his famous description of what the narrator is thinking as they walk along the streets one night, gleaned from sighs and glances). Imagination is not, however, applied as a wild shot in the dark, but is the result of connections nurtured by observation and pools of relevant data at your fingertips. Imagination is not separate from analysis: "the *truly* imaginative [are] never otherwise than analytic" (125).

The qualities thus far described make him the perfect tool to bring to bear on the seemingly irrational and extremely puzzling murders that took place in the Rue Morgue. If Dupin is the model of the rational, then these murders must stand as an antithesis. Committed in a locked room, for no understandable motive, by some being possessing remarkable strength, they are inscrutable to the police. To confuse the case further, the witnesses to the auditory evidence -- screams and exclamations -- all give contradictory evidence in relation to a central point: the language of the malefactor. The bizarre and gruesome evidence of two severely mutilated corpses, one lying a few storeys below, her neck severed from her body, the other stuffed feet first into the chimney, strangled until her eyes bugged out, leave the police stunned, and clueless.

What the police have run flat against are two bodies which have been mangled beyond intelligibility: "The body, as well as the head, was fearfully mutilated -- the former so much so as scarcely to retain any semblances of humanity" (131). A crime so horrible that actual identity, individuality, has been nigh obliterated. And as to the identity of the murderer: there is no clue. It is a nameless, faceless crime. To use Brand's terminology once more, the epistemological gap has been demonized. Somewhere out there in the city is a fearful killer at large. He could be anywhere. Nobody knows who he is. It is a totally illogical and unreasonable situation -- as well as frightening.

Enter Dupin, who admits, "[a]n enquiry will afford us amusement" (137). He begins with an attack on the inability of the police to expose any of the mystery surrounding the case: "In fact, the facility with which I shall arrive, or have arrived, at the solution of this mystery, is in the direct ratio of its apparent insolubility in the eyes of the police" (139). Taking one's cue from the arrogant tone of this remark, one realizes the confidence with which Dupin tackles the case, and again notes the resonances with the earlier story. Where "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" differs is in the fact that Dupin never breaks his stride (indeed, he suggests that he has arrived at the solution from the very beginning of the investigation). This is a clearly a *tour de force*.

Dupin, the individualist, is squared up against the collective of the police force, and the threatening irrationality of the seemingly motiveless crime. The police he writes off as follows:

The Parisian police, so much extolled for acumen, are cunning, but no more. There is no method in their proceedings, beyond the method of the moment. ... The results attained by them are not unfrequently surprising, but, for the most

part, are brought about by simple diligence and activity. When these qualities are unavailing, their schemes fail. (136)

They are essentially blinded by their preconceptions and their lack of clear discernment, an acuity that the singular Dupin does not lack, in a sense through his extreme individuality, his marginality in society, which allows for detachment and scientific observation without the ideological constraints that the police labour under. An example of these constraints is their need for a motive for the crime. As Dupin says: "I wish you, therefore, to discard from your thoughts the blundering idea of *motive*, engendered in the brains of the police by that portion of the evidence which speaks of money..." (146). The crime he tackles thus:

Truth is not always in a well. In fact, as regards the more important knowledge, I do believe that she is invariably superficial. The depth lies in the valleys where we seek her, and not upon the mountain-top where she is found. ... By undue profundity we perplex and enfeeble thought; and it is possible to make even Venus herself vanish from the firmament by a scrutiny too sustained, too concentrated, or too direct. (137)

So for a profound mystery, he suggests a simple approach. For a crime that suggests complexity, he advocates tackling it from the premise that it is less obscure than it appears. It is the very *appearance* of difficulty that leaves the truth-seekers floundering, the *reality* of the solution is in the superficial, the clue that lies on the surface. It is expectation, the confusions of our own minds, that lends the situation obscurities which were never there to begin with. Dupin, a clear flame in the midst of furnaces of emotional response, sticks to his method of examining the observable fact. For the multiple suggestions that are offered, stay with that which *is there*.

Poe emphasizes the various conflicting responses of the people on the street, and also the newspaper reports which suggest unfathomable mystery; these form the confused background, the noise of the social mass, against which Dupin rises out in

his precision and clarity. The pre-eminent symbol of this is the babble of languages that is ascribed to the killer by the people on the scene. Nobody can identify the tongue that is spoken, even though, present in the crowd, there is a speaker (it so happens) from just about every major linguistic group in Europe, and even Russia. Dupin, however, instantly reaches the "obvious" solution, but withholds his answer for now.

Dupin enters into a precise scrutiny of the signs that remain in the room, steering clear of the suggestions already put forward ("We must not judge the means... by this shell of an examination" {136}). After his explanation of the windows, he turns to the bodies, drawing attention to the outer signs that are manifest on the surface of the physical body as he narrates the solution that he always already has found, for we as readers are being led by the nose. The first, rather macabre, sign is "thick tresses -- very thick tresses -- of grey human hair. These had been torn out by the roots" (147). He emphasizes the strength necessary to do this. He turns to the body itself, lying crushed on the pavement outside the window, and shows how the bruises on the body were caused by the impact of her falling from the window -- being thrown from the window (now that he has proven it could open). It is the "excessively *outré*" (147) nature of these signs on the body that leads him to his conclusion.

Dramatically, Dupin asks what form of person could commit an atrocity so brutal "a *grotesquerie* in horror absolutely alien from humanity" (147) and speak in a voice "foreign in tone to the ears of men of many nations" (148). The narrator feels a creeping of the flesh, the similar response of the reader being led into a dark avenue of the human psyche, for as the narrator can only conclude: "A madman... has done

this deed" (148). Then, in a symbolic echo of the human hair that was torn out by the roots, he displays to the narrator his final proof: a little tangle of hair, taken from the "rigidly clutched fingers of Madame L'Espanaye" (148). The process of demonization is now complete, the narrator can only exclaim in horror -- "Dupin,' I said, completely unnerved; 'this hair is most unusual -- this is no *human* hair.'"

Then, by showing the size of the hand-grip of the killer on the neck of the second victim, explaining the riddle of the speech, and bringing out his volume of Cuvier, Dupin identifies the criminal -- the hapless Ourang-Outang.

Thus the criminal turns out to be the most de-individualized being that Poe can find, and therefore the most threatening to the society where crime is contained in the individual. For the duration of the story before the unveiling, the killer is potentially anybody with strength, lacking identity, hidden in the crowd. With immense relief, society is saved by the one person who can see the "obvious" clue, and who does not fall back on irrational fear and superstition. He is helped, as he points out, by the *outré* nature of the clues, their extra-ordinariness lends to them a character that would be missing from the banal (which remains the most threatening), and aids identification.

Dupin identifies and neutralizes the killer, who is, after all, not a part of society. From the potential nightmare of the gap, that which is unknown, to perfect clarity and security, Dupin acts as the calmative for a society that believes in rationality, or deeply desires to do so, but is still beset by irrational fears (fears which Bram Stoker and Mary Shelley tapped into). He is the (living) proof that the power of reason can overcome the most confusing puzzle, the most dangerous threat to the integrity of the society -- unreason, in this case the crime that is unsolved and thus

always endemic, having never been isolated. In this story he goes so far as to identify and explain the non-human -- the farthest possible point of unreason is controllable in his universe.

Dupin's success lies in his proficiency as the perfect reader of the urban sign, and the languages of humanity. In terms of the languages, one of the most puzzling clues for the police, Dupin is the meta-reader who can discern, in the omissions of the speech of the criminal (for example the absence of syllabification), the lack of humanity. He makes the meta-abduction that is not necessarily based on a knowledge of all languages, but on a knowledge of the structuration of speech, the over-arching design of language. From the specific clue he is able to make abductions, the educated guess, as described by Umberto Eco *et al.* in The Sign of Three, a method which I describe in more detail below. In this manner the tuft of hair, along with the speech, the size of the grip, equals the ape. The part becomes the whole for the perceptive reader of the sign. Thus, as Martin Priestman points out, what Dupin displays is that the part becomes the metonymy for the whole, "truth" (total understanding) is in every small part of the whole: "we are being taught to feel for a different order of meaning, where 'direct' access to metaphorical depth is replaced by our willing acceptance of the horizontal metonymic *surface* of the narrative" (1990:49). One must reject the desire to delve past the specific order of the superficial in the hope of discovering the "real" meaning. Any "real" meaning is to be found in this "obvious" matrix of the detailed surface.

This ability to understand the whole from the part relies of course on a conception of the world where the part does stand for the whole in an unambiguous relationship. It is the rational world of clear causation of the scientific nineteenth

century. As Stephen Knight points out (1980:52), it is a "false dialectic of thought and reality," because the material under examination is necessarily more tractable than in real life. This "bogus problematic... could convince the newly alienated intellectual reader that his own epistemology could stand as an ontology: that all this reading and thinking was a way to live." This fictional control was necessary to convince the reader, and to give to the text the "necessary ideological power".

But what I wish to emphasize is the importance that is attached to the tangible sign, the urban mark, for the detective. It is a mastery of this knowledge -- how to read the sign -- that creates the perfect investigator in the nineteenth-century city. This ability reaches its apotheosis in Dupin. By mastering a mystery that is emblematic of the urban experience, seemingly disordered, the detective displays the power to solve any possible mystery in the city. Dupin "masters the city by mastering a synecdoche" (Brand, 1990:237). And with an individual like Dupin at work, the demonized gap is less fearful, for he is the model of control over the vastness of the urban multitude. And he proves that it can be done by one man of clear observation and pure method.

Note, also, how the development of the story is free of any physical involvement on the part of the investigator. This form of detection is enabled through the "controlling, selecting intelligences" of the detectives (Knight, 1980:47), reminiscent of Foucault's prediction that in the presentation of crime in literature,

... the struggle between two pure minds -- the murderer and the detective -- will constitute the essential form of the confrontation... we have moved from the exposition of the facts or the confession to the slow process of discovery; from the execution to the investigation; from physical confrontation to the intellectual struggle between criminal and investigator. (1979:69)

DOYLE

In many ways, Sherlock Holmes is a literary reincarnation of Auguste Dupin, if not a rarified form of the same ideal: the epitome of the rational hero who resolves urban disorder (Knight, 1980:104). His method is similar and his philosophy of the external world also accords with Dupin's. In Holmes's own words, he does consider himself superior to Dupin: "No doubt you think that you are complimenting me in comparing me to Dupin,' he observed. 'Now, in my opinion, Dupin was a very inferior fellow. ... He had some analytical genius, no doubt; but he was by no means such a phenomenon as Poe appeared to imagine'" (A Study in Scarlet 24). This remark is clearly the result of some professional antagonism, for in his approach, Holmes is deeply indebted to Dupin (as Arthur Conan Doyle is to Poe, indicated by the intertextual reference). The fact that the two show such similarities leads one to assume that the societies within which they operate are not dissimilar. The cultures are both late-nineteenth-century European,⁷ and both hold the rational individual in high esteem -- the reason that Doyle is so successful with his detective stories which laud the epitome of this figure in Holmes.⁸ As Nordon explains (quoted by Sebeok and Umiker-Sebeok in Eco and Sebeok, 1983:28):

As the creation of a doctor who has been soaked in the rationalist thought of the period, the Holmesian cycle offers us for the first time the spectacle of a hero triumphing again and again by means of logic and scientific method. And the hero's prowess is as marvelous as the power of science, which many people hoped would lead to a material and spiritual improvement of the human condition, and Doyle first among them.⁹

In this way, too, the individual integrity of the detective is not put under any external pressure, or physical duress. This later changes, as described in chapter two.

Dupin is, in effect, a superman who has "always already" solved the crime because the city and its people are wholly transparent to him. He lives in the hyper-reality of a present wherein the mysteries of the past and future are already and always clear. It is a confidence that displays a powerful belief that runs through detective fiction from Dupin to Poirot *et al.*, that the perfect solution is available to those who are pure of thought. It is the ideal dream of the scientific impulse in humanity, where totals are always the sum of the parts. And it displays the feverish need for the city to be controllable. But this requires, as I have suggested, a superman. The way that he is portrayed, however, allows the lie that his method is open to anyone who follows his example. Thus, after his solution is given, it always appears "obvious". The cracks in this literary edifice begin to become gradually clearer, but this belief in scientific rationalism remains powerful for some time, as is apparent when one looks at the figure who took up Dupin's baton, and carried it to fame.

Priestman (1990:146) adds: "This model of Selfhood that is triumphant is the 'free-standing, destiny-creating Individual,'" and Cranny-Francis emphasizes that Holmes foregrounds self-help and own ability, both prime Victorian virtues (1990:148).

And in a world where the individual is threatened by the rapid agglomeration of person and edifice, Holmes acts as a strong example of both the individual and the individualizing agent -- his ability to find and identify the criminal or the person who has disappeared into the city under a *nom-de-plume*. The threat of the masses to the individual must not be underestimated. Michael Biddiss explains that "prominent among the threats to liberal individualism were the connotations of anonymity and standardization accentuated in mass society, and the increasing powers being assumed by the state in order to cope with new social complexities" (1977:108). Again, in the face of this state control, Holmes acts as the Individual who is able to beat the forces of the state at their own game (noted in his belittling of the police).

But it is a fine line before he is seen as an agent of the state's desire to control society through the gaze of power; his sarcasm towards the state operatives merely acts as smokescreen to the very real fact that he is aiding the cause -- the compartmentalization of the individual through close scrutiny. Holmes's power allows a vicarious peek into the private lives of everyone, he penetrates even the private room of refuge. He participates in the realization of Bentham's panopticon ideal, the totalization of knowledge of persons. Social complexities work against this, but because of his abilities it can be said, as Colin Mercer does, that in Holmes the oscillation between the two is fixed at the extreme of total visibility (1986:65). Mercer goes on to assert that detective fiction is involved in "the coordinates of pleasure in contemporary culture: a complex and negotiated 'fix' on the individual within the

social framework, in the urban space, in the city" (66). Here again is a link with Poe's "Man of the Crowd".

While Holmes is participating in this form of pleasure, he does employ a degree of free will and decision that is often at odds with the black letter law of the dominant forces, witness his exercise of the choice to let some "criminals" free if their crime is understandable in the light of circumstance. He does not feel bound by the letter of the law, indeed it is not beyond him to break the law where he sees fit. This is a function of the fact that he remains an Individual, never a member of the amorphous state functionaries, and it can be argued that the impetus behind his fixing of the individual differs from that of the state (being pleasure rather than control), though the problem remains that the two intersect. For Holmes the joy is in the solution of the puzzle, not in the capture of the criminal. His motivation is not the same as that of the state's, which is the interdiction of the criminal body and the attempt at social control. This problem of the differing approaches becoming confused, since the result is often the same, remains foregrounded as detective fiction moves on. The distinction emphasizes the *private* nature of the private investigator, and what this means in terms of the official forces of control; however, one could argue that the boundary is never comfortably resolved.

Using the story entitled "The Cardboard Box" I want to examine Holmes's method, and then proceed to the assumptions underlying this methodology, and draw attention to the implicit world views and the limitations that come to the fore in these philosophies.

Essentially, Holmes's method relies on painstaking observation of the smallest of details and of the most irrelevant-seeming sign. ("You know my method. It is founded upon the observation of trifles." {"The Boscombe Valley Mystery" 214}). In "The Cardboard Box," he goes to the house of the woman who has received a disturbing parcel in the post -- a box containing two human ears, freshly severed and preserved in salt. In examining the box a number of things are suggested to him: the string connotes, by virtue of the type of knot, that a sailor sent the package, this is further supported by the writing which is that of a man without much education (he misspells); the rough salt that the ears are set in suggests that they were not sent by medical men, as is proposed, but by someone unfamiliar with the methods of preserving tissue. But it is the ears themselves that are the most carefully scrutinized and provide Holmes with the information that he needs. The ear, as Holmes tells Watson he should know, is one of the most singular features of the body. No two ears are alike. And, it so happens, Holmes has the expert knowledge to differentiate, as he has penned "two short monographs... upon the subject" (896). It is this knowledge that allows him to note that one of the ears is similar to those of the woman who received the parcel, and conclude familial peril.

Thus, careful observation, coupled with the requisite knowledge which acts as a background filter to judge the observations is the basis of his method. To further the similarities in this method to those of the scientific discipline, he adds the following rules: never theorize before having evidence before you (A Study in Scarlet), and make a point of having no prejudices ("The Reigate Puzzle"). He even refers to his activity as "The Science of Deduction" (A Study in Scarlet 23). Massimo Bonfantini

and Giampolo Proni summarize the ideal, and give therein a good description of the man:

Puzzle-solving, like detective work, calls for keen observation and encyclopaedic knowledge in order to have at one's fingertips *the finite and predetermined set of immediate and clue-fitting possible hypothetical solutions*. Then one needs training in logical calculation, coolness, and *patience* for comparing and selecting the hypotheses until one finds the line of interpretation supplying the only *solution that fits all the clues*. (Eco and Sebeok, 1983:127-128, original italics)

Again this draws attention to the belief that "dispassionate science was steadily comprehending and so controlling the world" (Knight, 1980:79).

In a story like "The Cardboard Box," this methodology allows Holmes to make the abduction that leads from the ear to the criminal. The ear that he receives as clue, in its plenitude of meaning, forms the specific part of the whole crime. It acts metonymically, allowing his deduction from the specific to the totality. In this manner, every object and every sign offers to Holmes suggestions of its greater meaning. Every clue or object is a sign imbued with potential which he has the ability, through study, to realize. Moretti puts this in semiotic terminology:

...clues are more often metonymies: associations by contiguity (related to the past), for which the detective must furnish the missing term. The clue is, therefore, that particular element of the story in which the link between signifier and signified is altered. It is a signifier that always has several signifieds and thus produces numerous suspicions. (1983:146)

In this case the ear would produce endless possibilities if the link is not made.

Without the link, it is a floating signifier which simply conveys horror. With the connection made, by Holmes, it is a sure path that leads to the true signified: the body. And in the identification of the body of the victim lies the identification of the criminal body.

This is a materialist epistemological model which Holmes follows -- from the physical data can be read "what has happened and what will happen". This relies heavily on the idea of "materialist causation" important to the Victorian world view (Knight, 1980:74); the clue is the pointer to the solution, in it is contained the "truth" and there is a necessary link. And for one who is able to read the clue, the truth is obvious. What is further being relied on in this epistemology is the perfect match (somewhere, to be found by the educated seeker) between the idea (the detective's solution) and the external "reality". As Eco, quoting Spinoza, says, Holmes must be convinced that "*ordo et connexio idearum idem est ac ordo et connexio rerum*" (Eco and Sebeok, 1983:217). Should this be the case, then Holmes's abductions will yield results, he knows that his knowledge of fact has direct relevance to the reality before him. And the solution that Holmes provides must be the only solution, in order that he remain as potent a symbol of rationality as he is. In the rational world where cause is necessarily linked to effect, the supremely rational being does succeed. This epistemology has already been criticized in relation to Poe's detectives, but it is important to note how it became even more firmly entrenched in Sherlock Holmes.

On an interpersonal level too, there must be consonance. When Holmes can explain to Watson what the train of Watson's thought was (as he does more than once, and again in "The Cardboard Box"), he is relying on the fact that Watson's mind follows a path similar to his own, ie. a rational one. This is easily called into question, since, as Brand (1990:231) observes, the genre depends on the assumption that the detective is capable of throwing himself into every other consciousness in the story, implying that minds work similarly. As Priestman remarks, wherever Holmes's reasonings "touch on matters of social relationship there are always some very large-

scale assumptions about unbreakable social rules implicit in them" (1990:91). While this common fallacy remains in place, all is fine, but it holds no space for adaptation. There is no sense that Holmes posits a *possible* solution, he gives *the* solution, and it checks out against the sympathetic facts; even though, as Eco *et al.* point out, he is involved in abduction, which is a form of guessing, albeit an informed guessing. ("Abduction is, after all, nothing but guessing" -- Charles S. Peirce quoted in Eco and Sebeok, 216).

Abduction is distinguished from deduction by the addition of an element of guesswork, embodied in a "rule of thumb" that needs external validation. An abduction is a "hypothesis" and is not "logically self contained, as is the deduction... they need to be externally validated" (Eco and Sebeok, 69). Holmes has been criticized for failing, in the majority of cases, to validate his abductions in the external world -- he simply assumes their truth. While deduction works from the facts at hand towards the solution in a relatively linear fashion and without leaps of the imagination, abduction relies on more than the observable fact, it requires an "extra-sensory" faculty that makes connections where the average person would fail to do so. Holmes assumes, or is allowed to assume, this faculty. For Peirce, the statistical average for correct abduction was seen to be enhanced by an interconnectedness with the world -- a *lume naturale* (cited in Bonfantini and Proni in Eco and Sebeok, 134). This ability necessitates being able to draw on vast and different avenues of social skill which are brought to bear on the problem. This idea of interconnectedness with the world describes Holmes's relation to the world: he is very much in control, the world is one which he understands, it supports and does not fail him (the trains run on time, he understands the spoken word and can detect a lie), and therefore he has

the law of averages on his side. He is able to rely on his connective abilities. This interconnectedness will be seen to have direct relevance to the detective's approach to the city.

Holmes thus believes in a purposeful universe, a universe connected. As he laments at the end of "The Cardboard Box" in reference to a sudden death: "What object is served by this circle of misery and violence and fear? It must tend to some end, or else our universe is ruled by chance, which is unthinkable" (901). Holmes's universe is ruled by strict laws of nature. He repeatedly uses the idea of the chain of events, events happening in a sequence that is ordered. An example of this is found in The Valley of Fear when he says: "I can see only two things for certain at present -- a great brain in London, and a dead man in Sussex. It's the chain between that we are going to trace" (779).¹⁰

As may be expected, Holmes is in control of the urban world that he inhabits. This is a description of him at the start of "The Cardboard Box": "He loved to lie in the very centre of five millions of people, with his filaments stretching out and running through them, responsive to every little rumour or suspicion of unsolved crime" (888). And, as may be expected, he has an exact knowledge of London, "It is a hobby of mine to have an exact knowledge of London" he says in "The Red-Headed League" (185). He does indicate the enormous possibilities that are offered by a place of this size, but remembering his sure place in the ordered world, one gets the impression that he can cope with the variety:

If we could fly out of that window hand in hand, hover over this great city, gently remove the roofs, and peep in at the queer things which are going on, the strange coincidences, the plannings, the cross-purposes, the wonderful chains of events, working through generations, and leading to the most *outré*

results, it would make all fiction with its conventionalities and forseen conclusions most stale and unprofitable. ("A Case of Identity," 191)

Indeed an ironic final clause.

