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Comfort Factors, Moral Fantasy And Social Criticism In Formulaic Fiction

A Study Of Literary Formulas With Particular Reference To The 'Hard-Boiled' Detective Story

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Introduction: In Pursuit Of The Common Touch

I started this work because I enjoy reading books of this kind and, I would argue, many of them have a very good deal to say which is relevant and pertinent and of artistic and cultural merit. Secondly, however, I deeply regret and deplore the commonly held perception that popular fiction is less worthy of attention than the 'art' novel. Thirdly, I suspect that tendency of many critics to write in a language which is completely inaccessible to the 'man on the street' has damaged the study of literature to a point where it is almost past repair. I believe that the only way to revitalise the study is to pay heed to the kind of stories most people read and to write about them in a way that most people can understand.

The so-called 'hard-boiled' detective story is probably one of the most successful formulaic fictive patterns to be developed this century; and has been translated very effectively into popular film and television drama. Its founding fathers are normally deemed to be Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler and Ross Macdonald. A study of their works should provide a valuable insight into the structure of their patterns and how they are made to work to the public's satisfaction. After all, the one indisputable and verifiable matter in the whole business is that these sort of texts appeal to great numbers of people who read them because they enjoy reading them. Some of the interesting questions thus revolve around the issue of why these fictions are so well liked.

However, a study of literary formulas assumes the necessity of demonstrating what those particular formulas are. There are three predominating structures which, to my mind, build this kind of fiction into its finished shape. Firstly, there are the comfort factors which offer the reader a sense of security. Secondly, there is their sense of moral fantasy which allows the reader to escape from the confines of their everyday lives. And thirdly, in the best of these works, there is some element of the new and/or the unconventional, often in the form of social and political criticism encapsulated within the safe formulas of the text. This adds the necessary spice to the life of the construct. Cawelti wrote:

> In general, the most significant formulaic artists are those who effectively solve these problems in a way that balance the claims of escapism and the fulfilment of a conventional experience with the artistic interests of revitalised stereotypes, some degree of originality, and as much plausibility as the boundaries of the formula will permit. (ADVENTURE, MYSTERY AND ROMANCE: 20)

However, just before I go any further I would like to address the question I raised earlier of a literary perception of the value of works of this nature. As I said, popular fiction is often regarded, to its detriment, only to be critically interesting because of what it has to say about public attitudes and motives. It might be possible to leave aside for one moment the question of whether one can actually disentangle, to any good purpose, what is culturally important from that which is of literary worth. I am going to suppose that a great deal of harm has been done to the study of literature by the forced separation of the so-called 'art-novel' from so-called 'pulp fiction'. It, also, seems to be a completely pointless exercise.

Therefore, I am prepared to argue that popular fiction, that which is read by the increasingly diminishing reading public, can also be of enormous artistic significance and that too easy a classification into various genres according to a deemed standard of academic and literary worth is dangerous. Firstly it can lead to works being overlooked simply because they are presumed to be of little substance because they are enjoyed by those who read to relax. Secondly, and to quote David Lodge from his essay on STRUCTURAL DEFECTS: " a very unhealthy gap has opened up between educated discourse inside and outside the academy." (from WRITE ON: OCCASIONAL ESSAYS: 113)

Now Lodge wrote that in 1980 and I think that the "gap' is beginning to close. But it does sometimes seem as though it will not close fast enough to save the study of Literature as a viable proposition. Lodge argues that this "gap" was brought into being by "what is loosely called structuralism." (113) He writes that the most important

> trail blazing criticism now being produced is written in a style that is impenetrable to the layman. To paraphrase Yeats, the most readable critics lack all conviction and the least are full of passionate intensity. --- If you know what structuralism is, and names like Levy-Straus, Barthes, Lacan, Derrida, mean anything to you, --- you are in higher education on the humanities side, or not long out of it, ---. (113)

Well structuralism certainly did not help the situation as the following line of argument should serve to make clear. Todorov's approach to literary criticism is supposed to exemplify the characteristic structuralist pursuit of explanatory models with which masses of literary data can be classified and explained. He wrote, in his work on the TYPOLOGY OF DETECTIVE FICTION

> every great work establishes the existence of two genres, the reality of two norms, that of the literature it transgresses, which dominated the preceding literature, and that of the genre

it creates.---There is a happy realm where this dialectical contradiction between the work and its genre does not exist: that of popular fiction. As a rule, the literary masterpiece does not enter into any genre save perhaps its own; but the masterpiece of popular literature is precisely the book which best fits its genre. Detective fiction has its norms; to develop them is also to disappoint them; to improve upon detective fiction is to write 'literature,' not detective fiction. The whodunit par excellence is not one which transgresses the rules of the genre, but the one which conforms to them: NO ORCHIDS FOR MISS BLANDISH is an incarnation of its genre, not a transcendence. This is a generally unnoticed phenomenon, whose consequences affect every aesthetic category. --- the same measurements do not apply to 'high' art and 'popular' art. ---It is no accident, it seems to me, that the reader habitually considers novels such as those I have just mentioned (Francis Iles' PREMEDITATION and Patricia Highsmith's THE TALENTED MR RIPLEY) marginal to the genre, an intermediary form between detective fiction and the novel itself. (from MODERN CRITICISM AND THEORY:: 158-165)

Todorov makes some valid points, not the least of which is the attention he draws to the disparate perceptions of 'high' and 'popular' art. However, in order to justify this he puts forward the proposition that 'popular' art is at its best when it conforms absolutely to the restrictions of its formulaic structure. The whole basis of his argument is that it matters how books are classified. We have to accept that initiating premise if the argument is going to make any sense at all. If you cannot, and I cannot, then the whole pack of cards collapses. And the only way I could see to justify placing Chase at the top of any list is to base that decision on the kind of arguments Todorov proposes. His conclusion already negates his argument because Chase is not as satisfying a writer as Hammett or Chandler. I use the word satisfying with due care and attention because these works are supposed to satisfy their readers. Also, and after all, that is what Todorov appears to be talking about.

Secondly, Todorov wrote that "it is no accident that readers" habitually consider novels which defy classification marginal to the genre. I do not know which readers he is talking about. This whole argument is about "popular' fiction, the fiction which is read by the general mass of the population for pleasure and, as Cawelti has pointed out, the most successful formulaic writers are those who employ some degree of originality. It can only be presumed that Todorov is redefining all readers of 'popular' fiction into children who want only the soporific of exactly the same story over and over again. This might be considered mildly offensive.

On the other hand, he may be supposing that this is the criterion which academics, of one form or another, would apply. His argument, thus, would appear to run that if a formulaic text has something

out of the ordinary to say then it must be literature which is, ipso facto, not formulaic fiction. We are back to the initiating premise that it is of some necessary worth to classify texts precisely as to their type. It does sometimes seem as though the pursuit of explanatory models is a bit like doing crossword puzzles. It may be 'fun' for the person doing the puzzle. However, it is only a game and as such, is of no practical consequence whatsoever to anyone else.

In any event, it could be argued that Lodge's "gap" opened as long ago as the turn of this century when there was a perceived split between those who are now defined as the 'modernists' and those who became known as the 'contemporaries'. This, of course being, to a large extent, the difference between the fiction read by the general populace and the fiction admired by a self-styled 'literary elite'. Jameson did write, in his work on THE POLITICS OF IDEOLOGY; IDEOLOGICAL POSITIONS IN THE POSTMODERNISM DEBATE, that "Zola may be taken as the marker for the last coexistence of the art novel and the best-seller to be within a single text." (382)

Anyway, the purpose of this study is not to worry unduly about why or when this particular state of affairs came into being, but to accept that is has, and to question the validity of the distinction, and just what it is supposed to achieve. In other words, what is it precisely that a critic can discover that is worthwhile about the 'art' novel which s/he cannot extrapolate from a work of popular fiction.

Firstly, many of these stories are as stylistically complex, by which I mean their use of language to effect and their use of structure to purpose, as any of their relatives usually deemed to be more worthy of academic consideration. Secondly, successful formulaic fiction explores a tension between fantasy and culture, between the acceptable and the unacceptable, in ways that no other fiction allows. Thirdly, (and apart from anything else) removing a study from the common interests of the day, thus in essence treating that interest as though it were at best irrelevant, or at worst contemptible, does not appear to be practical politics. It seems to be a very odd way of going about matters. It might be presumed to ask rather more of the human race than it could reasonably be expected to bear with grace. After all, why should the public continue to support a discipline that appears to be deliberately removed from any issue (or form of language) which relates to their every day lives.