An example of Holmes using his vast knowledge of the city in the solution of a case is "The Red-Headed League". In this puzzle, a chain of events as diverse as this is presented: a league established for men of red hair, a workman keen on photography^{who} encourages his boss (the client) to sign up, the simultaneous presence of a large quantity of cash at a local bank -- these are diagnosed by Holmes. And it is through his knowledge of the streets (he investigates the streets around the building where the client operates his pawnbrokerage, tapping with his cane and examining the adjacent buildings) that "the magic solution of the impasse between the ungraspably amorphous and the irreducibly singular from which the problem seems so dramatically to arise" (Priestman, 1990:88) is discovered. The amorphous is the city, the singular is the strange specificity of the other factors, for instance the bizarre importance that the client, Jabez Wilson's, red hair seems to hold.

What Holmes deduces is that it is not the hair, but the location of Wilson's shop that the criminals want unrestricted (the shop being near the bank where the money is kept), so they concoct a task for Wilson under the auspices of the non-existent league -- in another part of town. Priestman goes on to say: "His realization that the source of Wilson's singularity is not him but his shop, and then only in its relation to the bank, implies a means by which the whole cacophony of London might eventually be comprehended" (88). In other words, by finding the correct relation of part to part, the amorphous is grasped in the "sum total of all these relations". Holmes is the man to find these connections, in this case, only because of his familiarity with the "endless labyrinth of gas-lit streets" ("The Red-Headed League"

187). He is able to make the meta-abduction, the leap from the personal fact to the external fact of the building's location -- seemingly unrelated facts.

It is also his rootedness in the real knowledge of the streets that prevents him from being drawn to the false clues that abound, clues which are interestingly linked to reproduction (the reproduction of the Encyclopaedia Britannica that Wilson is involved in, and the reproductive activity of photography that the criminal practises), reproduction hiding the *production* of crime -- the "real" act. The false fronts obfuscate the actual, but Holmes is not fooled. These false fronts (the photographic) pretend a sure reality as the photograph itself does, but Holmes sees past this to the reality of the crime which is hidden behind these facades, behind the wall, the wall being all the photo can show.

However, as Knight demonstrates, the "darker" side of London is not explored, but elided. Holmes's portrayal of the true city is also photographic, paradoxically, in the sense described above. It too is involved in the obfuscation of truths about the city it represents, this by virtue of the fact that "the real threat to respectable life posed by the grim areas where working class and the 'dangerous classes' lived is thoroughly subdued" (1980:94). The "real" threat, dispossession of property, is not examined at its root. So while Holmes is adept at seeing past the front that the specific crime sets, he fails to see through to the reality of urban crime. Doyle refuses to examine the political root of criminality in nineteenth-century London. Holmes does sometimes head into the outskirts of London, but when this happens we do not follow, as Knight points out, but are merely party to his discoveries upon his return (94). Watson describes, in The Sign of Four, his perception of the city on a particular evening:

It was a September evening and not yet seven o'clock, but the day had been a dreary one, and a dense drizzly fog lay low upon the great city. Mud-coloured clouds drooped sadly over the muddy streets. Down the Strand the lamps were but misty splotches of diffused light which threw a feeble circular glimmer upon the slimy pavement. The yellow glare from the shop-windows streamed out into the steamy, vaporous air and threw a murky, shifting radiance across the crowded thoroughfare. There was, to my mind, something eerie and ghostlike in the endless procession of faces which flitted across these narrow bars of light -- sad faces and glad, haggard and merry. Like all humankind, they flitted from the gloom into the light and so back into the gloom once more. (98)

This is the ominous London of Jack the Ripper, and Watson is open to the psychological effect that such a city produces during these hazy nights. His description is ominous, and his tone does not suggest comfort or easy control over the urban environment. In descriptions like these, the demonization of the city is suggested.

Contrast then Holmes, who, both in the sureness of his movements through the city, and his professed knowledge of the streets, offers a reassuring model of the man in the city and reassuringly fills the demonic gap in knowledge. Holmes also offers direct assurances about the city on occasion, as in "The Copper Beeches" where he replies to Watson's dismay that Holmes associates crime with countryside dwellings: "They always fill me with a certain horror. It is my belief, Watson, founded upon my experience, that the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than does the smiling and beautiful countryside" (323). Thus Holmes familiarizes the city and "draws its sting" (Knight, 1980:95). Yet, in its necessary blindness to the urban reality and the socio-political causes of crime, the artificial construction of his success is evident, but elided. This social blindness is needed to be able to carry out the fantasy of Holmes's success, but in passages like Watson's description of the city there is the "ghost" of the unknowable, as also demonstrated in Holmes's fear that order doesn't exist, that "unthinkable" horror. This dread surfaces

in The Valley of Fear. The city is the locus of the fear, the focus of the problem; for, as Raban puts it "[i]f you are used to teasing out the nature of the world from a single stone, or a tree, or an old Cumberland beggar, the city offers an unparalleled resistance to your habits of mind" (1974:40).

Holmes understands the interconnections of the edifices that make up the city. And in a world becoming increasingly centred on these divisions of wall and room this is invaluable knowledge, opening up endless possibilities in the knowledge/power nexus. It is Holmes's ability to understand the connections that leads him into the rooms of the private individual, rooms where he is also adept at finding the hidden object (as in "The Naval Treaty") or the linking clue (as in Douglas's room in The Valley of Fear). As Benjamin points out, it is precisely in the interiors that the individual leaves the most obvious trace: "[t]he interior was not only the private citizen's universe, it was also his casing. Living means leaving traces. In the interior, these were stressed..." (1983:169); and elsewhere he suggests why the interior takes on such importance: "Since the days of Louis-Philippe the bourgeoisie has endeavoured to compensate itself for the inconsequential nature of private life in the big city. It seeks such compensation within its four walls" (46). So both the holistic entity and the specificity of the city are understood by Holmes -- as always, the part standing for the whole.

The Holmes stories remain reassuring because of this ability that does not fail him. As Porter points out, this is what makes these stories "popular fiction" *par excellence*, they are infinitely reassuring (1981:ch.11). Sherlock Holmes helps to uphold the belief systems of the Victorian age, those of rationality and control. As Cranny-Francis says, he helps to "naturalize bourgeois discourse" (1990:149).

Yet there is a Holmes story which provides an interesting challenge to the canon. This is The Valley of Fear. In structure it does not differ from previous novel-length treatments of cases, such as The Sign of Four, with its dual time line and division into the present story and then the history leading up to the events in the present. But what is different is that in this case the history takes Watson, the chronicler, to America and to the growing industrial cities of the north. And while the European city remains controllable for Holmes, the portrait presented of the American city is one of ingrained crime and disorder, an anarchic world.

It is interesting to note that when The Valley of Fear was published in 1915, contemporary critics found his treatment of the industrial city too political, and Conan-Doyle faced pressure to keep his work within the defined limits of the genre (reported in Porter 1981:192). What is found in this work is therefore an attempt to examine the social realities of the American city, which is ironic in the light of his refusal to do this "at home". In this attempt, the style that Conan-Doyle adopts is indicative of the changing direction of the detective story, and precursive to the American hard-boiled tradition.

For example, the treatment of violence differs markedly. There is a comparative lack of violence in the usual stories, or a comic/sporting treatment of it as in "The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist": "He ended a string of abuse by a vicious backhander, which I failed to entirely avoid [*sic*]. The next few minutes were delicious. It was a straight left against a slogging ruffian. I emerged as you see me. Mr. Woodley went home in a cart" (532). This, in contrast, is a description from The Valley of Fear, and one sees the brutality that replaces the "sporting" tone:

An instant later a gray-haired man rushed out on the landing.

He was seized before he could get farther, and his spectacles came tinkling down at McMurdo's feet. There was a thud and a groan. He was on his face, and half a dozen sticks were clattering together as they fell upon him. He writhed, and his long, thin limbs quivered under the blows. The others ceased at last; but Baldwin, his cruel face set in an infernal smile, was hacking at the man's head, which he vainly endeavoured to defend with his arms. His white hair was dabbled with patches of blood. (839)

Also the descriptions of the city and environs point towards the primal landscape of the hard-boiled story:

Through the growing gloom there pulsed the red glow of the furnaces on the sides of the hills. Great heaps of slag and dumps of cinders loomed up on each side, with the high shafts of the collieries towering above them. Huddled groups of mean, wooden houses, the windows of which were beginning to outline themselves in light, were scattered here and there along the line, and the frequent halting places were crowded with their swarthy inhabitants.

The iron and coal valleys of the Vermissa district were no resorts for the leisured or the cultured. Everywhere there were stern signs of the crudest battle of life, the rude work to be done, and the rude, strong workers who did it. (816)

The theme of the story, a city run by corrupt gangs, is in direct relation to the treatment of the city by writers like Hammett, as in Red Harvest, a discussion of which forms the body of the next chapter. The protagonist is a Pinkerton detective who is sent to clean up a faction (the scowlers) which rules the labour forces through violence. The description of the detection is bleak and filled with an over-riding sense of despair; the agent, Douglas, caught in the penumbra of the shadow of "the Valley of Fear," wondering whether he will ever emerge (796). Finally, after assuming numerous disguises, he breaks the gang, but fails to apprehend all the members and has to flee, dogged by attempts on his life which continue to haunt him. His emergence in the present of the mystery death which Holmes solves in England is the result of his past. It is of interest that the singular individuality of the detective is already shifting, as is evidenced by the fact that Douglas has recourse to a variety of disguises in his attempt at the case. Even with Holmes, who is a master of disguise,

this is demonstrated: he needs to be *more than one* person if he is to solve the crime in the modern city.

At this point, Watson tries to tie all up, as is usual, with his message at the end of Part One, "we shall meet once more in those rooms on Baker Street, where this, like so many other wonderful happenings, will find its end" (815). His reassurance is in vain. For, after the retelling of the history to the present, Douglas dies a mysterious death aboard a ship on the way to South Africa. This death shadows the sureties of Holmes's world, for as he says about the mysterious element which caused the death: "I don't say that he can't be beat. But you must give me time -- you must give me time!" But the gloom of the shadow has descended and will not go away, for the last line, strangely echoing Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness and its insecurities, reads - - "We all sat in silence some minutes while those fateful eyes still strained to pierce the veil" (866). Holmes's eyes, the eyes of control which are able to discern fate, are helpless in the face of this crime. The demonized gap resurfaces.

Suddenly the closed ending of the formula is disturbed, certainty is denied. Whatever manner of pretence is involved in Holmes's control of the environment, it has been shaken by this disorder which Holmes is helpless against. The "he" whom Holmes refers to is Moriarty, the essential symbol of deep crime, and interestingly a man who represents a criminal underworld -- a vast organization (866). Holmes describes Moriarty in another case as "the Napoleon of crime... He is the organizer of half that is evil and of nearly all that is undetected in this great city" ("The Final Problem" 471). It is this organizational crime that Holmes cannot defeat, as individual he seems to lack the resources that are required to stop the crime represented by Moriarty.¹¹ This marks the end of the Great Detective as Individual conqueror over

the individualized, identifiable crime. The vast crime that cannot be separated and excised through observation and method is his undoing.

Though detectives like Holmes live on (for example in Agatha Christie's Poirot), they cannot deal with the increasing complexities of the modern urban world after World War I, and do not attempt to do so, their activities set in enclosed worlds like the country manor. For the modern cityscape to be tackled it is time for a new hero.

Enter the lonely man of the American detective story.

CHAPTER TWO: BABYLON -

ALONE IN THE CITY OF CHAOS

On thinking about Hell, I gather
My brother Shelley found it was a place
Much like the city of London. I
Who live in Los Angeles and not in London
Find, on thinking about Hell, that it must be
Still more like Los Angeles.

-- Brecht
'On Thinking about Hell'
Poems: 1913-1956, Part Three

Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a
monster. And when you look long into the abyss, the abyss also looks into you.

-- Nietzsche
Beyond Good and Evil
Aphorism 146

And what have you got at the end of the day?
What have you got to take away?
A bottle of whisky and a new set of lies
Blinds on the window and a pain behind the eyes

Scarred for life -- no compensation
Private Investigations

-- Mark Knopfler
'Private Investigations'

The ending of The Valley of Fear points to America as the enigma against which Holmes is powerless. It may be argued that Holmes fails in this instance merely because America is outside his "materially known" world, and for this reason he can offer no reassurance against the uncertainties that it offers. But the shift from European to American detective literature marks a more important change that occurs in the portrayal of the external environment in the detective genre. It took a transplantation of the genre from one society to another to unleash these changes fully, but the real change came about in the way that people thought about external "reality" and the way it was presented in art. This is, to simplify, the change from the rational/scientific epistemology where the observable fact is linked in direct causation to a reality, a truth which can be found; to an understanding that any notion of "truth" is much more complex than that, and that it is not a stable, immutable idea, but one which is bound to change in the interpretive act.

Stowe (in Most and Stowe, 1983:373-374) describes the change as one from a "semiotic" understanding where "fact-signs" are necessarily linked to truths, to a "hermeneutic" understanding, a change which occurred over some time, but which took a while to be accepted. (Indeed we still labour under the distorted notions of scientific truths). A hermeneutic approach takes into account the fact that what we assume to be true is "culturally and linguistically conditioned" and that interpretation involves an understanding of our own preconceptions and the need to partake in an interactive process of reading that may result in different solutions dependent on who is reading (because of the different assumptions brought to bear on the reading).

In art and literature, this revolution corresponds to the dawn of Modernism, as it is now termed. In the popular forms of literature, these concepts took slightly

longer to have a noticeable effect, but with the development of the "hard-boiled" form of detective literature these ideas come to the fore powerfully.

HAMMETT

Just as Poe is seen as the originator of the detective story, so Dashiell Hammett is recognized as a founder of the detective story that has come to be known as "hard-boiled," also known as the American form of the genre because it was perfected and elaborated in America by a group of writers making a living through the dime novel. The masters are now seen as being Hammett, Chandler and Macdonald. I begin my examination of the form with Hammett since he was the first, and in my opinion, most interesting practitioner of the hard-boiled school. And the novel that I wish to look at is his first, Red Harvest, published in 1929.

On the very first page of the novel, one finds the following description of the city of Personville:

The city wasn't pretty. Most of its builders had gone in for gaudiness. Maybe they had been successful at first. Since then the smelters whose brick stacks stuck up tall against a gloomy mountain to the south had yellow-smoked everything into uniform dinginess. The result was an ugly city of forty thousand people, set in an ugly notch between two ugly mountains that had been all dirtied up by mining. Spread over this was a grimy sky that looked as if it had come out of the smelter's stacks. (5)

Beginning with this less than positive description of the city, the Op (Hammett's detective, the Continental Operative) retells the story of his encounter with the city, an encounter which becomes an all-out war before he leaves Personville. In this war,

the city becomes a symbol of the moral environment that the Op turns his hatred upon, it personifies (as its name suggests) the individuals who are so corrupt. Personville definitely falls into the category of the "Great Wrong Place" as Auden describes the milieu of the city in the hard-boiled tradition (in Winks, 1980:19). Should one look at other examples from the tradition, more instances of this dislike for the city are easily found. It ranges from a cool dislike to the active vitriol of Red Harvest. In Ross Macdonald's Blue City (1947) the former attitude is displayed:

The city started sooner than I expected it to. In ten years it had crawled out along the highway, covering new farms with the concrete squares of suburban developments. On both sides of the highway I could see the rows of little frame houses, all alike, as if there were only one architect in the city and he had a magnificent obsession. (1)

The description of farms being covered by concrete is a telling one, suggesting the strong agrarian bias of American fiction. This city is the kind of place you like "if you don't know any better places" (1). Likewise in Raymond Chandler one finds sympathetic descriptions of the natural, but not of the urban. Compare the following two descriptions:

I got down to Montemar Vista as the light began to fade, but there was still a fine sparkle on the water and the surf was breaking far out in long smooth curves. A group of pelicans was flying bomber formation just under the creaming lip of the waves. A lonely yacht was taking in toward the yacht harbour at Bay City. Beyond it the huge emptiness of the Pacific was purple-gray. (Farewell, My Lovely 187)

1644 West 54th place was a dried out brown house with a dried out brown lawn in front of it. There was a large bare patch around a tough-looking palm tree. On the porch stood one lonely wooden rocker, and the afternoon breeze made the unpruned shoots of last year's poinsettias tap-tap against the cracked stucco wall. (Farewell, My Lovely 174)

There is a strong sense of the wasteland, a withdrawal of the generative forces of nature wherever the city is too established. Where in the first extract the ocean is a vast force, dwarfing the yacht, nature becomes a desiccated desolation in the second.

This anti-societal theme, which is condemnatory of the city since it stands as symbol of society *en masse*, runs through American fiction. What we find in Hammett thus stands in a literary tradition which is highly critical of the city; and in order to examine Hammett's detective novel in terms of the city, some contextualization is necessary, for there is a well defined anti-urban tradition in American fiction.

The opposite poles in this tradition, around which the struggle is waged, are the concepts of "Nature" and "Civilization". To understand what is meant by "nature" in this context, a look at Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay, entitled "Nature" (1836), is a good place to begin, since Emerson and the Transcendentalists were strong champions of this concept. For Emerson, Nature is the embodiment of a spirit that is ur-human, it is a powerful force which is integrated with God. Manifest in the natural world, the unspoilt areas free from the intrusion of the settlers, this force was regenerative and provided succour. Emerson's treatment of nature abounds in optimism, but its opposite, civilization, is condemned in his statement: "we need nature and cities give the senses not room enough" ("Nature"). For Emerson, humankind is reliant on the natural world for spiritual strength and psychic wholeness. This doctrine has become a part of the national psyche to such an extent that in 1896 Frederick J. Turner could say:

No grave social problem could exist while the wilderness at the edge of civilization opened wide its portals to all who were oppressed... Here was a magic fountain of youth in which America continually bathed and was rejuvenated.

Another example of this agrarian bias is illustrated in Thomas Jefferson's praise of the country when he slates, somewhat short-sightedly, the contribution of the city to America's growth: "Indeed, American democracy was, on the whole, bred in rural United States, where doctrines of individualism and liberty took firm hold among the

people. ...urban Americans played no... paramount role in the development of democracy in this country" (quoted in Sirjamaki, 1964:112). So, while the European experience of the city, though not always complimentary to the city and its influence on the people of this environment, showed some balance in its love for the city (exemplified in Samuel Johnson's statement: "When a man is tired of London, he is tired of life," noted by Boswell in The Life of Samuel Johnson 1791), the American projection was, on the whole, negative. For the European the city could be seen as a "symbol of progress and enlightenment... the school of civilisation and liberty" (Williams, 1985:144), but for the American writer it was either too civilized and therefore close to the pernicious effects of society *en masse*, or it was not civilized enough.¹² For this reason Morton and Lucia White can say:

...enthusiasm for the American city has not been typical or predominant in our intellectual history. Fear has been the more common reaction. For a variety of reasons our most celebrated thinkers have expressed different degrees of ambivalence and animosity toward the city... We have no persistent or pervasive tradition of romantic attachment to the city in our literature or in our philosophy... (1962: 13).

At the time that Emerson wrote, the natural world was still strongly present on the American continent, vast areas of land which were unpenetrated by the Western settlers still existed. But rapid growth of civilization demanded more space, and industry more raw material. Soon, unbroken areas of the natural, free of any taint, were scarce, and in a landmark address of 1893, Frederick J. Turner announced the closing of the frontier.¹³ The border between the natural and the civilized no longer existed -- the civilized had conquered.¹⁴

The effect of the Nature myth remained strong enough to lead to the city (symbol of civilization) being seen as un-American in a manner rather paradoxical, since the largest cities in the world began to form on the Eastern seaboard. Civilized

life was seen as being largely hypocritical and out of touch with basic human values (Lewis, 1966:214). People still desired escape to the country, and in the popular culture of America this desire persisted -- witness a comparatively recent film like Easy Rider, which (once more) deals with the death of this aspect of the American Dream. The question "Is the city un-American?" can even be posed by sociologists like Gist and Fava (1969:524), showing the strong agrarian bias that persists into the twentieth century. The city rests uneasy on the American conscience, and Gist and Fava quote the Whites: many of the American writers have "bad dreams of the city" (1969:533), which is highly appropriate in the light of the Op's dreams of the city that I explore below.

America, therefore, lacks a theory of society which sees the city as a normal centre of human activity, unlike Europe, which is inured to the city (Porter, 1981:199). Jonathan Raban points out how America's optimistic idealisms also unfairly prejudiced the city:

Perhaps the original dream of the American city... was too optimistic and elevated for reality. But the present disreputable state of *civitas* in the United States is the product of an exaggeratedly Calvinist sense of sin. Finding the city irredeemable is only the other side of the coin to expecting it to be paradise: utopias and dystopias go, of necessity, hand in hand. (1974:11)

The city might not be the place that the American hero wishes to be, but there is no choice left in the matter. The American detective, as embodiment of this American hero (in the literary tradition of the loner hero of adventure and western tales) has nowhere to run for escape, and his wilderness is now the "urban jungle" (Grella, 1974:421), the "place of wickedness". This link between the American hero and the detective is made by various writers, including George Grella and Stephen Knight, the latter stating that Hammett brings "the independence and isolated rectitude of the old

frontier hero into conflict with urban crime of modern America" (1980:135). The detective is the later manifestation of an anti-establishment individual who is now forced to remain in the city, and who must find some other way of expressing his mistrust of the activities endemic to the city. What better way than the tracking of the criminal element, the cleansing of the corrupted -- if the corruption of the city can no longer be escaped, then at least it might be rooted out. Note here the difference between the understanding of crime in this fiction as compared to the classical detective story where crime is seen as being encapsulated within one person -- this person having been identified, the criminality of society is eradicated. In the hard-boiled tradition, crime is endemic to society (Cawelti, 1976:149).

The American myth of Individualism is well developed. Already in 1838, Alexis De Tocqueville could state:

As social conditions become more equal, the number of persons increases who, although they are neither rich nor powerful enough to exercise any great influence over their fellows, have nevertheless acquired or retained sufficient education and fortune to satisfy their own wants. They owe nothing to any man, they expect nothing from any man; they acquire the habit of always considering themselves as standing alone, and they are apt to imagine that their whole destiny is in their own hands. (1955:105)

This actually serves as a good description of the detective, ^{and} is in sympathy with Chandler's definition from his "Simple Art of Murder" (1950): "But down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid... The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero, he is everything... He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world". However, Hammett's Op is a more complex example of the American hero. This is firstly due to his position as an agent in a corporation, which leaves him bound to certain societal rules. As Sinda Gregory explains, the Op "is never really free of

answering to others for his actions in a case" (1985:44). Also, he is nameless -- an interesting devaluation of his role as individual, since it suggests replaceability. At the same time, it may point to the continuing mystery as to who the Op is, which becomes for Gregory one of the central puzzles (40).

Nevertheless, his reaction to Personville upon first seeing it (see passage above), is allied to the dismay with which his literary forebears saw the city. (One recalls the reaction Dreiser has towards the city, seeing it as "blind, dark, indifferent, and meaningless..." {White, 1962:130}). He holds no love for it, on the contrary, it is an active dislike that he displays. This hatred for the city and what it represents allows the Op to commit his acts of violent purging, which acts take on near-psychotic proportions, identified by William Ruehlmann (1974:129) as being actions which symbolically reject the city. The danger that arises through his deeds is in his not recognizing the extent to which his own actions position him within the economy of crime. It is this struggle for some understanding of the morality of the detective himself that becomes the crucial hub of the book; in the process of "detection" he has to grapple with the dissolution of his self-identity. Ruehlmann states:

... he does not learn of corruption through self-awareness, and his consequent acts are not directed toward his own purification, but everybody else's. He is entitled to mete out justice because he is *already* pure; and so his performance entangles him in evil rather than liberating him from it. ... the eye is the American innocent gone mad. His search for truth is only an inventory of slaughtered scapegoats that teaches him nothing. At the end he begins no symbolic journey to a better place, having sent too many others there before him. (129, original emphasis)

This illustrates the danger of the Op's reaction to the city, one which allies him with the vigilante (as he says, "Don't kid yourselves that there's any law in Poisonville except what you make for yourself" {107}). It also alerts the reader to the fact that the detective is a figure no longer unimpeachable or guiltless. There is a shift in the

conception of the identity of the detective. Bentley makes this link in order to launch a criticism of the Op's function, which he says is more geared towards "cleaning up" than detection. He criticizes the novel for "indulging its punishing narrator, not the suffering community" (1988:61). Bentley goes on to liken the Op's politics to populist notions of problem solving: "and like populism it remains an essentially sub-political attitude, embracing palliatives such as vigilante justice, rather than seeking political solutions" (68). Bentley's suggestion that a novel like Red Harvest contains no overt political solution is of debatable relevance and validity, since one has to examine the political content that does exist in the novel and then compare this to Hammett's political and social philosophies of the time -- which philosophies actually avoided "solutions" as being naive. Further, his statement that Hammett offers no redemption is also of debatable merit; nevertheless, his criticisms of the Op are noteworthy and will be examined.

The question of redemption is an interesting one, for in Raymond Chandler's books it forms an essential part of his detective's message -- there is redemption in solitary pursuit of meaning, or an adherence to a personal code of ethics. Hammett's vision was bleaker, and, one could argue, more "realistic". Gregory (1985:59-60) describes how all the characters in the book try to find themselves a system, a mode to order the chaos of the city around them. This would be the characters' attempts at finding some "way out" of the nightmare of the city. For Dinah Brand it is money, for Elihu Willsson power, for Pete Noonan physical violence. But in every case the person is crushed, there is no redemption and the city is too powerful -- it destroys any such shield, based as they are on what Gregory calls "expediency" rather than recognizing the need for flexibility and "human morality". It is the position of the

Op in this dialectic of descent and redemption that is the most interesting to this study, and this will be explored as his personal development is traced.

Red Harvest does mark the point at which the American myth of the individual and the agrarian myth have to deal with the new realities of the encompassing urban world. And it is a harsh awakening that tests and collapses these myths, leaving behind a bitterness of disillusionment, hence the cynicism of Hammett's detective. The city environment is the fall from Arcadia, the detective is a lonely man in hostile surroundings.

The urban world that the Op finds himself in is one of political corruption and gangsterism. As Gregory puts it,

[i]ndeed, probably the most obvious thematic elements in Red Harvest are its criticisms of the debased social and political climate existing in America in the 1920s. As a representation of these rotten conditions, Personville is a city whose corruption is so pervasive that it stands as a powerful indictment of big city politics and capitalism. (1985:55)

Personville is an industrial city, and Red Harvest is the story of the Op's quest to come to terms with this city which affronts him as he investigates a murder. Much of the indictment that Gregory talks about is conveyed through the Op's highly critical attitude to the city. From the first there are premonitions. Immediate tensions are set up as Hammett's Continental Op introduces the city: "I first heard Personville being called Poisonville by a red-haired mucker named Hickey Dewey in the Big Ship in Butte" (5). And the anti-pastoral is ushered in by the perversion of fertility in the title, Red Harvest, with its allusions to the reaping of the crop, this time as red as the tide of Revelation. For it is ultimately the city that the Op is up against in his struggle for survival, a city where life is cheap, and power is in quick wit and quicker draw.

The history of the city is part of the underlying narrative, it is retold for the reader early in the book and establishes the background of political corruption. This is centred on the corrupt mayor-patriarch, Elihu Willsson, who, in an effort to suppress a coalition of the workers, calls in the aid of the underworld.¹⁵ These hirelings sow dissent, which is what the patriarch wanted; but at the same time they take over control of the town, something Willsson *didn't* expect. The city is one that is run by corruption and violence, a long way from the "calm" city of Doyle. The Op is not shocked by this discovery, but he is angered. The history frames the present tense of the detective's work, which begins when the patriarch's son, a newsman, calls in the detective to... what? Ostensibly to help him in uncovering some of the corruption, but the aid that he seeks is never made known, for very soon the detective has to discover why it is that the newsman has been murdered -- before the Op has met with him. From this commissioned duty, which was political in nature, the Op embarks on an investigation into the killing. When he is physically endangered, it turns personal. From this confusion of motives a chain of events is started. The Op embarks on his mission to "stir things up" (19) and see what rises to the surface. As he says to Dinah Brand, the main female interest: "Poisonville is ripe for the harvest. It's a job I like, and I'm going to it" (62). By the time he leaves the city, well over twenty people have died, mostly at the detective's instigation. Something has gone wrong.

Returning to the mayor as the source of individual control and power, there is an interesting play of forces which works rather paradoxically: the detective is the individual trying to gain control and ascendancy, while Willsson is the powerful individual who is being dis-empowered by the order that the gangsters embody -- a corporate power that ab-uses individuals for further gain. This system, the mob,

becomes the opposing force to both Willsson and the Op in an interesting parallel. The mob is at first run by a powerful single gangster baron, but it soon becomes a bureaucratic machine. There is thus a movement from a feudal (single-person-controlled) to an organizational system. Elihu Willsson proleptically shows that the Op's attempts at a personal order and empowerment are destined to fail by virtue of these changes in power structures. The similarities between the two men, both powerful symbols of the individual, offer analogy. At the same time, the Op's position is made more complex by the fact that he is the member of an organization, one which wins out in the end, aided by the calling in of the National Guard (another organization). But, as is clear in the detail following, the Op acts mostly out of a strong sense of solo retribution, waiving his organizational allegiances. This is borne out by the fact that he is reprimanded by his boss for his solitary action: "I might just as well have saved the labour and sweat I had put into trying to make my reports harmless. They didn't fool the Old Man. He gave me merry hell" (190).

The prejudice that the Op holds against the city clearly informs his perceptive "fix" as regards his aesthetic of the city -- basically this opinion takes the form of a fundamental dislike for the form of the industrial city.¹⁶ But we are soon to learn that the Op also attaches a moral decrepitude to the outer manifestation. The outer ugliness reflects the inner rot.

In this way the people, too, are ugly, described with animalistic imagery. And this world that he enters is animalistic, living up to Hobbes's warning of a life that is "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short" {1651, 1968:62}¹⁷). The manner in which the Op describes various characters indicates his attitude to these people who lack

values of temperance and ethics that constitute "decent" humanity. This, for example, is how he describes a man: "He had bowed legs and a long sharp jaw, like a hog's" (64). As if this were not enough, the man is given the name "MacSwain," and the Op introduces himself as "something like Hunter or Hunt, or Huntington" (65). This is the city of humanity that no longer basks in the light of Divine Will; it is a common pool of dog-eat-dog ethics, where people are only just, if at all, above the selfishly atavistic in motivation. Dinah Brand, for example, bursts in her lust for money, a lust powerful and devoid of considerations of conventional morality -- she sells out her friends, her lovers, to feed her money-lust.

In another sequence, the pervading aura of danger and mistrust is described. Life in the city is one of perpetual threat of death:

Off to the north some guns popped.
A group of three men passed me, shifty-eyed, walking pigeon-toed.
A little farther along, another man moved all the way over to the curb
to give me plenty of room to pass. I didn't know him and didn't suppose he
knew me.
A lone shot sounded not far away.
As I reached the hotel, a battered black touring car went down the
street, hitting fifty at least, crammed to the curtains with men.
I grinned after it. Poisonville was beginning to boil out under the lid...
(104)

Hammett has been linked to the American Naturalists in his portrayal of society and quotations like these attest to the validity of this comparison. Hammett wished to show the reality of crime in society, to leave behind the romantic colouration that the detective story had been prone to in the past. This description of Dreiser and Norris would suit Hammett equally well:

they saw themselves cutting through the jungle of city life to urban reality. For them the city was not only a place of lively sights but also a place of violent social struggle in which only a few people rise to positions of enormous power while many others sink to a primitive level and lose their identity (White 1962:124).

The sequence of dreams which the Op endures on the night Dinah Brand is killed serves as a fine example of what was earlier described as "bad dreams" of the city. The Op has a vision of himself traversing endless city streets, not nameless streets but the main arteries of the urban bodies of America. He is looking for a woman wearing a veil:

I walked streets hunting for her, half the streets in the United States, Gay Street and Mount Royal Avenue in Baltimore, Colfax Avenue in Denver, Aetna Road and St. Clair Avenue in Cleveland, McKinney Avenue in Dallas, Lemartine and Cornell and Amory Streets in Boston, Berry Boulevard in Louisville, Lexington Avenue in New York, until I came to Victoria Street in Jacksonville, where I heard her voice again, though I still could not see her.
(144)

When he finally discovers her, she kisses him, and he feels uncomfortable "because everybody stood around looking at us and laughing" (144). Could this be the symbol of lost innocence? Innocence lost in the city, and worthless to the city? His embarrassment is rooted in his even searching for her. Later he walks along the alleys of Personville and narrates: "I must have walked as many streets as I did in my dreams the night Dinah was killed" (176). At this point it is clear that Personville, or Poisonville as it is known by the locals, has become metonymic -- it represents the cities of America. By association, that which makes Personville a toxic environment tainting purity of action, also exists in the other cities, the poison is seeping. The effect of this poison is brought back down to the personal level in the description of a young girl of the jazz-age dying of a wasting disease in the city hospital: "it's hell to die ugly as this," she tells the Op (84).

So, under the guise of a personal vendetta, the Op engages in a wholly political task -- that of the individual against the corrupted capitalist city. It is this seeping poison that he uses as a motivation for his actions, a furious act of cleansing, a

mission of purification. This "urban" knowledge that he has -- the realization that crime is endemic -- destroys the American myth of Innocence. Porter describes this revision well as "the shattering of the pastoral dream on the concrete surfaces of the urban wasteland" (198).

Moving for a moment away from the specific, I wish to look more generally at this modern city that the Op is pitted against, and then examine the way that the Op tackles it and how this differs from the previous detectives, their cities and their methods.

The American city had grown enormously over the hundred years that led up to the Depression years. As has been discussed, the everyday reality of the majority of Americans is no longer that of the country, but of the urban landscape. This in itself would be change enough to dislocate perception and understanding of the environment, especially given the growth and complexity that the city soon embodies. From small communities where people knew one another, the city grows into the metropolis where millions of people go their daily rounds, brushing past people they will never get to know personally. The physical structure of the city is also rapidly becoming gargantuan,^{and} before long it is a veritable maze of streets and buildings.

For the individual, the city as a whole is incomprehensible. This was the case in Holmes's London too, but the popular belief allowed Holmes his perfect understanding of the streets. There is, however, a shift in sensibilities, and this naive belief can no longer be entertained. As Anselm Strauss argues:

If we consider large communities in these same ways, it is apparent that the complexity of physical layout and structure is immense; that social structure is so complicated that even research teams of sociologists can do little more than grasp the outlines of significant groups and their interrelationships. And who,

ordinarily, can hope to know or appreciate the whole social history of a city? (1961:8).

But while this social complexity develops, there is simultaneously the paradoxical growth of individual standardization, differences between people becoming obliterated by this growing uniformity which leaves every person a small undifferentiated part of the whole social machine. The human scale is lost, and with this comes a feeling of helpless sameness for the majority of the population. As Fredric Jameson points out, there is a growing disjuncture between the microcosm of personal lives in personal orbits, and the macrocosm of the city as a whole: "a new centreless city, in which the various classes have lost touch with each other because each is isolated in his own geographical compartment" (Jameson, 1983:127). There is no link between the part and the whole, but merely certain parts and other parts, individual and the next individual, and even this is restricted. "[W]e need not be surprised that most people use and know only a limited number of spatial sectors of their city and know very little about the people who frequent those areas" (Strauss, ¹⁹⁶¹65). And to quote Jameson once more, there is the growing development of "isolated units... all haunted by the feeling that the centre of things, of life, of control, is elsewhere, beyond immediate lived experiences" (127). It is basically this isolation, this lack of communication between the different groups, which allows the Op to pit each against the other so successfully.

However, in this social structure which is so vast as to have no structure visible to the individual human, the detective plays a privileged role. For Holmes it was the privileged knowledge of the whole structure. Now that this is gone the detective finds a new skill, becoming the earthbound Hermes of the city, the messenger and connector.

Since there is no longer any privileged experience in which the whole of the social structure can be grasped, a figure must be invented who can be superimposed on the society as a whole, whose routines and life pattern serve somehow to tie its separate and isolated parts together. ... In doing this the detective in a sense once again fulfills the demands of the function of knowledge rather than that of lived experience: through him we are able to see, to know, the society as a whole, but he does not really stand for any genuine close-up experience of it. (Jameson, 1983:127-28)

The detective has the ability to move between the various social strata without necessarily being a part of any of them (Krutnik, 1991:39). He is the perpetual journeyer, the link between the different parts, which is where he is allied to Hermes "god of boundaries and messenger between worlds," a "hired boundary-crosser" (Kermode, 1979:8). He is perpetually in search of a "truth" along this journey, and "it is only by indirections that he finds directions out and his travels through the extreme reaches of different social classes and different parts of the city, always in pursuit of a unified truth, link what might have seemed disparate and unconnected fragments into a complex and deeply corrupt social network" (Most, 1983:348).

But boundaries are not crossed free of peril, as the experience of the American private investigator shows in the violence against the detective. And it is in this arena of physical danger that the risk he runs of becoming once more disconnected from society's realities is ironically negated, since his physical involvement denies him the true distance of a Holmes and makes him a better example of the exponent of "lived experience" as opposed to being a singular "function of knowledge" (to take issue with Jameson's terms *supra*).

What this city means for the detective in his search for answers is a reality that is intractable, as well as physically threatening. How he deals with this, his *modus operandi*, is now the subject of my examination.

Very early in the form there is a clear divergence from the detective *à la* Poe or Dupin. The Op is soon involved in a physical confrontation where his life is in danger, but this is not something that encourages him to leave; on the contrary, he decides that he will answer this challenge to his person. When he vows to "stir things up," he is remarkably close to the strike-breakers that Elihu Willsson hired as his *modus operandi*. His willingness to fly in the face of the Agency (though he is bound to them) is possibly the only link between the Op's actions and those of the earlier detectives in that it displays an individualistic disregard for the organizational powers.

But the task that the Op takes on is a political one (the personal crime of murder having already been solved), one that he was not hired for, but that he helps himself to by bulldozing the patriarch of the city into agreeing to condone his "cleansing" operation. The Op's pretext is personal -- he doesn't take kindly to being shot at, he tells Elihu Willsson (59). As Ruehlmann points out, he is "no longer a hired man, but a free agent with a grudge" (67). His intentions are thinly disguised, as are his politics, which remain the personal politics of retribution. He desires a reactionary war against the wholesale corruption of the American city of industrial capitalism, embodied in the ugly city of Personville, and he gets it when Elihu tells him: "I want Personville emptied of its crooks and grafters. Is that plain enough language for you?" (40).

The murder mystery having been solved early in the story, the Op has the go-ahead and now his political vendetta takes precedence. Here the city itself is the criminal. His mission becomes reminiscent of the "muckraking" of writers like Lincoln Steffens at the turn of the century. Steffens, in chapters titled "The Shame of

Minneapolis" and "Philadelphia: Corrupt and Contented," exhorts the individual American to stand up against the corruption of the city, which he generally ascribes to business and businessmen; saying that the citizen must "hold himself in readiness like the old volunteer firemen to rush forth at any hour..." (6). In the spirit of true populism, the Op (populist hero) heeds this call. He abandons the initial investigation and takes on the political criminal that the city as a whole represents, being the embodiment of the crime of industrial capitalism and its societal evils. The Op vows to use the mandate that the patriarch gives him to "[open] Poisonville up from Adam's apple to ankles" (59). Clearly a violent promise, the Op proceeds through the violation of verbal codes, the dissemination of false information, and the free use of physical force.

Instead of relying on scientific knowledge or any force of abstract intelligence like abduction, he has to rely on a personal cunning, an ability to outwit, outspoke and outfight his opponents (there is never just one). He is not much good at any form of control through ratiocination or abduction, as he himself admits "I was never much good at guessing" (116). His world does not lend itself to guessing either, for with the knowledge that crime is not contained in one person, it may possibly come from any or many source(s).

His recourse is to a risky act of inter-personal juggling. Using his ability to reconnoitre the different social groupings that exist in the city, he spreads dissension and confusion. By pitting the powerful antagonists of the town against one another, he hopes to remove them through their mutual self-destruction. An example of this method in action is the boxing fight that he (re)rigs; it was staged as a fall for a good boxer, he finds the necessary leverage, and re-stages it as the opposite. This ploy

leads, unfortunately, to the death of a boxer, reinforcing what Glenn Most has said about the hard-boiled detective: he is "not only the solution, he is also part of the problem, the catalyst who by his very introduction both provokes murders and solves them" (in Most and Stowe, 1983:347). He is afterwards asked why he did this, and replies: "That was only an experiment -- just to see what would happen." The rest of the conversation runs thus:

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

‘Plans are all right sometimes,’ I said. ‘And sometimes just stirring things up is all right -- if you’re tough enough to survive, and keep your eyes open so you’ll see what you want when it comes to the top.’ (77)

This piece of writing emphasizes the differences between the Op’s method and that of his literary forebears. The intention is to root out the gangsters through this manipulated in-fighting which upsets the equilibrium that has been established by the forces of the bootleggers, the gambling bosses and the corrupt police force. These forces are held at knife-edge tension between mutual distrust and necessary interdependence, and the Op soon realizes that it needs only some carefully placed suggestion, some innuendo, for the whole structure to crumble into a Hobbesian anarchy of endless retribution. As Jameson writes, the detective acts as a catalyst which speeds the processes of society and brings them to an earlier conclusion:

The appearance of the detective breaks the balance, sets the various mechanisms of suspicion ringing, as he triggers the electric eyes, snooping and preparing to make trouble in a way which isn’t yet clear. The upshot is a whole series of murders and beatings: it is as though they existed already in a latent state, the acts that had merited them having already been committed, like chemical substances juxtaposed, waiting for a single element to be withdrawn or added in order to complete a reaction which nothing can stop. The appearance of the detective is this element, allowing the predetermining courses to run their course suddenly, to burst into flame on exposure to the open air. (In Most and Stowe, 1983:143-144)

The one distinct method of detection that he does rely on to a great degree is the control over information. To know what is happening in the city is of paramount importance, to know where to find people, where to be and where not to be. This knowledge is not safe though, it is a veritable time-bomb. The more you know about the city, the closer you are to destruction, as is exemplified in Dinah Brand, who thought she knew and understood the city ("I'm a girl who knows her Poisonville," 77), and she does, but too well. She is fooled by her confidence, takes on too much, and is destroyed. The Op's various disguises and personae aid him as he moves through different social groupings; they shield him from location, entrapment, and destruction. In this manner, he acts like the agent Douglas in The Valley of Fear, constantly shifting personae to avoid entrapment.

He becomes involved in the shifting world of verbal information, where the ability to be able to tell the lie from the honest report is the cardinal attribute. It is in this way that the Op solves the murder mystery. He interrogates suspects until finally he is able to say "You talked too much, son. You were too damn anxious to make your life an open book for me. That's a way you amateur criminals have" (54). In this ability to glean information, the corollary is suggested -- do not give information away. Hence the taciturn nature of the Op. There is power inherent in informational knowledge in the Op's Personville as well as in Holmes's London, but the Op cannot presume any knowledge. Nor is information an easily transferable commodity: people cannot be trusted to tell the truth, something that the Op is well aware of and also uses to his own advantage to set up the conflict between the crime bosses. The Op uses fiction to penetrate fiction (Day, 1988:48), he is able to play the same game, in the end masterfully, because his control over the gangster idiom is superior to that of

the gangsters themselves, this idiom which is "informal, laconic, understated, oblique, amoral" (Freedman and Kendrick, 1991:215). The detective is at home in this world where the spoken word is detached from its alliance with the letter of the law. What you say does not have any necessary connection to what you do. The world that the gangsters are involved in is described by Carl Freedman and Christopher Kendrick: "a world of the word -- of unwritten agreements -- backed by violence. ... the dialogic style that signifies this latent force is the laconic mode. The detective is ultimately different because of his desire for self-control and 'dialogic mastery'" (216). So while the gangsters use the dialogic as their instrument of power, it is only insofar as they are able to back it with violence that they have control. They are not, therefore, masters over the dialogic in itself, but only when it is supported by violence. This leads to a breakdown in the power of the word itself. But the Op uses the dialogic in a purer way, he does not want control over the word to slip from him, and he uses his words as tools of detection and manipulation without backing them with violence himself (though they do spark violent acts). It is this self-control that the Op initially prides himself on -- he does not give too much away in speech, a fault he chides the man for doing in the above extract. He knows exactly what he is doing and saying at this stage of the game.