And lastly, but not leastly, it could be argued that formulaic fiction is as accessible, and has been proven to be as accessible, to critical penetration as any other kind of fiction. Todorov should have provided some sort of insight into structuralist criticism. However, Cawelti has distinguished three main approaches which have been widely applied to explain the cultural functions or significance of

this literature. "These may be loosely characterised as (1) impact or effect theories; (2) deterministic theories and; (3) symbolic or reflexive theories. "(22)

Impact theories are largely discredited but I think that the ideas embodied within them still deserve some consideration; particularly because this is a study of 'popular' fiction. I, also, suppose that they are implicit to a good deal more critical theory than is generally supposed. Anyway, I am going to try to dissect some of their concerns later. Deterministic theories, Cawelti defines as being from Marxist or Freudian school of thought, and I am going to submit some of them later when I enter into the question of acceptable moral fantasy.

The third approach is the one which Cawelti himself favours. I do not intend to walk down exactly the same road as he does. However, I am starting from the same basic premise. That is to say, these stories reflect or symbolise their reader's cultural perceptions of enjoyable moral fantasy.

Comfort Factors: The Well Worn Slipper

The comfort of the familiar is a fairly well recognised phenomenon. Children learn new things about the world and the people in it from books. However, and as anyone who has ever had to read the same story over and over again to any child will know to their cost, children also love and find great comfort in the repetition of the familiar. Adults do not usually read the same book to the point of stupefaction but they often read the same sort of text. They continue to find a delight in familiar types of construct which promise them that, when they enter into a particular kind of text, they can expect to get certain matters out of it. Books are, naturally enough, carefully packaged and jacketed so as to provide useful clues as to their contents. For instance, anybody buying a book which has a well-dressed woman on the cover wearing a large hat and a great deal of jewellery or, in the past, showing a great deal of bosom and leaning over a castle wall, would be entitled to feel a bit peeved if they get home and find they have acquired the likes of Dashiell Hammett's RED HARVEST. They would probably be even more annoyed if they discovered that they have bought something written by Thomas Pynchon. This is despite the fact that such a cover could be entirely appropriate to the content of the novel. The public expects publishers to signal quite clearly what kind of text they are offering. There are definite conventions which govern the presentation of the love story, of crime fiction, and of social melodrama; as well as some fascinating variations in covers according to where the publisher has decided to grade the fiction on offer in some pre-determined scale of merit between 'classics' and 'trash'. All of which merely goes to prove my point that many people buy fiction because they want the comfort of a familiar formula, do not want any unpleasant surprises, and that this desire is well understood and catered for by the publishing industry.

There are, of course, many other comfort factors to successful formulaic fiction. The two most obvious are, what I am going to call, the comfort of place and the comfort of the resolution of these texts. Part of the charm of the great writers of the 'classical detective story', Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers and Margery Allingham, is their portrayal of the stable and restricted world of the country houses of England. Their characters are drawn as though they rest at peace within the comfortable arms of the class system. Everybody knew their place and only the criminal elements tried to get themselves out of the hole that God had ordained for them. I am not going to write about these writers in any depth, although they are of obvious value for this kind of study, because I find the likes of Agatha Christie virtually unreadable. And Sayers' and Allingham's unqualified acceptance of the English class system as the best of all possible worlds began to annoy me to the detriment of any pleasure I could find in their work rather more years ago than I care to remember. However, this sense of place is an important element in the backdrop to nearly all varieties of popular formulaic fiction. It is 'place' that is 'tidier than life'. It brings back memories of the kind of books many of us used to read as children. Daffodils bloomed right through the Spring. It never rained in Summer.

Autumn was always bonfire night and the snow always lay thick on the ground at Christmas. Naturally enough all this could be said to be somewhat confusing to those born in the Southern hemisphere. On the other hand most even quite young children seem to be able to accept it for what it is. That is to say 'make believe'.

Thus, these writers are a useful guide because they do signify the importance of the formula of place; and they also specify this setting for precisely what it is. That is to say an invention. The houses and villages of Christie's England never existed. Not many people would care to dispute that. However, the public's perception seems to change when fiction moved away from the cosy fictions of country life in England and into the 'mean streets' that Chandler is so often quoted as designating as the initiating premise to his fiction. The equation seems to be worked through the theorem that any kind of slightly sordid detail makes it 'real'.

John Williams, in his introduction to INTO THE BADLANDS explains the attraction, and perhaps the misconception, of this sort of evocation of place as well as anyone has done. He says

> I wrote this book because I wanted to go to America. I wrote about crime writers because it is largely due to them that I wanted to go to America. It seems to me that crime writers are the most astute chroniclers of America today ---. Elmore Leonard made me want to go to Miami Beach, reading James Crumley made me want to go to Montana, reading Sarah Paretsky made me want to go to Chicago. And so on. Not that they portrayed these places as necessarily lovely but because they portrayed them as always alive." (7-9)

And that, of course is precisely the point. These writers make their 'places' larger than life. They fire a vibrancy into their imaginary structures.

In any event, it may be worthwhile to look at these two disparate descriptions of Bourbon Street in New Orleans. The first is taken from THE NEON RAIN by James Lee Burke. The second comes from INTO THE BADLANDS. Burke was, naturally enough, one of the writers Williams went to see when he visited America. A good deal of the power behind Burke's work lies within his hauntingly lyrical delineation of his Louisiana settings and the 'larger than life', or perhaps one should really say 'simpler than life' mythology he constructs out of Louisiana's past and her culture heritage. The easiest way to define this is to say that, ugly as a good many things are that Burke writes about, he romanticises his background because his words sing out the message of its culture. It is the same old story. It is not what he says but the way that he says it

It was hazy and bright when we drove through into the quarter. There was no breeze, and the palm fronds and the banana trees were green and motionless in the heat. As always, the quarter smelled to me like the small Creole town on Bayou Teche where I was born: the watermelons, cantaloupes, and strawberries stacked in crates under the scrolled colonnades, the sour wine and beer and sawdust in the bars; the poor-boy sandwiches dripping with shrimp and oysters; the cool, dank smell of old brick in the alleyways.

A few genuine bohemians, artists, and painters still lived in the Quarter, and some professional people paid exorbitant rents for refurbished apartments near Jackson Square, but the majority of Vieux Carre residents were transvestites, junkies, winos, prostitutes, hustlers of every stripe, and burnt-out acidhead and street people left over from the 1960's. Most of these people made their living off middle-class conventioneers and Midwestern families who strolled down Bourbon Street, camera hanging from their necks, as though they were on a visit to the zoo. (Burke: 9)

This is the description of a place that is full of local colour. It may not be beautiful; but it is certainly 'alive'.

On the other hand Williams wrote, in his chapter SOUTHERN LOUISIANA: TELL IT LIKE IT IS:

Within three hours of arriving at New Orleans Airport I'm walking down Bourbon Street. Bourbon Street is a kind of Dixieland Canarby Street, offering a titillating whiff of debauchery for tourists from the Mid-West. For five or six blocks the three main businesses are bars, novelty T-shirt shops and strip clubs. Tourists are expected to file an itinerary along the lines of get drunk, buy a stupid T-shirt, get even more drunk and go to a strip show.

I do my best. Drinking can be done either indoors at inflated prices or alfresco from go-cups filled with either beer or a sickly local concoction called a Hurricane which is alleged to be a N'Awlins (as tourists are ordered to refer to New Orleans, to make us feel in the swing of thing or something) Tradition and appears to made from dark rum and sugar, both in lethal proportions. On spotting an Oirish-style pub, however, I experience a sudden yen for a glass of Guinness, so in I go to enjoy an overpriced and indifferently kept sip of stout while listening to a band dressed in Nashville cowboy outfits declare that they'll play the wild rover no more, and generally express their longing to return to Erin's green shore.

A little of this goes a long way at this remove from Tipperary and soon I'm back on the streets savouring the strains of 'When the saints go marching in' piped out from the novelty

> shops. I can't work up much enthusiasm for the souvenirs, which are tacky in a disappointingly half-hearted kind of way, Stroll further along Bourbon and I'm enticed into another bar by its relatively downbeat appearance and the sound of R&B percolating on to the street. Inside, though, its much like the rest of Bourbon: the waitress hits you for your two-drink minimum within seconds and the R&B group prove to be a bunch of young black guys trying not to yawn as they wade through a selection of the kind of 1960's soul numbers likely to appeal to white college kids who think the Blues Brothers invented funk. (Williams: 43/44)

Bourbon Street, in this incarnation, is about as vibrant as Disney World. You can almost smell Williams's disappointment dripping of the page. It reads like a bad second-rate imitation of the world Burke brought into being. Yet, they are both, obviously, writing about the same place. However, the truth is that Burke gave even its tackiness a golden glow, and that glow is both the comfort and the excitement of popular formulaic fiction. Not all the writers of crime fiction achieve this as musically as Burke does. However, one way or another, they all either impart an artificial light to the framework of their fiction or are struggling to do so. And it does not matter how sordid, or whatever, their settings are meant to be.