Truth itself, or any notion of this concept, also undergoes a change. What wins out in the end is the ability to convince others of your *version* of the events, be it fabular or not. As Gary Day says, the Op never proves that his version is the correct one, he merely *says* that it is with enough conviction and skill (1988:47). This idea that all stories, including the detective's, is "just a theory" and what this means to the detective is verbalized by Nick Charles in The Thin Man, Hammett's last novel:

"But this is just a theory, isn't it?" [said Nora]

"Call it any name you like. It's good enough for me."

"But I thought everybody was supposed to be considered innocent until they were proven guilty and if there was any reasonable doubt, they -"

"That's for juries, not detectives. You find the guy you think did the murder and you slam him in the can and let everybody know you think he's guilty and put his picture all over the newspapers, and the District Attorney builds up the best theory he can on what information you've got and meanwhile you pick up additional details here and there and people who recognize his picture in the paper -- as well as people who'd think he was innocent if you hadn't arrested him -- come in and tell you things about him and presently you've got him sitting in the electric chair."...

"But that seems so loose."

"When murders are solved by mathematicians," I said, "you can solve them by mathematics. Most of them aren't and this one wasn't. ... I'm only saying what seems most probable..." (184)

Day goes further and says that the Op is involved in the pursuit of knowledge, there is a real version of events which he seeks, there is a killer to be found (41). The complexities involved in a world where crime is potentially found anywhere leads to a situation where nothing can be known in any full sense. There is a proliferation of clues where everyone carries the mark of Cain. But the Op tries to find the links that will lead to the solution of the case, and it is often merely his presence as an investigator, as an agitator, that sparks the latent changes and social movements which result, ultimately, in the solution. Day probably goes too far in attributing the Op's actions to an outmoded search for a "real" version of events. As I explain later, it becomes more important to establish the dominance of your version, which is hopefully as close to the "real" as you are likely to get. There may still be a desire for the "real" version, but this is no longer a naive belief in social coherence; in like manner there is a shift away from earlier notions of epistemological coherence through the growing understanding of contingency and chance, and the awareness of the relevance that these factors have upon the "meaning" of detection.

The penetration of appearances becomes the Op's most important need, the removal of the guilt of lie and self-protective evasion. Appearance is a slippery sign to read where the city is in itself a deceitful signifier, functioning as an ostensibly ordinary society, but underscored by control which comes from channels other than the municipal. The Op's is the interpretive eye -- trying to separate the actual from the misleadingly fictional.

When he goes to the people in the city he finds that realities are endlessly shifting -- dependant on who you are speaking to at that point. Appearances are impenetrable, all that is left for him is to provide another story, or appearance of the "real," which agrees with what he perceives as close enough to the "real". It is, as Steven Marcus points out, another version of a reality, not necessarily the only one, "no more plausible and no less ambiguous than the stories that he meets" (1983:202). But it is the strength of the teller that counts, the power to push through that version of the events which comes through integrity, a knowledge of selfhood which does not allow the lie to dominate self-knowledge. It hinges on the desire for mastery over the dialogic, as Freedman and Kendrick point out, which in turn equals self-mastery. The Op relies on the fact that he cannot deceive himself, and he himself becomes his bedrock reality. It is the "ironic awareness of at least some of his own prejudices and his rudimentary sense of interpretation as a process of self-definition" (Stowe, 1983:378) which stands by the Op. The Op takes contingency into account, and realizes the power of subjectivity. While everybody labours under the delusion that his/her version of reality is absolutely correct, the Op as interpreter realizes that his might not be correct, and therefore *knows* that the others are slanted versions. Where

the other speakers realize the lie that they are propagating, it becomes a battle for dialogic mastery: who will be able to be the most convincing?

Thus Freedman and Kendrick can summarize the Op's method, not as a decoding of facts or clues, but rather as an *encoding* process. This process

activates the surplus energy inherent in this world, not deduction or ratiocination but an attempt at totalizing comprehension. This process, in which relations are to be grasped between foregrounded details and an entire social structure, defines itself against the structure in the classic, or Sherlockian, tradition, where clues are set off from the social totality and where reason tends to be instrumentalized... [the Op's method] requires the apparently spontaneous capacity to activate the energies present in the dialogic world and to weather the anarchic psychological and social effects that are thus set in motion. ... [h]e must move in the dialogic world without being subsumed by it, without losing his labor's freedom vis-à-vis the forces in this world. (1991:217)

His only control is his knowledge of himself. He is faced by shifting truths and alternative realities that hold no internal correspondence. What happens, then, if he loses his self-knowledge, his identity?

It is this extreme environment of deception and violence which begins to erode this most fundamental quality of the detective hero: his individuality. This individuality allows him an integrity, a strength found in adherence to a personal code of ethics, and a personal method.

But Red Harvest marks the blurring of the detective as self-realized individual as he encounters the Prohibition morality of 1920's America. In this novel, the detective must struggle to maintain his selfhood, in both the literal and the figurative sense. It is not uncommon for the hard-boiled writer to explore the physical dangers that beset the investigator as he moves against forces that are unfriendly and willing to make this known to the detective; yet the detective generally retains his sense of

self-identity and the control that accompanies this. But in Red Harvest even this is compromised as the detective becomes engaged in a blood-frenzy that has him killing a policeman early in the story and then becoming the suspect of a murder later. His role as detective, with its concomitant codes of behaviour, is seriously compromised -- as is his self-identity as investigator. Just as his physical person is endangered, so his identity as detective is also under siege in this city where the fittest survive -- those with sufficient ruthlessness and killing power.

This is how it happens. As the direct result of his efforts to "shake the town up" becomes manifest in the rising body-count, the Op wholly enters into the economy of death in order to save his own life. Though he has spurned entry into the fiscal economy that represents for him the root of the evil (for money buys anything in Personville -- it is the source of a morality and a system of control which he resists), this other force is inescapable. Later, in a rare mood of introspection, the Op will say: "This damned burg's getting to me. If I don't get away soon I'll be going blood-simple like the natives" (137). But by the time that he has had his fill of violence and is sickened, the Op cannot escape the net of deceit and death that he has helped create in order to shake the town up, in order to get the gangster bosses fighting amongst themselves.

The Op is actually morally evaluated for his refusal of the money economy; one of the gamblers says to him, "Dinah told me you were a pretty good guy, except kind of Scotch with the roll," (49) meaning that he did not offer bribes for information. It is a mark of the Op's morality and a link to his populist past that he finds the money economy abhorrent, but is willing to enter into the economy of life

and death to try to reform the society. His is the optimism which was described by De Tocqueville, but now matured by experience and repeated failure:

His reverses teach him that none have discovered absolute good; his success stimulates him to the never ending pursuit of it. Thus, forever seeking, forever falling to rise again, often disappointed, but not discouraged, he tends unceasingly towards that unmeasured greatness so distinctly visible at the end of the long track which humanity has yet to tread. (1838; 1955:35)

Likewise this becomes a sign of his tragedy and of the demise of the private eye as American hero, as shown by his failing efforts to bring about change, efforts which are presented, towards the end, as being transient and foolish in their anachronisms, a hankering after an impossible past and a futile future.

So violence becomes the hallmark of the story as he "shakes things up" -- violence and especially the ability to be able to withstand physical duress. This is a scene later in the narrative:

'We're done,' a heavy voice shouted. 'We're coming out. Don't shoot.'
Pete the Finn appeared in the dynamited doorway, his hands holding the top of his bald head. In the glare from the burning next-door house we could see that his face was cut, his clothes almost torn off.

Stepping over wreckage, the bootlegger came slowly down the steps to the sidewalk.

Reno called him a lousy fish-eater and shot him four times in face and body.

Pete went down. A man behind me laughed. (174)

In the carefully pared language that Hammett employs, this scene holds more horror for its proximity to black comedy, where people's movements are puppetlike, and violence is at some reported remove even when it happens right next to the narrator who dispassionately reports. But it is clearly the insertion of the man's laugh that turns a regular shoot-out scene into a comment on the morality of the city's inhabitants.

Here is presented the world of Naturalism, with the inhabitants informed by their environment, and unable to break free of it in order to regain any values that are above corruption or the suddenness of death. And though it has been argued that the Op stays above this primal swamp, being morally unimpeachable (as unimpeachable as Robespierre it has been suggested by Bentley, 62), this is not the case as he is drawn into the machinations of the unclean city and finds that he has to live by the same rules. It becomes a severe test to his personal integrity.

What begins to become patent is that he enjoys the job he has given himself, and the lines between criminal and detective are blurred once violence and duplicity become also the detective's method. As David Lehman points out, when crime is the norm, detection becomes more a habit of self-defence than anything else, the ability to stay alive and (hopefully) to pick up the pieces at the end of the day (1989:118). The impossibility of the detective trying to control a world so out of the bounds of any single person's control leads to the detective's transgressions of the nominal barrier that separates the detective from the world that he investigates (Priestman, 1990:170). As is inevitable, the Op is drawn in to this economy of violence, the boundaries between the "good" guys and the "bad" guys are long gone (his vigilante actions are not far removed from the gangster's), the detective is a part of the problem, not the solution. And it is through this relentless environment of violence that the detective asks the question, with an increasing confusion: is he as tainted as the rest, has the banality of the viciousness of the city's inhabitants, the ubiquitousness of this way of life infected him?

When the Op awakes to find his hand on the icepick that is sticking in Dinah Brand, the crisis point is reached: he becomes one of the hunted, no longer the

hunter. This paragon of the American Individual is now hunted for murder, and the detective is, in the eyes of the community, as tainted as the worst criminal. His role as hunter has been reversed in a particularly sharp identity crisis where antithesis replaces normative. It is here that any shred of his own self-identity is stripped away. For a time he does not know who killed Dinah, he cannot believe that it is himself, yet cannot find any proof it was anybody else. He has become so much a part of the spiral of death, so much an actor in it, that he no longer sees out of it. He has transgressed Max Weber's warning: "the world is governed by demons, and he who lets himself in for ... power and force as means, contracts with diabolical powers, and for his action it is not true that good can follow only from good and evil only from evil, but that often the opposite is true" (quoted in Marcus, 1983:207). In the second sequence that the Op dreams (after the pursuit-of-Innocence dream), he finds himself chasing a man who goes into a crowd. The Op is not held back, he simply runs across the heads of the people in the crowd, to reach the man only as he jumps off a building. He grabs hold of the man's head:

My fingers went all the way around it. Squeezing his head in one hand, I tried to bring the knife out of my pocket with the other -- and realized that I had gone off the edge of the roof with him. We dropped giddily down towards the millions of upturned faces in the plaza, miles down. (145)

Ruehlmann's analysis of the dream is telling. The Op takes the law into his own hands and rides roughshod over the inhabitants (runs over their heads). It is because of this that the Op murders himself in the process; he loses his fixed identity, "[f]or in the final analysis the Op is engaged in the willful destruction of his own sensibilities. On the way down he and his adversary are one" (1974:71).

The Op can now no longer pretend that a dislike for the city informs his movements, he is fighting for his life -- he is a lower part of the feeding-chain, in fear of his life in a most abnegatory manner, no longer above suspicion. There is even the hint that he is not above his own suspicion, as his answer to his fellow Operative indicates: "You mean, did I kill her? I don't know Mickey. I'm trying to find out" (181).

As can be imagined, his own fellow Operatives, whom he is forced to call in when the job spirals out of control, no longer trust him. The loss of control is total, as the very act of calling in help itself indicates. He cannot handle it alone. The days of Sherlock Holmes are clearly over.

From here on, with the Op the hunted figure, he must simply hang on to survive until the murderer of Dinah is identified. He is demoted in status from his position as controller of the actions, the master of ceremonies that he played before. As he says (with a note of pleading desperation) to Dinah the night she dies: "I've arranged a killing or two in my time, when they were necessary. But this is the first time I've ever got the fever. It's this damned burg. You can't go straight here" (137).

This becomes the Op's repeated plea-bargain for his own identity, in effect a sad excuse, blaming something else for his actions, but he reiterates that the only reason for this slide into amorality is the city -- the real criminal is the corrupting city, the anti-Eden of industrial capitalism. In a number of instances he avows this fact that it is not he, but the effect of the city upon him -- "I don't know how I'm going to come out with the Agency. ... It's this damned town. Poisonville is right. It's poisoned me" (139). Another telling example of this infection ascribed to the city is described in the sequence when the Police Chief becomes tired of the endless killing. He bows out of the action, and is thrown to the dogs of war by the Op and gunned down in

front of his home. The Op says: "I looked at Noonan and knew he hadn't a chance in a thousand of living another day because of what I had done to him, and laughed, and felt warm and happy inside. That's not me. ... It's what this place has done to me" (140). The poison of the city is contagious, and it is a contagion that, likewise, spreads through other hard-boiled narratives. In Chandler's Farewell, My Lovely, for example, one of the cops that Marlowe is dealing with says "A guy can't stay honest if he wants to" (309) in reference to the city politics, and Marlowe wryly describes the city as "probably no crookeder than Los Angeles" (280).

So here is clearly demonstrated the hard-boiled detective's reaction to the city which questions and tests his personal integrity. But is it the place that *does* this to him, or is it that the milieu simply brings out his fascistic tendencies? It is this fundamental questioning of his integrity that the novel deals with, and the ambiguity of the result remains unresolved. It remains for the reader to decide, Hammett certainly gives no clear guide (as is his ambiguous wont). For a critic like Ruehlmann, the Op's actions are an unleashing of his latent vigilante aggressions, and most critics seem to agree once they examine the issue (cf. for example Bentley, 1988). Complexities still remain, however. In terms of the city as aggressor, the Op's actions, necessarily violent, become intensely more so as the ripples spread. His failing may be a lack of judgement as to the extent of the effect which his actions will have, once begun. He quickly loses control, though he has to deal with the internal conflict of desire to control, one which is mocked by the city's anarchy. As Freedman and Kendrick point out, "[n]ow he encounters the reified gangster totality through the dualities that determine his identity as a private detective -- sympathetic knowledge of

gangsterism and professional distance from it, bohemian individualism and ultimate bourgeois accountability" (1991:220). He learns accountability the hard way.

The Op's spiral towards loss of self-knowledge remains one of the most powerful metaphors for the experience of the Individual in the city. The Op's initial dislike of the city proves to be prescient, for the city becomes, in Knight's words, the embodiment of "the threats to the self in a concrete, dehumanised image" (1988:85).

Gregory takes it further:

In this grim and grotesque vision of the American city, the individual has little chance of remaining untouched, for Personville is the collective nightmare of all citizens -- it is what America has made of itself, born, in part, out of our traditional celebration of the self-made individual. (1985:56)

Hammett explores the conflict between the negative side of this individuality, which, taken to the extremes that Elihu Willsson embodies, is a sickness in society; at the same time the detective is attempting to establish *his* authority as individual, as discussed earlier. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Hammett must make the Op fail in the end, Being too sceptical of the myth of the Individual in the capitalist society, Hammett had to forsake the triumphant conclusion that is associated with much popular literature. In these stories the individual triumphs -- one thinks of the dime novel stories with their successful conclusions, and recalls that Hammett began his writing career as a pulp fiction writer, so his bleak ending is at odds with this philosophy of "overcoming the odds". Hammett's socialist leanings are also relevant to his reluctance to inflate the singular importance of the individual.

The city now erupts into a vicious free-for-all, and the apocalyptic flavour is manifest. After an incendiary attack on a rival gang's headquarters, a dark red three-storey brick building which they bomb with their "pipefuls of hell" (173), the Op escapes

from the mobster that he was tagging along with for the time being, and tries to find a killer for the Dinah Brand murder. His descent into the underworld is symbolized through the description of two warehouses that he enters.

The first is totally boarded up, and in a scene that is reminiscent in mood to that which Poe's narrator in "The Pit and The Pendulum" describes, he also traverses a room in the pitch blackness, blindly feeling his way, to be attacked by an old man guarding a shipment of bootleg whisky. The next warehouse that he enters, for the final confrontation, has above it the faded name: "Redman and Company." He has descended into the physical heart of the factory maze, the underworld that he was so revolted by at the beginning of the narrative. It is here that he finds the answers to the murder that hangs over him, and here that he witnesses the death of a man named Reno, who, shot in the stomach multiple times, talks himself to death in a literal version of the usually figurative final sequence of the detective story -- the criminal confessing his crime. Reno had been shot by another gangster, the Op happens to find him when he does not expect it, there is no pretense that the Op has any control, or that he found the man through principles of sleuthing. The events are out of his control. The fact that the man shares his name with a city in America is again symbolic of the totality of the rot that the Op discovers, one which has infected all cities. As Reno speaks himself to death, he bleeds for all the citizens of Poisonville; as he explains his guilt, his body, and by extension the body of the city, degenerates. Reno's act of speaking himself to death is also ironic in the light of the speech/power nexus which is so central to the narrative. Here it becomes speech which literally kills. It has killed before, but indirectly. Speech is a power and a control that the gangster will not sacrifice, even when it kills him more quickly

"[t]alking could be torture, but he wouldn't stop on that account" (188). But this is not a neat resolution.

For in this final scene the Op gains the information that he needs to clear himself, but without being able to feel any sense of victory over the criminal. He is basically lucky to be alive: "I had all the information I wanted, and sitting here listening to and watching him talk himself to death wasn't pleasant" (189). But he has been granted a reprieve, and he gets out of the city, for as he says to the other Operative: "I know my Poisonville too well to take chances" (190) -- an echo of what Dinah had said earlier, though this knowledge did not save her. Effectively he learns through her misjudgment, and leaves, knowing defeat as the irony on the final page indicates: "He told me... that Personville, under martial law, was developing into a sweet-smelling and thornless bed of roses" (190).

The Op has to get out of the city, necessarily running to the next city, someplace innocuous called San Francisco, where he is reunited with his boss, the "Old Man" -- the devil he knows. We are finally left with the image of the detective on the run from the city, like so many American heroes before him.¹⁸ Priestman sees this "lonely exit" as the maintenance, in the final pages, of the barriers which separate the detective from the criminal, barriers which have been eroded in the narrative. By leaving, says Priestman, he never fully enters the world that he has described (1990:170). It is a moral victory. This is, however, too optimistic a response to what has occurred till now, actions and experience which must leave the detective a questionable figure, definitely not the pure and virtuous man of the nineteenth century. Ruehlmann is particularly cautionary: "And in an era of iron gates and guard dogs the private eye still holds an audience among those who would seek a messiah

with a gun. For he is no longer wish fulfillment for a frustrated nation but the emblem of American rage, the archangel Michael making war in Hell" (1974:146).

This element of final defeat, though the mission is ostensibly completed, is a distinguishing mark of the hard-boiled story. Grella quotes Paterson: "There is always at the end of the hard-boiled novel a moment of depression when the mission is completed, the enterprise ended, as if this little victory had cost too much in terms of human suffering" (1974:418). But he does live to fight another day, and to try for the "truth" in his next case, and whether this is the element of relentless optimism that is found in the detective, the optimism that will eventually lead to victory or whether it is simply a function of the simple reality that the Op is a professional man with a job to do, is open to debate. Should we look, however, at Hammett's next novel-length Op story, The Dain Curse, the ambiguities raised in Red Harvest concerning the enterprise of detection are taken to even greater lengths. As Gregory shows, this next novel is a reflection on the metaphysics of detection, one which has the Op positing three solutions to various stages of the puzzle, and never being sure of any "truth": "as is appropriate in a novel plotted to continually add new information, The Op's "solutions" are always presented as temporary, convenient guesses which somehow manage to account for the evidence" (1985:86). The evidence in Red Harvest suggests, however, that he will go to any lengths to finish his job. At the same time, his dislike for what he sees in the city spurs him on to step outside the boundaries of his job description, so evidence is paradoxical. What he sees as his job is largely contingent.

Red Harvest marks the violent end of the American pastoral dream and the dangerous edge that the hero of old now walks between morality and its antithesis, as well as the end of the detective who can safely traverse the cityscape. The habitat of familiar signs where the detective is the peerless reader has been replaced by the uncertain sign and the constantly shifting morality and meaning that the detective now discovers. Though he may read some of the external signs correctly, it is ultimately himself as detective that he has to define in the face of potential dissolution, as the boundary between detective and criminal wavers. He cannot remain distant, for his acts are powerfully political. It is all he can do to keep some semblance of self-identity as he fights the instant switch that turns the bullet from one of deliverance into one of vengeance. The novel marks the point where the detective as noble individual pitted against urban society fails, something Hammett is well aware of. Porter (1981:173) asserts that Hammett shows how small and provisional victories may be claimed by those who are tough and don't expect too much, and sees Hammett's message as being that "populist individualism [is] twentieth-century America's last best hope". But the evidence is too damning to support this optimistic view. The Op does open the town "from Adam's apple to ankles," but the cancer is already rampant, his actions are futile as he in turn becomes an infector. An "impure" hero cannot withhold his own taintedness. For the Op there are finally two possibilities: to move on to the next city (endlessly), but the rural is gone and so is any innocent perception of the city; or to accept the social realities, a "growing up" that the American hero has resisted in the past but that is now unavoidable. It is what Leslie Fiedler describes as the necessary development from "a rural childhood into an urban maturity" (1970:288) which occurs when the protagonist puts his concept of

selfhood to the social test. As Richard Sennett describes it, the fear of this subjection to the social test means that the individual avoids this problem and so is allowed to believe in a fixed picture of the self. He therefore never grows into a social maturity (1970:113).

For the Op there can now be no more avoidance, for the city and the urban experience have become the norm, "there seemed little reality in any other mode of life; all sources of perception seemed to begin and end in the city, and if there was anything beyond it, it was also beyond life" (Sharpe and Wallock quoting Williams, 235). So for the Op to ride into the sunset is a trick ending, and Hammett is aware of the irony in mentioning that the Op flees to San Francisco.

Hammett's vision of humanity in the city is bleak, but whether it is the "inescapable condition" that Cawelti (1976:176) ascribes to it, or whether it is very much a condition brought about by economic and social structures, is also questionable.

Cawelti goes on to say:

Hammett's work reflects the vision of a godless naturalistic cosmos ruled by chance, violence, and death... his stories are essentially about the discovery that the comforting pieties of the past -- belief in a benevolent universe, in progress, in romantic love -- are illusions and that man is alone in a meaningless universe. (173)

As a precursor to the next chapter, where I look at so-called "post-modern" examples of detective fiction, it is useful to explore Hammett's vision of the universe to a fuller degree. Red Harvest, and its connotations of the inescapable violence of city life, is perhaps Hammett's most vitriolic attack on the inhuman super-structures of the modern city and its effect on the individual. It is also an attack on the socio-economic milieu which is so riddled with corruption.