And very often, when critics draw attention to what they deem to be the 'realism' of crime fiction, it is the plausibility of the settings they are referring to. "It has become almost a cliché to commend them for their sense of place." (Williams: 9) It is almost as though the mention of an verifiable street name or district, and a little bit of maybe genuine local colour, imparts an authenticity to designation which, I hope, John William's example of Bourbon Street demonstrates as being without any necessary foundation. On the other hand, the comfort to the whole business is that no reader is going to be bored by these settings which sing out the message of their day-to-day living. Who needs the language of the prosaic when it all sounds so much better backed by the beat of the rhythm and blues? This is supposed to be escapist literature. It is not constructed to leave readers staring miserably into their own back yard.

In any event, one other pre-dominating comfort factor to this kind of fiction is that it always reaches a resolution but, and this is the essence of its soothing qualities, it is a small resolution which does not pretend to be more than it is. For instance, a crime has been committed. By the end of the book the reader is going to know why that crime was committed and who was responsible for it. However, it is a demonstratively fictive world and nobody is pretending to solve the problems of the universe. These fictions are conclusive but they are neither decisive nor final. They work within a different level of expectation.

This could perhaps best be delineated through contrast with other texts that have 'happy' or well ordered endings. Barthes wrote:

> Expectation thus becomes the basic condition of truth; truth these narratives tell us is what is at the end of expectation. This design brings narrative very close to the rite of initiation (a long path marked with pitfalls, obscurities, stops, suddenly comes out into light); it implies a return to order, for expectation is disorder: disorder is supplementary, it is what is forever added without solving anything, without finishing anything; order is complementary, it completes, fills up, saturates, and dismisses everything that risks adding on: truth is what completes, what closes. (Barthes: S/Z: 76)

Readers of the greater bulk of nineteenth century 'realistic' texts, also, reached towards the end of the book secure in the knowledge that the final chapters would explain everything that needed to be explained. However, the authority of these novels, even though they were often the popular fictions of their day, was very different from the authority of popular fiction in the twentieth century. I am using the word authority in a sense which closely approximates, I think, to what Barthes meant by 'truth'. The sense of this particular meaning is in the relationship between the reader and the text. Marriage was, as often as not, part of the return to order in the nineteenth century fiction, and usually at the end of a novel which posed a good many more questions than this sort of answer could satisfy. Ian Watts has written in THE RISE OF THE NOVEL about

> the tremendous fascination of marriage and every detail connected with it for the heroine; but this emphasis is complemented by another - an equally striking horror of any sexual advance or reference until the conjugal knot is tied. Both these tendencies are typical of Puritanism ---. The assimilation of the values of courtly love to marriage --- occurred particularly early in England, and was closely connected with the Puritan movement. Not, of course, that the Puritans approved of romantic love, but its individualistic and anti-ecclesiastical type of religion caused it to attribute supreme spiritual importance to the relation of man to wife ---. The two attitudes, of course, ---are in no sense exclusively Puritan, and are found among many other Protestant sects. The idealisation of marriage is, however, distinctly Protestant, since in the Roman Catholicism the highest religious values are connected with celibacy ---" (155)

I am not holding out any brief for celibacy but Puritanism and/or Protestantism has a good deal to answer for as well. Thus, if a text uses marriage in the Barthesian sense to complete and close the text, given the mythology which surrounded marriage at that time, then it imposes a problematic into that text. This, in its turn, may prove to be uncomfortable for any reader who remains unconvinced about the efficacy of that institution to cure all ills. It was a literary convention or formula, still is in

many ways, and is sanctioned within that construction. However, and this is the reason for comparing the closure of marriage with the closures inherent to crime fiction. Marriage and attitudes towards marriage (as Ian Watts sought to demonstrate) could be said to be one of the central political and social issues of the protestant world from the eighteenth century onwards. Crime, and attitudes towards crime, tend to be one of the over-riding political and social concerns of the twentieth century. So we will leave aside for the time being, any necessary or perceived distinction in literary worth between the classical or art, text before the turn of this century, and popular formulaic fiction after that cut off date. It could be argued that the greatest disparity between these two lies, from the point of view of content, in the authority of their deemed resolutions. Both sets of fiction can, and often do, address extremely consequential issues. However, marriage is a social resolution, and applied as it was applied in the classical nineteenth century text, it endorses the mythology of a particular social structure and, thus, the perceived wisdom of the day. The single hero/ine of 'hard boiled' crime fiction is, on the other hand, absolutely on his/her own and very often works against the perceived wisdom of his/her day. The incorruptible detective is as improbable as an incorruptible marriage, but the concept, being perceptually and essentially anti-social, does not carry the whole weight and consequence of the ethical and social mores of its day. Marriage, as written then, was a moral signifier. The detective is a moral fantasy. It is both implicit and explicit in a good deal of 18th century and 19th century fiction that readers believed in, and should believe in, the sanctity of marriage. Nobody in his or her right minds takes the concept of an incorruptible private eye seriously.