In The Maltese Falcon, his most famous work, one finds perhaps his most compact metaphor for a vision of the modern world. It comes in the form of a parable which Sam Spade relates to the *femme fatale*, Brigid O'Shaughnessy. This is the story of Flitcraft:

"Here's what happened to him. Going to lunch he passed an office building that was being put up -- just the skeleton. A beam or something fell eight or ten stories down and smacked the sidewalk alongside him. It brushed pretty close to him, but didn't touch him... He was scared stiff of course, he said, but he was more shocked than really frightened. He felt like somebody had taken the lid off life and let him look at the works." (59)

Flitcraft is jolted from his understanding of a comfortable, ordered world and realizes that he could be killed by a falling beam. It was "only blind chance" that spared him. His sensibly ordered affairs had put him "out of step, not into step, with life" (59). He leaves his present life, walks out on his wife and job, and disappears.

This is essentially the world that Hammett's detectives operate in, a world of chance (and chance is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the modern city for Robert Park {quoted in White, 1962:163}). You have to be tough and prepared for any eventuality, never set stake by any given. This is the only way that his detectives survive, by keeping their eyes open and being at the ready -- always expecting the unexpected. Marcus says of Hammett that he moves towards a literature that shows how people persist in acting as if the world is rational and ordered when there is no reason for doing so, reality actually being "inscrutable, opaque, irresponsible, and arbitrary" (1983:200). The paradox is that human life is actually contrary to the way that we live it, and therefore we will always be surprised by it and taken off guard. This tension is well understood by the Op, it is a part of his existence, and it enables him to roll with the punches, as it were, to "keep [his] eyes open so you'll see what you want when it comes to the top" (77). It is fundamentally a pragmatic approach in

a world of contingency very far removed from Holmes's ordered perception of the world and his plea: "[Misery and violence]... must tend to some end, or else our universe is ruled by chance, which is unthinkable" ("The Cardboard Box" 901).

People will always strive towards understanding, towards truths. Likewise, the detective has to keep looking for the "real" answer to his conundrum, he has to keep looking for the clue which will point to the criminal and identify that person, the clue which causally links the person to the crime. Though the Op may have the perception to realize that what he is embarking on is possibly futile, it is a part of his capacity as detective that he *has* to try, for this is what detection is about. Not to search would be to go contrary to his fundamental nature. The very meaning in his life is to search for meaning in the world. This becomes a highly ironic and paradoxical mission, ironic because the detective is aware of the futilities, paradoxical because he keeps trying.

Red Harvest is the closest Hammett comes to the dissolution of the detective as an epistemologically viable character in literature, while still allowing him to walk out at the end. In fact, there is enough evidence to suggest that the Op loses his identity as detective completely, and becomes, after this, simply a man fighting for physical survival. It is merely chance, pure luck, that allows him to find Reno in time to clear his name and leave the city "for good" as a detective still. It is through the aid of this *deus ex machina* -- as Fiedler points out, luck is always a loaded concept in literature, it basically stands for grace, the grace of the author (God), the grace of the populace who wants the hero to live.

For detection ultimately depends on elements of stasis, it depends on the presence of invariables on which the detective can rely, on information which is not deceitful, arbitrary, or pluralistic in meaning. In the modern world this is too much to

ask. Detection comes to mean something less controlled, less sure, and it loses its position as literature which upholds the false consciousness of a fixed and controllable reality. Therefore, detective literature which still upholds these outdated notions of reality draws further out of step from the truly imaginative and questioning forms. At the same time the detective is an archetype, he stands for our desire to order in the face of chaos, a desire which is a part of the human psyche and cannot be denied or suppressed. This is the powerful conflict which keeps the detective and detective fiction an interesting literary form.

The uses to which this more complex and radical understanding of the genre has been put will now be explored.

CHAPTER THREE: BABEL -
METAPHYSICAL DETECTION IN THE CITY
OF NOISE

San Francisco burned down last week, and I have been searching the reports to learn whether the whole city contained one object that cannot be replaced better in six months. As yet I've heard of nothing.

-- Henry Adams
(His reaction to the San Francisco earthquake of 1906)

We lie, as Emerson said, in the lap of an immense intelligence. But that intelligence is dormant and its communications are broken, inarticulate and faint...

-- John Dewey

After reading Red Harvest, one is left with the disconcerting problem of having to decide for oneself whether it is the Op who is corrupt and the source of the decay that he describes with such distaste (making him a very unreliable narrator); or whether it is the city that is the source of the corruption and decay. That the Op may be an unreliable narrator is not an unreasonable proposition, since his decline into a state of insecurity over his very personality opens a large area of doubt, both for the reader as well as the character, over the Op's persona and the reliability of anything that he has said. His opinion of himself is shaken just as his hold on his persona is; though, on the other hand, it is his constant opinion of the city that seems to assure his way out of the morass of conflict and doubt that he finds himself in. He always doubts the city to the extent that any self-doubt is always secondary, and this consistent doubt becomes his saviour, his fixed point of personal reference.

The Op finally draws attention to the subjectivity of the urban perception. He displays a perceptive "fix" that is, by the end of the narrative, sufficiently powerful (if not psychotic), irrevocably to establish the subjectivity of the narrator's perception. His subjective opinion of the city is one of an ugly place run by ugly people, and he tries to clean it up, but fails. In the face of the "order" that is before him, he tries to force his own system of order in a personal battle against the city. His loss suggests an inability to create subjective meaning, he cannot reassure the reader of the order that persists in the city of Personville. Yet, on the other hand, the order that persists in the city after the Op is defeated is not meaningless. By this I mean that it can be understood on the level of alternate order-systems: for example, a city run by the rule of personal profit, or personal vengeance, or gangster etiquette. The Op, in presenting his alternative vision of the city (the city as he wishes it to be) shows the city for what

it is, however inimical this is. This is Hammett's contribution to the Naturalist movement. He portrays the morally corrupt city of the Prohibition years in America as he describes its system of order.

This system is hated by the Op, but not necessarily by the gangster bosses who prevail, for this is their milieu, and as long as you're at the top of the pile, you're O.K. For them it has meaning. To ascribe to this city a meaninglessness is therefore a value judgement. Of course the meaning, or system in operation in the city is not easily controlled, it is a system of free "play," an anarchy of forces. But violence and strength and williness are controllers, albeit unreliable ones.

Thus Hammett shows that he still has the confidence to describe the American city as a form with an ordering system, although one which he condemns. He has control enough to portray a world in a certain state of order, while beginning to indicate that order is slipping as chance and the sheer mass of additional and unpredictable factors begin to impact on this world and lead to unforeseen results. So while the city begins to become unrecognizable (read "uncontrollable"), there is here yet an element, at least, of understanding.

What happens if understanding slips further? What happens when the city becomes a truly uncontrollable flux of forces? Where does the detective fit in? This is the challenge that the "post-modern" city offers the writer. By now it should be clear that the increasing insecurity of meaning is not solely the result of the physically changing city, though this has its associated anxieties, but is also caused by the changing perception of the city and the change in the epistemology of the writers, who realize that blunt belief in ordered universes *is* no longer viable. In the light of the conception of the city that I shall now explore, the city-world of Holmes's London

also becomes increasingly obscure, and the only place where it holds fixed meaning is in Holmes's head.

In the same breath one cannot ignore the effect that the rapid growth and change which the city has undergone in this century has had on the figure of the individual detective. Just as physical growth was accelerating in the centuries preceding the present, so the acceleration has continued in this century, and it has been intensified by the vertical growth of the city as well as the increasing concentration of people choosing to live in the city. The city has increased its relative density dramatically. With this saturation of people in the city it has become even more compartmentalized, both in the work spheres where people must refine their specialization, and in the spatial sense of the individual dwelling which becomes a cell connected to others, but rarely intercommunicating. The irony is that electronic communication seems to place the world within easy conversational distance. If anything can be ascribed dramatic importance to the modern city, it is the extreme rate of change which takes place in very short spaces of time -- should one judge these concepts historically. Such change must play a part in the shattering of notions of control over the city environment.

I shall begin with an examination of William Hjortsberg's Falling Angel (1979) because it is in many ways a homage to the hard-boiled novel of the twenties and thirties, but now rewritten in the later half of the century. This has necessary implications unless the novel remains genre-specific in the facile sense of reproduction without change. Of course, the detective novel forms of the classical period as well as the hard-boiled period still persist, sometimes with different settings,

but not even always. A detective story may be set on the moon but still be a classical detective story, and these exist (for example in Isaac Asimov's *oeuvre*). This is not to belittle them. It does point to the fact that, although the genre may be developed and change in its perception of the world, the old stabilities persist in the reading public's fare, which makes an obvious comment on the unwillingness of people actively to accept change on this dramatic scale even though it is happening to them daily. From a position of perceived stability to knowledge of instability involves a radical change in the understanding of the world, one which is uncomfortable to accept (as my discussion of Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 illustrates).¹⁹

The other novels which I shall concentrate on are Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 (1966) and Paul Auster's The New York Trilogy (1990). Many of the facets under discussion will be inter-related, pertaining to more than one of the novels, but I shall discuss under the respective headings of each of the three works that area which seems best described in that novel, and the connections should be clear.

FALLING ANGEL

The notion of spatial change in the continuum of time forms a very important part of this novel. As I demonstrate, it is repeatedly foregrounded as the detective, Harry Angel, makes his way through the city in search of a man by the name of Johnny Favorite.

While the film version of this book, called Angel Heart, was set mostly in New Orleans, the novel is intrinsically linked to the city of New York. In the opening paragraphs this relationship with the city is immediately established:

It was Friday the thirteenth and yesterday's snowstorm lingered in the streets like a leftover curse. The slush outside was ankle-deep. Across Seventh Avenue a treadmill parade of lightbulb headlines marched endlessly around Times Tower's terra cotta façade:... HAWAII IS VOTED INTO UNION AS 50TH STATE: HOUSE GRANTS FINAL APPROVAL, 232 TO 89; EISENHOWER'S SIGNATURE OF BILL ASSURED... Hawaii, sweet land of pineapples and Haleloki; Ukeleles strumming, sunshine and surf, grass skirts swaying in the tropical breeze. (1)

The juxtaposition of the Hawaiian reverie serves to make the realism of the street scene in New York of the Fifties more gritty, establishing an aura of disappointment and of gloomy expectation, "a leftover curse". The specificities of the initial paragraph are evident in the precise naming of the street, the actuality headline and the detail about the buildings.

The second element which is immediately introduced is time, both in the explicit "it was Friday the Thirteenth" and in the headlines which locate the year. Thus in the first paragraph are introduced two of the most important elements in modern life: space and time. These have become the measure of our contemporary existence. For the city-dweller they hold very specific value since they are both at a

premium in the urban environment, an importance which is dramatically played out in the story that unfolds as Angel tracks his man, both the physical space of the city and the temporal continuum becoming warped in this inversion of the traditional hard-boiled story. Falling Angel perfectly illustrates Mumford's description of the city as a place that acts as the repository for both the past and the present; it is a physical space that contains the marks of changing time. "Through its durable buildings and institutional structures and even more durable symbolic forms of literature and art, the city unites times past, times present, and times to come. Within the historic precincts of the city time clashes with time: time challenges time" (1987:118)²⁰. The novel explores this notion in terms of the meeting place between past and present in an individual's personal history, through the use of metaphors from the "personal" history of the city in Angel's constant reference to what buildings were in their past, eg: "Number Two, Sutton Place was the building where Marilyn Monroe lived" (183).

As I have mentioned, the specific effect that the urban environment acts out on the spatial continuum is the rate of change -- this being vastly accelerated. At the same time the temporal rate of change, while not subject to actual acceleration, seems to move more quickly in the paradoxical trick that the modern lifestyle plays on our notions of time. Partly because the spatial changes "unnaturally" fast, we find that it seems as if the temporal (being in so many ways linked to the physical proof of the city) becomes faster. And as the cliché runs, the lifestyle is also faster, we wish to pack more and more into the same space of time, indeed we are often forced to do this.

The catchword becomes change, and change is what we see in the very next paragraph of the book:

I spun my chair around and stared out at Times Square. The Camels spectacular on the Claridge puffed fat steam smoke rings out over the snarling traffic. The dapper gentleman on the sign, mouth frozen in a round O of perpetual surprise, was Broadway's harbinger of spring. Earlier in the week, teams of scaffold-hung painters transformed the smoker's dark winter homburg and chesterfield overcoat into seersucker and panama straw; not as poetic as the Capistrano swallows, but it got the message across. (1)

Even the billboards keep up with the changing seasons in the city. Life moves without pause, and this is reflected in the monument to time: Times Square. And it is at Times Square that the novel begins, it is at Times Square that it ends. "Normal" time has marched its steady pace, but for Angel time has taken a dramatic twist in the space of the events described. He moves backwards in time as he tries to track a man who disappeared years ago, moves through the city of the present seeing in its forms the city of the past and trying to recapture the "shadow" he is tracking.

Angel is something of a mystery man (making him well positioned within the tradition of the hard-boiled detective): we do know that he comes from out of town, then soon settles in New York. He is drafted into the army for the War, and when he returns he finds himself in Times Square, having been robbed of all his money and personal identification. "Caught up in the vast crowd and surrounded by the electric pyrotechnics of the spectacles, I felt my past sloughing away like a shed snakeskin. I had no identification, no money, no place to live, and knew only that I was heading downtown" (34). This conveniently symbolizes the manner in which the modern city strips one of personal history -- one is constantly re-invented, a theme central to Falling Angel. He sees a sign "Crossroads Detective Agency" and goes in, finds a job, and here he is. He develops quite a knowledge of the city (even in the abovementioned quotation the only sure thing he knows is his direction), which he prides himself on, as he says later to Epiphany, the female interest, "Detectives are

like cab drivers; they pick up the geography on the job" (149). Throughout the narration Angel gives detailed descriptions of the city, and he also knows the city's history:

We passed Cavanaugh's Restaurant. "Diamond Jim Brady used to court Lillian Russell in there. Back in the nineties the district was very fashionable. Madison Square was the centre of town, and over on Sixth were all the swank department stores, Stern Brothers, Altman's, Siegel-Cooper, Hugh O'Neill's. The old buildings are used as lofts now, but they still look the same." (149)

As this and other passages show, he is aware of the changing cityscape, he has internalized the features and the alterations, and is on familiar turf. He holds onto a feeling of historical continuity in the developing city, one which makes him feel integrated, able to change with it. In a sense he substitutes personal continuity for the external continuity which he traces. In an ironic passage, he wonders whether old billboard features are trapped inside the new ones, whether the past is encapsulated inside the present and still dormant:

In those days a pair of mammoth nude statues, male and female, bookended the block-long waterfall on the roof of Bond Clothes. Today, gigantic twin Pepsi bottles loomed in their place. I wondered if the plaster statues were still there, trapped inside the sheet-metal bottles like caterpillars slumbering within the confines of their chrysalides. (34)

This passage is ironic because it is, precisely, cocooned inside a porcelain vase that Angel finds the key to his personal past later in the story. Angel shows in this passing reflection that he is aware of the flux of space and time on the external plane that the city represents, but it takes the devolution of the narrative for him to learn this flux on the personal level.

So an early sketch of Angel reveals a secure individual who understands his home, the city.

In this cityscape, Angel operates according to the tried and tested code of his literary forebears. Showing the same tendency to privilege personal experience over scientific research and knowledge as did the Op, Angel can respond to a question concerning his conclusions with the characteristic dismissal of someone who is simply "living" the investigation without having clear ideas as he moves along: "Quick thinking Mr. Angel. And what are your conclusions?"

"Conclusions? I have no conclusions" (144).

This is not a cerebral investigation, and when the murders begin to mount up, happening ominously along his investigation trail, he resorts to blind instinct in order to make it to the other side, the safe shore of the solution: "No matter how many times I went over the scene there was something missing, a piece gone out of the puzzle. But which piece? And where did it fit in? I had nothing to go on but my instincts. A nagging hunch that wouldn't let go" (26). Only towards the close of his case does he decide, under duress, to do some background research into the occult underworld in which he finds himself becoming involved.

Another feature which defines Angel as a private investigator is his awareness of the individualist nature of his profession -- he is involved in the tracking of private persons, one man finding information about another man or woman. Early in the proposed investigation he suggests that the job is too big for a p.i. -- "Favorite could be anywhere in the country, or abroad. I'm just one man on my own. I can't be expected to accomplish the same results as an organization with an international information network" (28). The limitations of the individual in the expanding social world are not news to him.

This then is his background. He takes the job at fifty dollars a day, plus expenses, and sets out to gather the information that his client, Louis Cyphre, wants -- this being information about a man named Johnny Favorite, a "crooner" before the war. He very soon discovers that the man he is looking for is long gone from people's memories. He belongs to a bygone era before the war which serves as a break in history, and people hardly remember him, and nobody knows where he is. "Fifteen years is a long time. Give a guy that kind of lead and the trail is bound to be cold as ice," he suggests to his client (28). He is forced to begin to delve into the past, to try to track a man who existed then, but not now. And this man was a phantom to begin with, a mysterious singer who had few friends and an assumed name: Favorite, the favoured one. His real name, Angel is told, is Liebling, "loved one". A popular man who is missing.

Angel traces him to a war hospital where he is told that the man suffered severe facial injuries which left his features unrecognizable. He underwent reconstructive surgery and was transferred. When Angel looks up the transfer, he is told there is no-one there, and never was. He interrogates the doctor who looked after Favorite, leaves him locked in a room as part of some strong-arm tactics, when he returns the man is dead, a bullet through the eye. This is the first of a series of emasculating deaths that symbolizes Angel's inability to solve the crime, like the next one when Angel takes up the musical angle and traces Favorite's band members who are scattered about the country and city. He finds a man who played with Favorite, and sensing that he has some more to tell, trails him to a midnight voodoo ritual in Central Park. Using this as leverage, proof of an illegal activity, he interrogates the

man, Toots Sweet. The next day the musician is found by Angel amid a mess of blood, his genitalia stuffed into his dead mouth.

The third angle that Angel follows is that of the occult activities that Favorite was involved in. He goes to a fortune-teller and, as an experiment to see whether the date jars her, gives Favorite's birthdate. She proceeds to describe his character:

"Playing roles comes easily. You switch identities with the instinctive facility of a chameleon changing colour. Although you are deeply concerned with discovering the truth, lies flow from your lips without hesitation... Your role-playing ability has a darker side and presents a problem when you confront the dual nature of your personality... Cruelty comes easily to you... On the one hand you are methodical and tenacious, but by contrast you place great stock in intuition." (51-52)

The character study offers a good description of the hard-boiled dick. Even he decides that the description seems pretty close to his personality. The only problem, he thinks, is that this is someone else's birthdate. Later the fortune-teller is found with her heart wrapped in paper.

He follows other trails into the past, all the while moving through the city of now with commentary on the way that it has changed. He doesn't seem to get anywhere; he only begins to doubt the chance of finding the man more and more. "I felt like a man chasing a shadow" (100). The police hound him; he has now been linked to multiple murders. He gets broken up by two thugs, for a reason he doesn't know. He gets no closer to the solution.

The description of the detective's peregrinations through the city must now be left behind. For this approach leaves the mapper, as it does the detective, to the mercy of the severe destiny that was all the while Angel's fate, mapped out on the surface of the city. Time to jump forward and give away the shocking conclusion that the reader

detective is stripped of his role as law-bringer and he becomes an altogether untrustworthy character. Such metaphysical speculations play with the securities of the detective form, because the detective as figure is unstable in an unstable world.

The city becomes a place of unreliability, of insecurity and of chance. Angel's musing on whether the past is contained in the present proves proleptic in a manner he could not expect. So while his movements through the city of the present prove to be a detection of the past -- which is the role of the detective as Frank Krutnik describes it, the filling in of the gap in knowledge that is represented by the enigmatic past (1991:52) -- for Angel this detection of a very enigmatic past holds more danger and meaning than he ever realizes. For his understanding of the city is channeled through his hold on himself; this gone, the city becomes opaque and threatening. The dreams of the city that Angel has prefigure this loss of confidence:

My dreams were a succession of nightmares. Violent, distorted images alternated with scenes of utter desolation. I was lost in a city whose name I did not know. The streets were empty, and when I came to an intersection, the signposts were all blank. None of the buildings seemed familiar. They were windowless and very tall. (156)

There is an emphasis on the aspect of blindness, blank signs, windowless buildings. The detective, the private eye in the city, is blind. The city is illegible. It has been his vivid descriptions of the city and its past that have served his self-knowledge in the narrative, but in his unconscious these are proven false and misleading. He unconsciously fears the unreadable city, and his loss of control. And when the nature of the investigation is finally clear, he knows finally that he never knew himself, the city, in turn, was always other than what he knew, he never had the control which he believed he had, the essential referent, himself, being negated.

This is a good example of the "bad dreams" of the American city that Morton and Lucia White speak of, and in this light it is interesting that Hjortsberg opens the genre by turning it into a metaphysical struggle for a person's soul against the backdrop of the city. It is in the alternative worlds of demonology and soul that the physical city finds its expression in fear and doubt. This expression is overlaid and hidden by the repeated emphasis on the detective's cognitive knowledge of the city streets. These are the fears that Holmes never admitted to, the dark underworld that exists not only in the unexplored slums, but also in the bright present of the daytime, "known" city. Appearances are at war with the realities.

The city as locus of chance is illustrated in the fortuitousness of Angel being in Times Square at that moment when Favorite was looking for the young man with whom to swap souls. . . . Angel remembers Times Square "blazing like a neon purgatory" now that he knows the arcane workings of the fate that leads him to his solution. Times Square, the place of crowds, and he was arbitrarily singled out. A classic case of wrong place, wrong time. It could have happened to anyone.

The detection of a person in a crowd (which is for Benjamin the origin of the detective story, 1983:43) is very much influenced by and dependant on which "person" Angel is, for it is true to say that he struggled to find the person he was looking for in the city precisely because that person was always closer than he thought. If you are unaware of the fact that it is yourself you are tracking it would be the most difficult of all labyrinthine trails. Angel's dual personality is split by a break in temporal continuity -- at a point in 1943 he is taken, killed, and reincarnated, and he is unaware. His tracking the physical area of the city reflects his desire to find the

solution of identity (who and where in the city is the man he is looking for?), but he is ever frustrated (never asking who he is). Thus, though Angel moves across the city in the present time of the story, he moves in personal time in a circle from Times Square and back again. Therefore he never "really" moves at all, and his knowledge of the city is fundamentally shaken. The city and Angel's perception of it stand in as a metaphor for the change that Angel has to face: from comfort and knowledge to the disintegration and eventual reversal of knowledge.

The time/space present of the city (and of the person) acts continually as a misleading sign because it seems to him clear, and he believes he is reading the past in the present very efficiently. But he does not see the past's relevance as impinging on himself personally. This is his (natural) blindspot. As Stephano Tani points out, "the labyrinth of the past 'mirrored' (distorted, changed, removed) in the present is the best ally of the murderer" (1984:48). And this is especially true for the murderer who is being sought in cityspace, in a place, instead of in personal time. Not only does time cover the tracks, but Angel is also looking in the wrong place -- outside himself. What Angel sees is the image that the mirror casts, but not the mirror itself, and this image is constantly what he "knows," since it reflects his appearance: "No matter how cleverly you sneak up on a mirror your reflection always looks you straight in the eye" (240). This shows a clear lack of the ability that Holmes had perfected, which was to be able to tell the "photographic" from the "real". The city does suggest all the way through the narrative the possibility of the answer to the puzzle being inside, like the chrysalides of the plaster statues, but Angel does not read the external on this (internal) level. His search is outwardly projected, and when this search is shown ^{to be} a _^

failure, the nature of the outward elements, the city, changes, because the relationship between individual and city has changed, and there is no longer an understanding.

As unknowable as the detective turns out to be, so too the city. Culminating in this graphic failure of self-knowledge, the plasticity of the city is proven. As Raban describes, the city assumes a shape around you:

the city goes soft; it awaits the imprint of an identity. For better or for worse, it invites you to remake it, to consolidate it into a shape you can live in. You, too. Decide who you are, and the city will again assume a fixed form round you. Decide what it is, and your own identity will be revealed, like a position on a map fixed by triangulation. Cities, unlike villages and small towns, are plastic by nature. We mould them in our images: they, in their turn, shape us by the resistance they offer when we try to impose our own personal form on them. (1974:1)

It is an interactive relationship, one which is constantly shifting and even more so when the perception of selfhood is fluid.

While Falling Angel reflects the disintegration of the individual using the backdrop of the city to describe a developing schizophrenia, an inability to tell the "real" person from the perceived person, the next novel deals with the city on the more abstract level of lines of communication.

THE CRYING OF LOT 49

Thomas Pynchon's novel is not ostensibly a detective story.²¹ It lacks the formulaic elements of the genre, yet in its form it borrows the pattern of the struggle to uncover the hermeneutic mystery encapsulated in the question: Who or what is "The Tristero"? On the other hand, Oedipa Maas is not your average Sam Spade, introduced as she is as a housewife who has just been to a Tupperware party.²² But what the novel becomes is a sharp attack against the notion of a comprehensible city and the complacency of the individual within the city.

The novel is set against a city called San Narciso, very much a city of the American West Coast. It revolves around Oedipa Maas's quest to discover the meaning of The Tristero, a mysterious organization which seems to have an alternative postal service in operation. She "happens" upon this organization while involved in the execution of Pierce Inverarity's estate, and events quickly conspire to make her inquisitive enough to follow the clues. Thus she becomes a detective by default "like the private eye in any long-ago radio drama, believing all you needed was grit, resourcefulness, exemption from hidebound cops' rules, to solve any great mystery" (124).

Her detection, like that of Angel, works along multiple time lines (her leads to The Tristero go back to the Middle Ages) and space (as she moves through the city trying to find the W.A.S.T.E. bin, sign of the alternative postal service).

As space, the city is now the sprawling megalopolis on the scale of Los Angeles. There are no longer definite boundaries: "San Narciso had no boundaries.

No one yet knew how to draw them" (178). Indeed the scale of the city becomes large enough to be seen as a whole continent, if not a world, being a tapestry so detailed and intricate that it becomes a world (21). This is the famous description:

She looked down a slope, needing to squint for the sunlight, onto a vast sprawl of houses which had grown up all together, like a well tended crop, from the dull brown earth; and she thought of the time she'd opened a transistor radio to replace a battery and seen her first printed circuit. The ordered swirl of houses and streets, from this high angle, sprang at her now with the same unexpected, astonishing clarity as the circuit card had. Though she knew even less about radios than about Southern Californians, there were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate. There'd seemed to be no limit to what the printed circuit could have told her (if she had tried to find out); so in her first minute of San Narciso, a revelation almost trembled just past the threshold of her understanding. (24)

This is her view as she descends into the city, it is a privileged map drawn from above, and she never has this clarity of vision again, since the city grows darker and more arcane (though she retains a sense of imminent communication and the desire to understand) as she is immersed in it. At this point, on her arrival, her sense of the city is fed by a romantic impulse which allows the city an intricate form which has the ability to function as a interactive unity; its complexity, far from hindering, actually aids the participative understanding and ability to communicate.

But as she becomes immersed in the puzzle of the strange symbol which she finds repeated in various places, a postal horn which has been muted, and as she finds more arcane references to The Tristero, even in the games of children, the city becomes for her an obscure and relentlessly evasive place, her detection of the clues which come her way lead only to dead-ends or further clues. Moving from a perspective of clarity, we come to the sequence later in the novel where she wanders through the streets of the city trying to follow her latest lead, and here all her

optimism is replaced by a tired aspect of defeat in the face of the incomprehensible city:

They rode over the bridge and into the great, empty glare of the Oakland afternoon. The landscape lost all variety. The carrier got off in a neighbourhood Oedipa could not identify. She followed him for hours along streets whose names she never knew, across arterials that even with the afternoon's lull nearly murdered her, into slums and out, up long hillsides jammed solid with two- and three-bedroom houses, all their windows giving blankly back only the sun. (130)

The dreams of the Op and Angel are now Oedipa's reality. The city becomes an active threat to Oedipa, it is personified to the extent that it "nearly murdered her". Again there is the image of blank windows, as found in Falling Angel, windows being the source of a house's communication with the outside world. Now the houses are dumb, and Oedipa is totally alone and in a vacuum of sound- and signlessness. This experience of the city becomes an important metaphor in the description of her frustrated attempts to find answers to her questions.

The next day she flees, "demoralized," believing that "[s]he might well be in the cold and sweatless meathooks of a psychosis" (132) -- a particularly impersonal and a-human image, typifying the horror she feels at the lack of communication the world is offering, its total dispassionate remoteness. She is wholly alone, and begins to question her sanity, as the Op did once Poisonville began to exert its influence over him.

Her slide into the belief that she is going mad is brought about by the expectation that she initially has that the world is intent on communicating with her, "the intent to communicate" existing as a potential promise. The clues which casually come her way, and the trails that she follows for a while until they fade, serve to tease her into the

role of detective. They constantly appear, like maps of the city, to suggest meaning and hint at connections:

A map of the place flashed onto the screen, Oedipa drew a sharp breath... But she'd only been reminded of her look downhill this noontime. Some immediacy was there again, some promise of hierophany: printed circuit, gently curving streets, private access to the water, Book of the Dead... (31).

For Robert Park, the city is an organism whose main function is the transmittal of communication. Society relies on communication to exist. He goes on to say that this communication begins to break down in the big city where "a very large part of the population of great cities, including those who make their homes in tenements and apartment houses, live much as people do in some great hotel, meeting, but not knowing, one another" (quoted in White, 1962:164). But Oedipa sees proof of a communication that she is not part of; it is symbolized by the emblem that she sees again and again, and it is then no wonder that for Oedipa the inability to communicate, while realizing that there is a society which exists on the other side of the divide, leads her to the point of utter despair of the outsider.

For Mumford too, the city has a special purpose in the retention and transfer of messages: "In terms of current psycho-social jargon, the city is a special receptacle for storing and transmitting messages" (1987:119). This is the importance of the city to Oedipa's encounter with the flux of messages which she receives; it forms a palette whereon the channels are engraved, like the circuit-board it is described as. And there is no lack of message that comes Oedipa's way, it's just the lack of system, the connections which she can't find that trouble her. Kermode writes: "She dreads the anomic, the world collapsed into filth and randomness" (1978:164). She finds the emblem of Tristero on various lapels, she sees the stamps that have been subtly altered, she sees the graffiti on the walls telling of W.A.S.T.E. One of the main

sources of potential message which she traces relentlessly is the play "The Courier's Tragedy" which, like so many of the clues, comes to her seemingly arbitrarily (she comes across important clues "by accident" though thinks that her shrink would "accuse her of using subliminal cues in the environment to guide her" {84}). This time the play is recommended by a group of punk rockers. In the play, or a least a suppressed version of it, she finds explicit reference to The Tristero. But when she traces it, all the other versions of the play have a couplet different from the one mentioning Tristero. Like the detective she becomes, she is now hyper-aware of any sign that has relevance to the pursuit of this puzzle: "[s]he could, at this stage of things, recognize signals like that, as the epileptic is said to -- an odor, color, pure piercing grace note announcing his seizure" (95). Already linked to disease, her desire for ordering the clues begins to seem to her malign:

Oedipa wondered whether, at the end of this (if it were supposed to end), she too might not be left with only compiled memories of clues, announcements, intimations, but never the central truth itself, which must somehow each time be too bright for her memory to hold; which must always blaze out, destroying its own message irreversibly, leaving an overexposed blank when the ordinary world came back. (95)

She is driven on, however, by the boundless clues, "coincidences blossoming these days wherever she looked" but she left with "nothing but a sound, a word, Tryster, to hold them together" (109). Like Dewey, she feels that she is in the lap of a great intelligence, but that the lines of communication are broken. The alternative postal system that she finds stands as a symbol for the lack of inter-connectedness of the languages that people speak; it is a private code that is closed to the outsider, just as all the other codes of communication of countless other systems that now exist in the city are closed to the particular individual. It is a struggle for communication between the islands of existence that the modern city-world is, separated by a void of fuzz

interference where blips of information float about, but never the key to drawing all the bits, the clues, together. Control over communication would equal immense power, the power that The Tristero fought for (164), but this is now a dream in the multifarious melange of competing systems of communication.

Sharpe and Wallock mention the breakdown of democratic system (in other words one comprehensible to most people), and relate it to the death of the city as a signifying system as it should be in the sense Mumford described it (1987:24). They go on to say that for some writers (they mention Bellow) this means a "collapse of civilization," while for Pynchon it is "a kind of delirious entropy, an over determined semiotic mesh endlessly indicating its own fictionality" (24). It is this mesh that Oedipa runs up against, but with a lack of understanding of the spirit of play that she could be participating in. This spirit entails the ability to resist the sureties of stable knowledge, since the playfulness of the post-modern environment dares attempts at understanding only to mock them afterwards. In this manner Pynchon is mocking her (and our) desire to find an order that will connect the variousness of the clues, a language that will structure them.

It is a desire for "truth" that drives Oedipa, like the detective she is, and her literary forebears: what they want is an answer to the puzzle. They desire to know the "Word," a notion which Pynchon satirizes: "Remember that Puritans were utterly devoted, like literary critics, to the Word" (156). This drive is powerful, as I have mentioned before; it forms an important part of our psyches, even though the strength of modern philosophy mocks the naiveté that is involved in upholding such a belief in the face of our current conceptions of the world. Tani describes the problem:

the ambiguous relationship between systems and conspiracy is mirrored in the private relationship between the detective as a "system" and the outside world,

which "conspires" against Oedipa through the proliferation of clues and indecipherable signs. In fact, Oedipa herself is a "system," a human system striving for mental harmony and understanding, which are inherent and irrepressible human needs. (1984:97)

This need extends to the reader, who also desires to know the answer. David Porush comments, however, on Pynchon's slippery truths: "The serious reader of Pynchon who is drawn into this cabalistic game finds only that Pynchon mocks him" (1985:115). It is this drive that has Oedipa, at the end of the novel, awaiting the "crying of lot 49" (183) and the arrival of a mysterious bidder who is connected to The Tristero. Significantly, we as readers are left in the dark; the novel ends in mid-stride leaving us unaware of the next sequence and whether Oedipa comes any closer to a solution. But we feel she won't, there will be yet another, further clue for her to (endlessly) follow. This forms another radical subversion of the detective form -- the story with no solution -- this is one of the characteristics which makes this a "metaphysical" look at the structure of the detective story form, for it refuses to admit one of the basic elements of the detective story: the resolution which the detective enacts to close the circle of loose threads and bring the desired completion. This is how Edward Mendelson argues the relevance of The Crying of Lot 49 in terms of detective fiction, a position which makes the "metaphysical" elements clear, since the novel inverts the conventional detective story structure:

Where the object of a detective story is to reduce a complex and disordered situation to simplicity and clarity, and in doing so to isolate in a named locus the disruptive element in the story's world, The Crying of Lot 49 starts with a relatively simple situation, then lets it get out of the heroine's control: the simple becomes complex, responsibility becomes not isolated but universal, the guilty locus turns out to be everywhere, and individual clues are unimportant because neither clues nor deduction can lead to the solution. (1978:123)

It is not only Oedipa who desires order in the world; this extends to other characters in the novel, making this a universal desire. Her husband, Mucho Maas, in a LSD haze, finds a Holmesian world of interconnections, the utopia of his dreams: "Do you think somebody could do the dinosaur bone bit with that one string, Oed? With just his set of notes on that cut. Figure out what his ear is like, and then the musculature of his hands and arms, and eventually the entire man. God, wouldn't that be wonderful" (141).

But Oedipa, in her frustration, is led to an uncompromising position: "Behind the hieroglyphic streets there would either be a transcendent meaning, or only the earth" (181). All or nothing. She either has hope, or gives up. The spirit of free play, which sees form but does not try to make the clues conform to one system of meaning, seems to be lacking in her. Though Tani states that Oedipa finally gives in to a mystery "as 'eternal' as the open-endedness of her fiction and of the human condition" (1984:99), I think that she does not allow this type of complacency, this resignation. One of her final musings precisely pins her desire for exclusive order:

Another mode of meaning behind the obvious, or none. Either Oedipa in the orbiting ecstasy of a true paranoia, or a real Tristero. For there either was some Tristero beyond the appearance of the legacy America, or there was just America and if there was just America then it seemed the only way she could continue, and manage to be at all relevant to it, was as an alien, unfurrowed, assumed full circle into some paranoia. (182)

As Steven Marcus writes, "[e]ither the world is a delusionary plot or scheme of coherence or it takes a form so insane as to make history itself into a delusionary joke. And the contours of the urban world are the text out of which this psychotic alternative is to be read" (1987:255). This is the way that he describes the problem facing Oedipa: She is confronted with the dialectical opposites that exist in her mind,

this mindset that is not a solution, merely a part of the problem -- a schismatic order that allows no intermediary static.

In order to see the contemporary urban world clearly, Pynchon asserts here, we must be able to see past "the fiction of continuity, the fiction of cause and effect, the fiction of a humanized history endowed with 'reason.'" The structural categories are, in these words, meaningless deceptions themselves. The whole has become once again destabilized, opaque, obscure, baseless, mystified -- and most efforts of understanding or constructing a whole are themselves part of a mystification. (Marcus in Sharpe and Wallock, 1987:254)

Oedipa feels that she must succeed or slip into a state of paranoia. She must either be a part of a discernible reality, or free-floating, without bearings in her environment (for the metaphysical battle plays out over the city, as Marcus describes, the city is the text that demands her *dénouement*). This is how she feels shortly before the final possibility that the auction offers (177). You are either "inside, safe, or outside, lost" (129). She does not see past the "fiction of continuity," thereby becoming a Pynchonesque dig at our "oedipal" desire for primacy and causation.

Thus for Oedipa the lack of understanding means a deep paranoia which she feels at various stages of the narrative, "[e]ither he made up the whole thing, Oedipa thought suddenly, or he bribed the engineer over at the local station to run this, it's all part of a plot, an elaborate, seduction, *plot*. O Metzger" (31). This is the unhappy alternative that she feels to the existence of a meaning in the events and signs that she has witnessed. Her response is evocative of the condition that Jameson describes, a lack of capability in the face of the decentred communication network: "the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentred communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects" (1984:83). It leaves the individual in the city a vulnerable entity who must form a

callous shell of indifference to the city, a protective apathy in the face of the confusing signals of the differing languages that pervade the social air if one is to escape pathology (a pathology which is represented in the psychological demise of her shrink, Dr. Hilarius, into a Nazi persecution paranoiac).

In the face of the modern city, the personal position of the individual who strives for answers is an unstable one, teetering on the verge of madness. This novel leaves the individual on that verge, leaving the story open-ended. The next detective story which I examine moves into the realms of individual pathology in the face of the city's impenetrable mask.

CITY OF GLASS

Like The Crying of Lot 49, Paul Auster's City of Glass (1985) examines the issue of communication in the modern city of American society. And to further the analogy, questions over the nature of language and our understanding of language are also raised, possibly in a more overt manner.

His novel begins with a telephone call, a form of communication which from the outset is not simple, if indeed any electronic communication can ever be called simple. As previously mentioned, this medium both extends our range of communication, while at the same time representing our isolation -- we often don't meet the people we deal with in person, the only voice we know is digital. "It was a wrong number that started it, the telephone ringing three times in the dead of night, and the voice on the other end asking for someone he was not" (3). This is the story of one man's investigation into the nature of perceived reality itself, and the way that it is set off is by a misdirected phone call, a chance happening in the non-space of electronic wavelengths. The narrator is phoned in the mistaken belief that he is the detective Paul Auster.

At this point, the narrative makes a proleptic leap into the future of the storyline, and the reader is told: "Much later, when he was able to think about the things that happened to him, he would conclude that nothing was real except chance" (3). It is chance that begins his misfitted assignment, a result of a complex communication system momentarily misfiring, outside space and time; but his later conclusion is that chance is actual reality, the two are inseparably linked, chance

cannot be rounded off into separable little units of event (as Flitcraft discovered). And what this means to him as detective, which is what he unexpectedly is to become, is similar to the conclusion that Oedipa is forced to reach -- that detection is a quintessentially uncontrollable excursion into the vagaries of chance in the city-society. The choices that he is to make are more often than not simple gambles, a hope informed by the desire to reach the solution to the puzzle, as in the scene where he has to choose between two men at the station, both of whom look similar, only one of whom is the quarry he is to follow: "Whatever choice he made -- and he had to make a choice -- would be arbitrary, a submission to chance" (68).

Chance therefore rules his induction into the world of detection. The call, when he takes it and plays the role of detective, leads him onto the trail of a man who is feared to be a potential murderer. The person who fears for his life is the son of the man who is followed, Peter Stillman, who was locked away for nine years of his life by his father (also called Peter Stillman) in a bizarre experiment to find out whether a person who is deprived of human interaction and human speech will learn to speak the language of God. It is by broken request from the son who even now has only a loose hold on human speech that the writer-turned-detective, Daniel Quinn, moves out in search of the theorist of language that the man's father so inhumanely is, because the son fears an imminent attack by the father.

As the investigation progresses, Quinn moves from a position of relative security and sure hold over both his abilities as writer (which implies a certain hold over language and communication) and his understanding of himself as a writer, the fixed and

constant persona, into the shadow world of shifting sign, broken language and loss of hold over selfhood. This is immediately symbolized in the game that he plays when he decides to pretend that he is the detective that the young man is looking for, for he adopts an alternative persona. Where his detection ends is in a bare room, all that is left of his intense search being a notebook filled with his thoughts and observations, but no Quinn -- he has disappeared, he no longer exists. It is supposedly from this notebook that the case is reconstructed by a friend of Paul Auster's, in a literary game which sees Quinn impersonating Auster, who is a writer mistaken for a detective, while Quinn is also a writer who becomes a detective through the "coincidence" of the wrong number. Between these terminal events lies the dissolution of a detective who sought a solid goal, being the solution of the case, but found only a madness which led to his personality becoming erased, symbolized by his erasure as a character in the book.

For it is in the dynamic movement between the construction of the case (gathering clues etc.), the desired completion, and the failure of this completion through constant erasure, that the book and the investigation play themselves out. As I shall show, language and the city are linked as two possible systems of meaning which the detection represented by Quinn's efforts and those of the narrator explore. The city, in this book as in Stillman's deranged mind, is a signifying system which stands as a metaphor for language which strives to reach transcendence, to be able to speak the language of God. In this context, the city is read as a form that tries to embody the perfect order of the Celestial, the Heavenly, the desire for an Augustinian City of God. The city is ideally a place of message, in Mumford's sense, a language that is open to reading and whose physical form is communication. At this extreme,

Babel represents an attempt at direct communication with God -- pure communication with no misunderstanding or arbitrariness.

The city that Quinn knows is, however, the jumbled mess of message and meaning which the other writers describe:

New York was an inexhaustible space, a labyrinth of endless steps, and no matter how far he walked, no matter how well he came to know its neighbourhoods and streets, it always left him with the feeling of being lost. ... The world was outside of him, around him, before him, and the speed with which it kept changing made it impossible for him to dwell on any one thing for very long. ... By wandering aimlessly, all places became equal, and it no longer mattered where he was. On his best walks, he was able to feel he was nowhere. (4)

It is a centreless city that is at the same time both everywhere (he always feels lost, caught within the city) and nowhere. The city, as the detective story, is represented in the pluralistic and open-ended terms that mark post-modern discourse. The post-modern notion of the city is similar to the new understanding of the detective story, which is also centreless because the centre is potentially anywhere, anything is the story's essence. It is something as yet undefined. In the detective story, the potential is there for any single thing, any event or object to have significance, all are "seething with possibilities, with secrets and contradictions" (9). Furthermore, if the detective moves through "this morass of objects and events in search of the thought, the idea that will pull all these things together and make sense of them" (9), then this is what Quinn also endeavours to do. Quinn understands detection -- after all he writes detective novels. However, his detection with its desire for completion leads him to a "conclusion" rather more unsettling than those of his forebears.

As Quinn tracks Stillman through the streets of the city, he keeps notes of Stillman's movements and his actions precisely in order to try to establish what the idea is that will give meaning to the man's solitary rambles. In this perambular

motion the detective story turns full circle back to Poe's "armature of the detective story" as described by Benjamin (1983:48), with only the essential elements represented -- the detective, the quarry and the crowd.

What appear to be random, rather insane, wanderings, become, under the ordering of Quinn's notes, an intricate pattern, which, if superimposed upon the physical map of the city, spell letters of the alphabet. When Quinn traces this (which he does we are informed, for no particular reason, the action thus becoming another chance happening, 80), he finds that the movements spell out the words "The Tower of Babel". Stillman has used the city streets to communicate a message to the detective, but one so ephemeral that the detective is reluctant to believe it. For the message to be one which has a receiver, the sender had to rely on the presence of a mapper, a code-breaker, which is what Quinn so arbitrarily becomes. Or else the sender was not a sender on the earthly level, but a man involved in communication on a higher plane not having another person as the desired receiver. It is the latter which ultimately seems to have been the case, for Stillman, when Quinn speaks to him, is divorced from the realities around him, and is involved in a pursuit of transcendence in language, of assigning to every *thing* its pure word, a word which cannot be transferred, as happens with the elasticity of impure language. This order of language Stillman believes to be linked to the new Babel, the new City of God which he believes will be created in America, a creation which he tries to enact through his son as spokesperson, hoping his son will speak the language of God.

But what Stillman finds in America is not the pure system of his dream (his dream is broken). Similarly, his experiment with his son fails. Stillman explains his quest to Quinn, as well as the reason why he searches the streets of New York:

I have come to New York because it is the most forlorn of places, the most abject. The brokenness is everywhere, the disarray is universal. You have only to open your eyes to see it. The broken people, the broken things, the broken thoughts. The whole city is a junk heap. (94)

In this heap he finds his objects which he will rename and restore to their own *quidditas*. It is a cataloguing of the shards of civilization that will restore to every piece its fundamental essence and thereby restore the whole. It is a madness, an infinite desire for order that Stillman labours under, and it leads to suicide. In some manner, by some transmutation of will, possibly because Quinn, perchance, becomes the receiver of the message that Stillman spells out over the city, Quinn becomes infected with the desire for completion, for the order that will make his investigation a success. He becomes the quintessential detective. In one of their exchanges, Quinn, again pretending, takes up the persona of Stillman's son, a persona which now becomes symbolic of this transferral of will to order. Stillman is pleased that his son can speak so well -- "all words are available to me now" Quinn says (101), and the meeting ends with Stillman telling Quinn not to forget what he has told him, for "[a] father must always teach his son the lessons he has learned. In that way knowledge is passed down from generation to generation, and we grow wise" (103). Quinn answers "I won't forget what you've told me" and Stillman is content: "I'll be happy to die now, Peter." This is the enacted transmittal of desire, a desire which burns powerfully within Quinn from here on as he doggedly searches for Stillman. This interchange also acts as harbinger of Quinn's failure and of the futility of the quest. As Stillman plays with the sound of Quinn's name, "Quick, for example. And quill. And quack. And quirk," Quinn's assertion that "all words are available to him now" becomes ironic, Stillman showing that this does not necessarily entail control over words, since words are shape-shifters -- protean. Stillman plays the multiplicity of the words, and

says: "I like your name enormously, Mr. Quinn. It flies off in so many little directions at once" (90). These are proleptic words, for by the end of the investigation, Quinn's persona is as fragmented as his name is.

This doggedness exemplifies Quinn's desire for completion, his will for cogency, for the case to be wrapped up and for himself to be the clue-mender. When he is busy piecing together the movements of Stillman he begins to see the ramifications of this desire, and the danger of it:

It seemed to him that he was looking for a sign. He was ransacking the chaos of Stillman's movements for some glimmer of cogency. This implied only one thing: that he continued to disbelieve the arbitrariness of Stillman's actions. He wanted there to be a sense to them, no matter how obscure. This, in itself, was unacceptable. For it meant that Quinn was allowing himself to deny the facts, and this, as he well knew, was the worst thing a detective could do. (83)

Thus he is aware of Holmes's dictum, reliance upon observable fact, but cannot subdue his will to mold the fact, something he can never be sure he does not do through his entries in the notebook. In the face of the extreme inconsequentiality of the future events ("Like so many things that happened to him over the days and weeks that followed, Quinn could not be sure of any of it" {36}), Quinn needs security, and cannot hold with the detective's job: "I have not been hired to understand -- merely to act" (48). He desires connection.

The passage quoted above where Stillman acknowledges Quinn as his own, is the last time that Quinn speaks to Stillman. When Stillman escapes Quinn one morning, Quinn realizes that the man is now invisible in the city:

The old man had become part of the city. He was a speck, a punctuation mark, a brick in an endless wall of bricks. Quinn could walk through the streets every day for the rest of his life, and still he would not find him. Everything had been reduced to chance, a nightmare of numbers and probabilities. There were no clues, no leads, no moves to be made. (109)

The city has enveloped his quarry and Quinn feels hopeless, realizing that there was no continuity of clue, no system which he could use to track the man, that he never had any system. But he must try. Quinn takes the decision to take up surveillance over the house where the son lives, in order to protect him from any attack, and thereby fulfill his elementary mission. For Quinn feels lost, he has no hold over the case, he was "nowhere now. He had nothing, he knew nothing, he knew that he knew nothing. Not only had he been sent back to the beginning, but he was now before the beginning, and so far before the beginning that it was worse than any end he could imagine" (124). The security of purpose that the surveillance will offer is the only way that he will feel competent and in control. It is his only hook in the case while he searches for fixity. He feels his hold over the reality of his life slipping, the city and its vagaries beginning to close in -- as this extract suggests: "[a] white wall becomes a yellow wall becomes a gray wall, he said to himself. The paint becomes exhausted, the city encroaches with its soot, the plaster crumbles within. Changes, then more changes still" (124-5).

The house that he begins to stake out is one with which he also has lost communication. The telephone number that he repeatedly calls is permanently engaged. But he feels comforted even by this, because it is constant and not fluctuating: "There was comfort in the thought that whenever he dialled the number, the sound would be there for him, never swerving in its denial, negating speech, as insistent as the beating of a heart" (127). He tries to move as close as physically possible to this heart in an effort, initially, at personal communication. But as he becomes obsessed with his mission, he decides that communication with the client is no longer necessary anyway; he strips the case down to its essentials: him watching

the house, the eye watching the object of scrutiny. Quinn as fixed person melts away in a mirror image of Stillman in the city: "It was as though he had melted into the walls of the city" (139), and the "I" of subjectivity becomes a disembodied "eye" observing the city. The detective, the quarry, the city.

But again fate plays a cruel trick on him. He sits outside the house, systematically depriving himself of food and sleep so that he will not have to move or be asleep too long, both actions which keep him away from his post. He slowly loses touch with reality, in its everyday sense, after months of waiting for a *potential* crime, one which was never certain to begin with and which never materializes, and, finally, he is forced to move because his money runs out. When he phones for a cheque he finds out that Stillman, two and a half months ago, had committed suicide. There was no longer a case for him to work on. When he phones the house he had been watching for so long, the number is disconnected, dead.

He returns to his own house, a dirty, bearded bum, to find another person in his flat, all his possessions gone. "It was gone, he was gone, everything was gone" (150). This is the end result of the gradual disintegration of selfhood that Quinn undergoes, shifting his persona under pseudonyms until he no longer has any fixed persona -- "[i]t did not really matter. He had been one thing before, and now he was another" (143). What he earlier realizes as the "most important of all: to remember who I am" (49), is now completely lost.

He goes back to the house he scrutinized for so long, and takes Peter Stillman's son's room. Reality is now encapsulated within a threatened period of light which is growing ever smaller, periods of dark encroaching upon this light (155). He loses

speech in the symbolic diminishment of the pages he has left in his notebook, which he fills in the remaining periods of light. As he becomes more and more infected with the desire which Stillman unlocks, he begins to search for deeper understanding, to understand more about his life: "[h]e wondered what the map would look like of all the steps he had taken in his life and what word it would spell" (155). Finally, he wishes to understand the nature of reality itself. He moves beyond the case, his life, to write about "the stars, the earth, his hopes for mankind" (156). There are no answers, only more questions (154-5), culminating in the question which answers him by default and erases his person from the story, the ominous last entry: "What will happen when there are no more pages in the red notebook?" (157). Having shored the words against his ruin, his words have dried up and he is no more.

It is an end which draws attention to the fictionality of any attempt to reach some over-arching system of meaning in the world and in the city, that embodiment of the fundamentally dis-ordered world. This ordering could only ever happen in a fiction which was blind enough to ignore these anarchic elements, the desire for true understanding can only lead to the dissolution of the desirer. Quinn's suicide is epistemologically prefigured in the suicide of Stillman, both of them wishing to comprehend that which is impossible -- the true language, the essential Word which orders the world.

The real event in the city is intractable to the detective's ordering desire because meaning constantly avoids the Word, which is in itself the construction of a belief system wherein ordered universes can exist. Links between the object and the word, between the clue and the solution, between signifier and signified are ever fatigued. The modern city has become Babel in the post-apocalyptic sense, a

scattering of communications with no order. As a bridge between self and reality, language becomes not only a broken connector, but also a barrier, a partial courier, a potential link. Which of these it is at any given point in time and place is ungovernable. Word is essentially fiction, related to other fictions, perhaps mutually satisfying, in which case agreed upon.

Peter Stillman, the son, lives within this ever-shifting relation to language. For him, language is a treacherous field of possibilities, a system which is never sure, as the first words that he speaks to Quinn show with their constant production of meaning and then possible erasure in the very next word:

"No questions, please," the young man said at last. "Yes. No. Thank you." He paused for a moment. "I am Peter Stillman. I say this of my own free will. Yes. That is not my real name. No. Of course, my mind is not all it should be. But nothing can be done about that. No. About that. No, no. Not anymore.

"You sit there and think: who is this person talking to me? What are these words coming from his mouth? I will tell you. Or else I will not tell you. Yes and no. My mind is not all it should be. I say this of my own free will. But I will try. Yes and no. I will try to tell you, even if my mind makes it hard. Thank you." (18)

This is the static of language that Quinn is forced to come to terms with as the darkness descends on him. It is language disconnected from a common reality, a consensual basis. The narrative ends with Quinn missing: "wherever he may have disappeared to, I wish him luck" (158) says the controlling narrator, who relies on Quinn's notes to construct the narrative, reflecting thereby Quinn's search for order in a diminishing Chinese box illusion. This is a note of goodwill that joins the narrator to Quinn in the spirit of the search. But this narrator leaves Quinn to be wherever he may be, he leaves it open-ended, (choosing "not to choose" a solution,{Tani,1984:45}). The meta-narrator supreme, Paul Auster (novelist in our world), goes on, however, to retell the story of the detective and his quest for order in the following two stories,

which act, on one level, as the enactment of a further desire for some understanding; but in the hands of Auster become merely two more games with the reader who desires solution, perhaps through the next two stories which reflect upon the first. This desire is ever mocked and denied. Each story becomes a trick mirror which displays some development from the first narrative, but then becomes increasingly obscure itself, allowing no light to fall on the solution. There never is a glimpse of any over-arching meaning.

This is essentially the redundant truth of detective fiction: it must (ever) try, only to fail (once more).

AFTERWORD ON THE METAPHYSICAL

As Sharpe and Wallock argue, the struggle to decipher the city is now far more desperate than ever, possibly moving further from being a desire for order (though this still exists), to become a form of survival of the psyche that we must engage in, lest we are subsumed by the city -- "functioning amid the fallout from the Tower of Babel is still the city dweller's foremost challenge" (1987:28). This is illustrated by all three of the novels which I have discussed, and it also forms an integral part of other examinations of the city in later reworkings of the detective genre. In Michel Butor's Passing Time, for example (a book which is again not a conventional detective story), the central character is involved in a detection of the city which takes on the appearance of a war against the city -- a necessary battle against the encroachment which he perceives the city effecting upon his psyche. The act of detection becomes a method of survival, the more he knows about the city, the less vulnerable he feels to its power of seduction towards what he sees as a condition of living death, which is the city-dweller's lot.

On the other hand, one may argue as Kermode does, that the hermeneutic specializations of the detective story are transformed into a guide of how to look at a world that is not understandable in terms of ordered systems, the world that simply is, "lacking all meaning but that signified in our texts" (1983:188). This is the important lesson which we struggle to learn (as the detectives in the stories struggle): to work against the notion that things will "fit together," that things will resolve themselves into

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a neat (and foredestined) closure. This only happens if we "accept the false implication that the world itself is simply coded" (188).

The act of reading and of allowing the inconsequentiality of the open-ended text to dominate becomes a remaking of ourselves, we move "in worlds not conventionally realized," in this way opening up our perceptions of the world, allowing the realization of the way that our "local and provincial restrictions" delude us. This is of course an example of the metaphysical detective story functioning as a "readerly" text, to use Barthes' terms (from S/Z). A number of theorists on the detective genre have alluded to this affinity (Day 1988, Kermode 1983, Holquist 1983): that this type of detective story invites reader participation (and even forces it), if there is to be found the link, the order, that the detective story in essence desires. Reading is then an act of participant (re)creation.

In a similar vein, Holquist points out that the metaphysical detective story does not "narcotize" as the older forms did, or as the classical form still does: "Instead of reassuring, they disturb. They are not an escape, but an attack" (1983:173). Working on varying levels, this attack opens our eyes to the city; it is only in forewarning that forearming is possible. The attack also indicates the reality of lives in the possible void of meaning: "If, in the detective story, death must be solved, in the new metaphysical detective story it is *life* which must be solved" (173).

The metaphysical detective story offers a constant flux, an area of interpretative worry, it keeps the channels of learning open by constantly pointing out that any solution is the projection of the detective's desire for a certain order, that this may possibly be the "correct" solution (in generally accepted terms) but that others do exist. It always leaves the certainties of real solutions wide open. It does not

choose univocally, rather it uses the plural voices of a multiplex world, usually foregoing choice altogether, or making it clear that choice is essentially personal and subjective, or even a yielding of the will -- as it is for Quinn when he takes on the case.

But where does this leave our conception of the city? As is clear from the examples, the city forms the field of ordered dreams, made up of both the expectation that history has shaped and the personal desire of the citizen. For nobody wishes to be lost in the city; this is a most stressful event for anyone to undergo. As Lynch points out, "lost" carries "overtones of utter disaster" (1960:4). Not to be constantly potentially lost in the city means a need for an ordering system. And we have this in maps, symbolic replicas of the city, but these are not always good enough in the face of the ever-changing city. Also, maps cannot represent the vertical aspect of the city, nor the constantly shifting mass of people and vehicles which cloud any penetration into the city. They are hopelessly two-dimensional. Then there is the problem of reading the map, a language at which we are not always very proficient.

It comes down, once more, to our need for a language which can encapsulate the changing city. Perhaps the weight of my argument till now makes this desire naive, the city being elementally intractable; but try we must. The attention which various writers have given to the problem also suggests that it is an important question. Why are we unable to describe the modern city except as a "non-space," a disorder?

Burton Pike describes it as a problem of inherited language, our vocabulary of the city is received, and we have not developed it. Though we are involved "in a

continual quest for the essence of this urban experience and for ways to express it,"
our language is formal. He quotes Wohl and Strauss:

A fairly limited range of linguistic conventions has come into use whose formality is shaped by the fact that the form of the rhetorical devices employed does not depend on their content; their set phrasing is hospitable to any and all substantive statements about a city's qualities. (1981:12)

Our language is therefore outdated, locked in a preconception (as in a locked room). Sharpe and Wallock also argue that the incomprehensibility of the city is usually ascribed to its "sheer physical expansion" (1987:15), but that the real reason is that the city is changing its shape, becoming essentially decentralized, lacking the unity of place that it formerly had. Spatial permanence can be seen as leading to, and supporting, a permanence of order; as this spatial permanence breaks down, so do order and sequence (as time and space are linked in our philosophy), so that one is faced with the frayed fragments of a discernible order, clues to an order that existed in the past perception of the city. This is clearly linked to the elements of stasis that the detective relied on in the past, the reliable sign in the understandable city.

The consequent unity of language that was employed to describe the unified city is now outmoded because it relied on the fundamental idea of centre and centrality, the city as hub: spatially, temporally and socially. Sharpe and Wallock quote Derrida:

if totalization no longer has any meaning it is not because the infinity of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field -- that is, language and a finite language -- excludes totalization... instead of being too large, there is something missing from [the field]: a center which arrests and founds the freeplay of substitutions.

They then go on to explain:

Like language, the city is a system of signification dependent on certain fixed relations and shared values for its comprehensibility or "interpretation." But if the traditional functions of the city are displaced to other parts of a more

homogeneously urbanized environment, then the effect will resemble the loss of semiotic apprehensibility that Derrida describes. ... There is little doubt that since the industrial revolution we have gradually constructed an urban vocabulary, based on concepts of space and concentration, that is rapidly becoming outmoded. (16)

Therefore it is our language, "our spatially oriented vocabulary" (25) that "prevents us from discussing the interaction of space, time, and process except in negations and dialectical oppositions." This is why our vision of the city is of a labyrinthine maze at best, at worst a nightmare vision of formlessness.

The detective fiction that has been traced in this chapter does not escape this vision of the city. It actually capitalizes on this lack of order as a necessary setting, a natural setting, for the representation of the person struggling with an ordering consciousness. Is detective fiction the place to look for an optimistic vision of the modern city as a readable space, as Lynch²³ would have it, because of its traditional challenge to illegibility? Or does it point to the truth of a language that cannot encompass the new (dis)order of the city, that can never break from the "provincial restrictions" of the past?

It does remain potentially a creative form, a "readerly" form, and therein plays a helpful role in showing that it is in individual watchfulness that one may attempt to understand the city, by the individual using personalized signifiers. As Clay suggests in his detection/description of the city, it is our own conclusions that are the most important. We have to ignore the force of received ideas, the "industries of propagandists" who intrude their views. If we are active, using the private eye "[w]e do not merely react and respond to the environment; we actively represent it and construe it -- and thus build alternative constructions on it" (1973:13). He also points out the necessity for breaking free from the received perceptions of the city in order

to react with the modern city (29). This is the way to step out of the locked room of perception; or, to use another metaphor, to see beyond the image that the mirror casts, in which we observe only the expectation.

But at the same time, metaphysical detective fiction warns against the desire for totalizing comprehension of the city, for the order of a utopian City of God.

and the unwitting detective (who is slower than the reader, for there have been clues in a book laced with irony) are led to by the nose. Told that the soul with whom Favorite swapped personalities when he returned from the war, in an arcane magic rite, is identified by a soldier's dogtags in a vase, Angel races to find the tags. He, of course, was a soldier, and had his dogtags stolen off him on the night he returned from the war in Times Square. As he discovers through the name on the tags, it is his soul that Favorite now inhabits in an attempt to renege on the pact he struck with the devil, a Faustian swop: soul for fame. His client, the debonair Louis Cyphre, a.k.a. Le Ciffr, is none other than Old Nick.

Once this reality sinks in for Angel, he is utterly defeated. His congruent personality and the reality that this offered him *are* destroyed, and as he travels back to the hotel to face the police, he encounters a city that lacks the life that he so lovingly described: "I slouched in the corner and stared out at a world gone dead" (240). The image of the city as having gone dead is used metonymically for his sense that he has lost the life that he thought was his, a sure life based on his sure knowledge of the city.

There have been premonitions of loss of selfhood before this final realization. A good example is Angel's plastic nose. His nose was damaged in the war and reconstructed. Now it has lost shape for lying in the sun one day, and it is plastic also in the sense of alteration. The nose is of course also the part of the body most closely associated with the detective after the eye: it is used for snooping, "sniffing out the clues". His nose is in this sense compromised. Its plasticity also reminds one of the fortune-teller's remark that his personality is changeable.

In another example, Angel is beaten up and awakes to feel his face: "I reached up and explored my features. Nothing felt familiar. It was a stranger's face" (194). His initial doubts about his personality are all premonitory to the eventual realization of the actual falsehood of self-perception that he laboured under.

To return to the themes of time and space. Through the medium of one person, the story describes the collapse of time past and time present. He is a man past and present: he is both the killer, the perpetrator of the action which wrenches the timeline from its "natural" course, he is the protagonist in the past tense of the detective story (the story that went before); and he is also the protagonist of the story that comes after, the tale of the detection, the reconstruction in the present. The detective is the killer in the paradox that always threatens, because as the detective tracks, he must necessarily come closer to the person of the killer; in order to find he must live himself into the prey. And when he finds the killer, the past and present are always joined in a single connecting figure, the detective.

What this means for the detective as individual suddenly realizes the proposition that Hammett hints at in Red Harvest but does not carry through: that the objective character/individual that the detective has represented is now utterly destroyed. Hjortsberg uses the conventions of the form to implode the logic of the form and leave it devoid of the securities that it has offered in the past. The detective is now a proven unreliable narrator, in this case to the extent that he is the killer. In another detective story of this nature, Alain Robbe-Grillet's The Erasers, the detective is not "always already" the murderer, but follows the trail of a potential assassin so finely that he in the end fires the bullet that kills. In these novels, the

CONCLUSION

Your gaze scans the streets as if they were written pages: the city says everything you must think, makes you repeat her discourse, and while you believe you are visiting Tamara you are only recording the names with which she defines herself and all her parts.

However the city may really be, beneath this thick coat of signs, whatever it may contain or conceal, you leave Tamara without having discovered it. Outside, the land stretches, empty, to the horizon; the sky opens, with speeding clouds. In the shape that chance and wind give the clouds, you are already intent on recognizing figures: a sailing ship, a hand, an elephant...

-- Italo Calvino
Invisible Cities

There seem to be two alternatives that face the detective story in the future of the city. The first is the continued commentary on, and warning against, the city which rapidly draws ever further from our individual control, our ability to order the world of the urban space. This would leave detective fiction a reactionary form, a role that it has played in the past, as the discussion of Red Harvest demonstrated, and a role that the genre no doubt will play again, by sheer fact of its nature -- it is a popular form. This means that it expresses the frustrations and desires of the man or woman on the street, and will continue to offer what is often pejoratively seen as "escapism," a function of literature which is nevertheless essential. One cannot deny the fact that for most people reading is a form of relaxation, and may further be the enactment of wish fulfillment, such as the wish for urban control.

The other alternative for the genre is to begin an intelligent investigation of the nature of our urban world and to try to adapt itself to the realities (in as much as these are identifiable) it encounters in an interactive manner. The flipside of the genre being a popular form is that it constantly reflects the changing society, and this quality should see it being a valuable point of reference in the future of the urban interrogation.

But does the problem not go deeper, as has been pointed out in various arguments cited above, is it not a failure of our language -- in its very structure -- which disallows the capacity to encompass the modern urban milieu? A failure in language that allows only expression of centres and extensions, but not of centreless organisms that lack a dialectical order? This question is undoubtedly very difficult to answer. If one were to look at the novelistic expression of the modern world in the necessarily vague area of post-modern literature, one would find certain devices which

are employed to enter into the highly contradictory matrix which the social milieu has become. The most obvious example would be the use of pastiche, the borrowing of "tiles" from the past to build a new wall, a value-free use of the historical elements of literature in a new composition that reflects the multifaceted world.²⁴ Another element would be the cross-referentiality of a literature that borrows from sources "outside," from the languages of science, computer technology, music.

Jameson feels that, in so far as one can say that literature has a responsibility, post-modern literature needs to help in finding ways to deal with the fragmented world. He describes how the political form of post-modernism will have as its vocation the projection of a global cognitive mapping, both socially and spatially, to counter the spatial and social confusion of the present (1984:92), which confusion is of course what the detective fiction discussed here has explored. Lynch (1960:119) agrees that this need exists, albeit in terms of urban planning: "A clear and comprehensive image of the entire metropolitan region is a fundamental requirement for the future." Neither offers paths to take.

The problem in terms of detective fiction may be stated as follows: can a literary form which is necessarily based on dialectical oppositions play any role in the loosening of our language so that it may incorporate the modern city (as a symbol of the decentred world)? For detective fiction has always relied on the opposites of truth and lie, of enigma and solution, of hunter and the hunted. The detective story has been targeted by the writers of consciously post-modern works precisely because it displayed such reliance on a fixed form in the past. Critics like Holquist (In Most and Stowe, 1983) and Tani therefore point out that writers "outside" the detective genre take on this form in order to express "the disorder and the existential void they find

central to our time in a genre designed to epitomize the contrary" (Tani, 1984:xii). In this way, the form has been altered to suit a more radical purpose.

Therefore, the chapter on metaphysical detective stories has, I believe, gone some way in answering this question. So long as the reader (and the writer) is able to allow a form that liberates the detective story from its past fixtures, the genre will allow for the open-endedness that is necessary for an intelligent expression of the changing city. The form is able to express change precisely because, paradoxically, it was so rooted in form, in an ideal world. This allows the base wherefrom the newer writings can take off and examine the loose nature of the milieu. As happened to the city itself in its physical form -- a constant change which left the individual (and his or her ideologies) behind -- so the detective form is ever-changing, and it is only where the critic cannot see past the form of old that the genre is not developing, for in essence a novel like City of Glass is not unhappy to express the lack of order in the city, it does not judge the lack of order, it merely comments on the effect of this disorder upon those who desire order. Quinn's future is anybody's guess, anybody's story; it is up to the reader/critic to attach the dire or happy consequence. And all that is left of Quinn's journal indicates an interest, embodied in a question (what will happen when the pages run out), not despair.

What these examples of detective fiction have illustrated in terms of the individual in the city is the development from possible unease, to belief in control, to self-doubt and loss of control, and finally to loss of perception of the self as a unitary entity. This follows, in its broad form, the pattern of the literary history of the individual from realism through modernism to post-modernism: from the "scientific" age of the

late nineteenth century with its values of individuality, its belief in the power of the individual; to the modernist angst over the individual (which concept is still believed in) who is becoming subsumed or alienated, depending on temperament; to the post-modern expression of the individual becoming a sum of many parts, a scattered form, no longer a developing unity as perceived in the past. Jameson (1984:63) discusses the change from modernism to post-modernism as a shift in "cultural pathology... in which the alienation of the subject is displaced by the fragmentation of the subject." But the problem was already apparent to Wordsworth, as Raymond Williams points out:

Wordsworth saw strangeness, a loss of connection, not at first in social but in perceptual ways: a failure of identity in the crowd of others which worked back to a loss of identity in the self, and then, in these ways, a loss of society itself, its overcoming and replacement by a procession of images: "the dance of colours, lights and forms," "face after face" and there are no other laws. (1985:150)

In Poe and Doyle the value of the individual was so sacrosanct that there was hardly any notion of dispersing personalities, though the knowledge of this dark side of rationality was toyed with in the numerous disguises that Holmes would employ with enough brilliance that others could not recognize him, not even Watson. It was, of course, also the beginning of the age of Freud who identified and explored the horror of the threatened conscious and controlling individual personality.

In Hammett the individual is under serious threat, and the doubt as to whether he survives this attack is left lingering. He is, however, criticized and persecuted for his individualistic stance in the face of the sycophantic adherence to the order of corruption and money economy. The alienation that this egregious act of non-compliance evokes is tattooed upon his physical being, as is represented when he is both verbally and physically attacked. He is ostracized and punished for his lack of

sociability. In this novel, the individual is subsumed into larger social bodies: gangster mobs, municipalities, agencies.

What is represented in Falling Angel is the total disintegration of the notion of self-knowledge, the cornerstone to individuality. It is an extreme example of alienation, the subject of the narrative becoming alien to himself, a person he never knew he was. Individuality collapses in the face of this dramatic switch from knowledge to its opposite. The self-doubt that begins in Red Harvest is mockingly forced upon the subject of this novel. In Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49 self-doubt is handled more carefully, but is no less dangerous, since it forms the edge between sanity and paranoia. If Oedipa can hold onto her belief in order, and thereby her belief in herself, then she will survive, but the ending is ominous. The individual as represented here is truly against the world, because there can be only a subjective truth in this scattered city, never a consensual one. Communication, the bridge between the individual and society, fails, leaving all persons islands in a void of sound, a truly alienating position if one cannot come to terms with it or reach a position of equanimity. In the last novel which I examined, the individual (or rather the notion of the individual) is played with and is so thoroughly irrupted as to leave the concept worthless. It is a total disintegration of the individual as represented in the detective: as the "personhood" of the detective is never sure in the loops that cause a writer to be confused with a detective, who goes by the name of Paul Auster, who is also a character, another writer, in the novel, and who tells the story of Quinn to his friend, who is the frame narrator. Quinn himself plays at various times himself, Paul Auster (the fictional detective), Peter Stillman and Henry Dark. He also writes under the pseudonym of William Wilson, a sure clue pointing all the way back to Poe.

A true dispersal of individual character. While in Falling Angel there is a switch from one to another persona, in City of Glass there are multiple transformations.

If we return to Benjamin's definition of the detective story, an ironic development is apparent. He says of the detective story: "The original social content of the detective story was the obliteration of the individual's traces in the big-city crowd" (1973:43). In this instance, it is the quarry, the criminal, who is the individual whose traces are obliterated. But now it becomes the detective's personality which is threatened along with all others. While he was immune before, being a shining beacon of individuality, in the societal mass which so easily subsumes the person the detective is as threatened as the next. The social content of the detective story has lost its naiveté, it has been developed, played upon and broadened as notions of ^afixed persona disintegrate.

The fragmentation of the individual as entity is, to a great extent, caused by the forces of society in the city. As Royce is quoted as saying (by the Whites, 1962:182), "we tend... to read the same daily news, to share the same general ideas, to submit to the same overmastering social forces, to live in the same external fashions, to discourage individuality, and to approach a dead level of harassed mediocrity." Again attention is focussed on the city as a repository of these social forces that discourage and disintegrate notions of individuality, while at the same time the myth of individuality still abounds in society. Royce's argument is the familiar one against forced similarity in the city, the effect of all becoming faceless ciphers in the huge machine.

Jameson, in an interesting alternative position on this phenomenon, describes the development of the city as a radical process that has occurred so quickly as to

obliterate the old city form and lose that continuity of development that the human could rely on in the past, and use as a reference for perception:

If this new multinational downtown ... effectively abolished the older ruined city fabric which it violently replaced, cannot something similar be said about the way in which this strange new surface in its own peremptory way renders our older systems of perception of the city somewhat archaic and aimless, without offering another in their place? (1984:62).

This is of course the problem of language and expression once more, and what he goes on to describe in terms of the city is the focal point:

My implication is that we ourselves, the human subjects who happen into this new space, have not kept pace with that evolution [of space in the city, the "mutation of built space"]; there has been a mutation in the object, unaccompanied as yet by any equivalent mutation in the subject; we do not yet possess the perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace, as I will call it, in part because our perceptual habits were formed in that older kind of space I have called the space of high modernism. The newer architecture therefore... stands as something like an imperative to grow new organs, to expand our sensorium and our body to some new, as yet unimaginable, perhaps ultimately impossible, dimensions. (1984:80)

The acceptance of this suggestion for new organs comes from the ranks of the writers who are involved in cyberfutures as expressed in the writings that have come to be known as cyberpunk. In these writings, the individual responds to this demand for a new sensorium quite literally, with enhanced body functions -- add-ons and modifications -- which allow more effective transversal of, and interaction with, the city environment. The important role that the physical body plays in detective fiction is one that was already established in what Colin Mercer describes as Poe's ambivalence between, on the one hand, the specification of the body and its capabilities, and on the other the need to "prevent it from being dissipated in the traces of a new social complexity" (he cites "Man in the Crowd" as the genesis of the ambivalence, 1986:64). Control of the body is a fundamental component of social power. In George Effinger's trilogy of cyberpunk detective novels, the detective has

an extensive array of "jacked up" physiological systems which allows him to react faster, to change his personality, to suppress pain, to become a killing machine if necessary. Control of the body is nearly complete. The hyperspace of the information-loaded city wherein he works requires a computerized (wired) brain so that he is able to stay on par with the changing technology, and the body becomes substituted with cybernetic parts to be able to operate interactively with such a brain. The philosophical question is however begged: is a person modified in this way an individual in any consistent sense? He certainly exceeds the definition of an individual in the conventional sense -- the ability to become other personalities at will transgresses this. And not just acting other people, but becoming them. Along with this physical transmogrification comes psychic plasticity.

Ridley Scott's Blade Runner, based on Philip K. Dick's novel, is another example of a futuristic detective story where the detective (somewhat romantically) is not an enhanced being, because to be normal in the face of the replicants (copies of humans) he tracks is a fanfare for the pure human knight, the Chandleresque "lonely man". In this future vision, the "pure" human is still valued above the cyborg. In relation to this singularity of physical integrity is Deckard's ability to escape the powerful corporate force that controls the destiny of humans and also creates the replicants. Again this hearkens back to a desire for the individual to be able to deal with the social forces and to escape ultimate control. In the Scott interpretation, the city is portrayed as a grim future dystopia, shot in dark *noir*, where people are plentiful, yet alone (a theme which is emphasized through the replicants, who have no natural family, a comment on their human counterparts who draw ever-nearer to replicant status), and huge advertisements cast a neon glow over the city, telling you

how to live your life. In the original novel, the extreme isolation of the person in the megalopolis is emphasized:

He lived alone in this deteriorating, blind building of a thousand uninhabited apartments which like all its counterparts, fell, day by day, into greater entropic ruin. Eventually everything within the building would merge, would be faceless and identical, mere pudding-like kipple piled to the ceiling of each apartment. And, after that, the uncared-for building itself would settle into shapelessness, buried under the ubiquity of the dust. By then, naturally, he himself would be dead, another interesting event to anticipate as he stood here in his stricken living-room alone with the lungless, all-penetrating, masterful world-silence. (Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? 20)

Loss of identity and disintegration are the dominant fears, the humanly constructed edifice reflecting in its decay the physical being, a body which can no longer sustain unbounded life, mortality being etched in every building.

Jameson draws an analogy between the outmoded human body in the face of the city and our outmoded perceptive tools:

... this latest mutation in space -- postmodern hyperspace - - has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world. And I have already suggested that this alarming disjunction point between the body and its built environment -- which is to the initial bewilderment of the older modernism as the velocities of space craft are to those of the automobile -- can itself stand as the symbol and analogue of that even sharper dilemma which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global multinational and decentred communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects. (1984:83)

As yet, it is only in the futuristic forms of literature that this imbalance is righted, where the body is machine enough to be able to interact with the new city form.²⁵

But so often these forms of literature do prove proleptic, and, where not, they go a long way in familiarizing the "nightmare" dystopiae of the future, and in this give us the rudimentary tools of perception -- a conceptualized experience.

It is, as always, through language that our perception of the city is controlled and for Raban, as for Jameson, there exists a lacuna in this respect. Raban states: "Language codifies an order, a hierarchy, a stable view of the world, which is grossly exceeded by the reality of the modern city..." (1974:38). But in these futuristic glimpses at the city a language develops with which to "handle" the modern city, in the process that Sharpe and Wallock describe:

In short, as urban geographers have long maintained, we need to address the temporal as well as the spatial dimensions of the modern city. Doing so will require us to move from definition by negation (decentered city, non-place urban realm, doughnut) to a new set of positive terms. Whether the new language will be derived from the computer, systems engineering, or some other space-age, "high-tech" field is hard to say. Whatever words we employ, field or atom or something as yet unnamed, they will help shape our city, for the kind of metaphors we choose will influence the kind of city we see. As the examples of Engels and Orwell show, learning how to read the city is a necessary part of learning how to change it. (1987:38-39)

Already involved in finding these metaphors, the writers of the cityscape of today and tomorrow lay a path along which our perceptions may develop. What is truly needed, as Sharpe and Wallock explain (ignoring for the time being their value judgment in terms of necessary change), is to escape the negative associations we constantly ascribe to the city. We define by negation in a use of language akin to the apartheid metaphor of dialectical exclusion. Again, this is where the efforts of the writer can help -- there are definitely mixed approaches to the city in futuristic fiction, but enough positive association too.

Sharpe and Wallock also point out the "nostalgia" involved in the need to map the contemporary city, a nostalgia that Jameson also partakes of (1987:36), which desires urban legibility. While examination of this issue remains a nostalgic lament for the past's legibility, there will be no way out of the "fix" that keeps the city impregnable. One may criticize Jameson for the lack of projected solution, but this

would be to ignore the fact that this is a general problem, stemming from our reluctance to move from our desire for order and the epistemological ingraining of an inter-related world. What Jameson usefully does is to point to the effect of the modern urban world on the individual, an identification which can help to move us closer to "solution," although this can now mean only partial understanding, a loosening in the chemical sense of the word, and not definitive ordering and epistemological closure.

In whatever form, the city will continue to exist, and it will remain the locus of the struggle in discourse to contain it. It will remain, for Marcus, the symbol of our struggle to understand, the enigma which we constantly attempt to resolve: "Our ability to read it will continue to be concomitant with our ability to read our world" (1987:255). What form the city takes is a matter of how "city" is defined. Not all agree that the city will remain in the form that we understand, as is the opinion of Frank Lloyd Wright, who believes that the speed of communication (ironically) will link small settlements, so that the city can dissolve, since it is no longer needed to bring people together, which was its main function historically (White 1962:197). This, looked at another way, is simply a city that is everywhere, omnipresent and without borders -- "everywhere and nowhere,"²⁶ the global village of Marshall McLuhan. There are always problems: for the Whites the problem is how to foster individuality (again ironically) in the face of the prisons that constitute the separate compartments which we work and live in (1962:238). For Lynch it is the breakdown of the city as a definable place, an entity, in the spread of suburbs and lack of boundaries. Wright's utopia is Lynch's dystopia, a city that avoids legibility (1960:102). He does wistfully

write "perhaps this pattern of a whole cannot exist" (115), but he nostalgically laments this fate. Clay has a more pragmatically useful approach to the city: "There is no universal and everlasting right way for cities to present themselves to us. Each reflects the ideas, traditions, and energies available to its citizens in past centuries, as well as at this moment" (1973:14). This is a more interactive look at the city, which allows for the patterns of the past, insofar as they still exist, while recognizing the change of the present and the germs of the future.

As I have shown, detective fiction has always been firmly entrenched in the city experience. In this form of literature visions of the city of the past and of the present-future will be contained. And, by association, this form of literature will remain too, always reflecting the city, always detecting its form. It is a literature where perception is imperative, the "eye" of the detective cast over the city, observing and recording. It is interpretive of the city, whether this interpretation is "unaware," as in Doyle, or self-aware, as in Auster. The successful detective is one who can glean the past in the city, but who understands the inevitable change and the flux that is the mirror of the city, and who is prepared for the future formations. A fluid personality is required for working with a plastic city. Old ideas of individuality must be rejected. The one inescapable impetus is the desire for solution, but this desire must be tempered by the pragmatism of the knowledge that order is fleeting, and is in any case highly subjective, that solution can at best mean capture, but that this is often happenstance, since so much remains beyond our grasp.

For this reason, I leave the final words to Kermode, as he explains the *jouissance* of interpretation in a passage that describes detective fiction tangentially (half-glanced, only half-perceived -- the true state of detection), its desire for

interpretive order, the distress of failure to order, and (possible?) equanimity in the face of the unknowable:

What is the interpreter to make of secrecy considered as a property of all narrative, provided it is suitably attended to? Outsiders see but do not perceive. Insiders read and perceive, but always in a different sense. ... When we come to relate that part to the whole, the divined glimmer to the fire we suppose to be its source, we see why Hermes is the Patron of so many other trades besides interpretation. There has to be trickery. And we interpret always as transients -- of whom he is also patron -- both in the book and in the world which resembles the book. For the world is our beloved codex. We may not see it, as Dante did, in perfect order, gathered by love into one volume; but we do, living as reading, like to think of it as a place where we can travel back and forth at will, divining congruences, conjunctions, opposites; extracting secrets from its secrecy, making understood relations, an appropriate algebra. ...World and book, it may be, are hopelessly plural, endlessly disappointing; we stand alone before them, aware of their arbitrariness and impenetrability, knowing that they may be narratives only because of our impudent intervention, and susceptible of interpretation only by our hermetic tricks. Hot for secrets, our only conversation may be with guardians who know less and see less than we can; our sole hope and pleasure is in the perception of a momentary radiance, before the door of disappointment is finally shut on us. (1979:144-5)

ENDNOTES

1. I use the male pronoun since all but one of the detectives are men.
2. I have chosen to call the works which I discuss in this section "metaphysical" detective stories. I find this term more neutral than "postmodern," which opens up the usual can of worms in terms of definition, and which issue my study is not involved with. However, I will be commenting on the condition of the city as postmodern artifice in the fiction which I discuss. Any discussion of the "postmodern condition" will arise in discussions relating the literature to the modern city, and in these instances definitions, where appropriate, will be given.
"Anti-detective" is not used in order to keep consistency.
3. This is the distinguishing factor -- the private investigator who takes investigation as a profession or a hobby, and not simply a person who solves a riddle, as in Voltaire's "Zadig". However, the choice of Poe as the originator of the genre is disputed, see for example Harrowitz's discussion of the debate in Eco and Sebeok, 1983:179-181.
4. Ian Watt attributes the development of the novel form in part to the growth of urbanization in his study of Defoe, Richardson and Fielding. He argues that this urbanization leads to the realization of individual powerlessness in the face of the big city, a theme which is explored in the novel, the individual and the city becoming "two of [the novel's] most characteristic themes" (The Rise of the Novel 186).
5. Behaviour which is interestingly reminiscent of that which Thomas Jefferson describes in Parisian life: "Thus the days of life are consumed, one by one, without an object beyond the present moment: ever flying from the ennui of that, yet carrying it with us; eternally in pursuit of happiness which keeps eternally before us" (quoted in White 1962:27). The city, with its over-stimulation of the senses, can lead to this infinite loop of desire to take it all in. This desire is no less powerful in the city of the late twentieth century.
6. It remains one of the ironies of the story that the narrator is nameless. Placing such importance on individuality, while lacking a name, seems odd indeed. Perhaps Poe read himself into the narrator.
7. Although Poe was himself American, he set the discussed stories in London and Paris respectively. Poe's cultural bias tended towards the European, a fact which possibly led to his work receiving attention in Europe earlier than subsequent recognition in America.
8. I make this statement on the assumption that what the reading public buys is what it holds as a fond image of the status of the individual in society (in this case) -- a projection of their ideal. Where this ideal is a champion of the rational, this status

must be close to the preferred ideological current of society. See on this issue Porter (1981:1), who affirms "[t]he importance of popular works resides in their status as meaning-systems that embody implicit world views." Knight also talks about the "captivated readers" who had "faith in modern systems of scientific and rational enquiry to order an uncertain and troubling world, but feeling they lacked these powers themselves they, like many audiences before them, need a suitably equipped hero to mediate psychic protection" (1980:67).

9. Knight also remarks on Conan Doyle's "ability to popularize and naturalize rational individualism," which fact leads to their success with the public (1980:68).

10. I should note at this point that I do not wish to debate whether Doyle as author subscribed to such a simplified world view, I merely wish to show the tenets upon which the mechanism of the stories are based, and to go on to link these ideas to the vision of the city in the Holmes cycle.

11. Indeed, Moriarty kills Holmes over the Reichenbach Falls in "The Final Problem," but the public want more Holmes and he is resurrected.

12. Morton and Lucia White explore this dual antipathy to the American city in their book The Intellectual Versus The City. They valuably point out that there are these two strains of anti-urbanism, and not only the romantic condemnation of the city as inferior to the country. These two camps they call the "primitives and sophisticates"(225).

13. The date for this closing being around 1880.

14. This theme is evocatively treated in William Faulkner's story "The Bear".

15. Elihu Willsson forms the prototype of the feudal power-monger common to hard-boiled narratives; other examples are General Sternwood in Raymond Chandler's The Big Sleep and Noah Cross in Roman Polanski's Chinatown.

16. I take the term "fix" from Clay's book Close-Up: How to Read the American City 1973:23. It refers to your perceptive bias, what informs your opinion regarding the physical aspect of a city.

17. This comparison with Hobbes is also used by Steven Marcus (1983:205) as he describes the social background to the book in terms of the Prohibition (though he does not use the quotation).

18. As Leslie Fiedler writes: "the typical male protagonist of our fiction has been a man on the run, harried into the forest and out to sea, down the river or into combat -- anywhere to avoid civilization..." (1970:25).

19. Here I touch on the subject of literature and escapism, but here I shall stop. My study is concerned with the developing forms of the genre, which often mimic and pastiche the earlier forms but always alter them.

20. And cf. Pike, 1981: 4, who also notes the city's importance as a meeting place of the past and the present.
21. The novel has also been the subject of intense scholarly interest. My study will be limited to the relevance that the novel has for the detective form, and I cannot hope to reflect more than a fraction of the wealth of criticism that the book has generated.
22. She is also the obvious exception to my use of the male pronoun for the detective.
23. See page three of his book as an example of his optimism over the legible city: "This book will assert that legibility is crucial in the city setting".
24. On this subject, the use of pastiche and other elements of the post-modern, see Jameson's article "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism".
25. Examples which spring to mind in the arena of popular culture are the Terminator films, where the android figure traverses the city with apocalyptic ease.
26. This is Wright's conceptualization of "Broadacre City," which encapsulates a whole nation.

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