Thus, it could be argued that the road that Barthes' map directs, specifying the route of the inter-relationship between the function of expectation and the function of the resolution of the text, ends up in a settlement which is qualitatively very disparate when imposed on the classical 'high' culture novel; as distinct from when it is applied to the formulaic structure of 'hard-boiled' crime fiction. The latter ends with a closure which is very different, in significance and authority and 'truth', from the resolutions which conclude the great tradition of literature written in the nineteenth century.

And therein lies their comfort factor. The consumption of this kind of fiction is, frequently, a matter of conscious choice. Those of us who do not feel in the mood, for whatever reason, to engage with philosophical beliefs which displease our own moral or ethical structure, but who do not relish lying awake knowing that we are just any old creature on an insignificant star, briefly circling in no particular place to no good intent and to no necessary purpose, may very well chose a 'quick fix'. That is to say, the conclusion which is not conclusive, or the short-term resolution, which is no solution at all, of the 'hard-boiled' thriller. The best of them are clever enough to hold their reader's attention because their problems are plausible enough, engage with social and political issues of sufficient importance, but the answers explain the simple mystery of the text and nothing of any

other consequence whatsoever. This is one of the reasons why these texts are often called escapist or defined as opiates. However, and this what I would argue is a greater part of their success, they are texts, which as a very part of their construct, draw attention to their partial qualities. They state, within the limitations of their formulaic construct, that they are only pretending to offer a very limited solution. Thus, they do not impose on their fantastical structure any pretensions to any larger design which could or would cause the discomfort which the art-novel, or inadequate texts with serious and literary delusions of grandeur, inflict upon their victims. The best crime fiction only promises to reveal 'who did it?' It does not offer 'happy ever after'. It gives us, within the context of its own rules, a plausible resolution we can believe in. Nobody is expected to swallow a whole philosophy. The fantasy of moral order, of truth and justice, is reinstated by the temporary illusion of a single incorruptible being in a corrupt society. This is not the full-blown moral fantasy about the ultimate competence of a particular ethical structure, be it christian redemption, or socialism, or laissez-faire economics, or the spiritual worth of marriage, or whatever. There is a very great comfort to not being expected to bite off more than one can reasonably be expected to swallow with ease.

So, popular formulaic fiction imposes various comfortable or soothing patterns upon its construct. It promises that it will deliver the kind of familiar story inherent to its structure. It undertakes to give local colour which is colourful. It delivers a resolution which is of no greater consequence than its content can uphold. However, the quintessence of these fantastic stories is that they transcend the boundaries of the frustrations of ordinary life by offering the moral fantasy of a world which is more exiting, more fulfilling and, in particular, more benevolent than the prosaic reality of the everyday. On the other hand, the best crime writers are not just full of sugar and spice. They often seem to write from a position of an intense and private despair which is evidenced from the limited material they choose to engage with. The restrictions innate to the form signify the inadequacy of all human resolution. However, it is within the interplay between the formula and their own personal concerns that their artistry, their originality, lies.

Moral Fantasy: Or To Trip The Light Fantastic

Cawelti has laid down three specific formulaic patterns and the moral fantasies they incorporate.

> If we look at the enormous variety of literary formulas, certain general principles seem to emerge. Many types of story centre on heroic action, and these are quite different from stories where the chief interest lies in how a girl meets a boy and love is born. Still another kind of story focuses on the unravelling of some kind of mystery, and while it may very well contain elements of both heroism and romance, these are clearly subordinated to the search for truth. Other types of stories derive their fascination from the imaginary encounter with some monster or situation of fantasy." (Cawelti: 37)

The particular story-type of the 'hard-boiled' thriller composes itself around two essential structures which remain constant; despite all the other necessary differences between authors and genres. The basic premise is the pursuit of truth; and the truth is in the hands of a 'tough-guy' hero/ine who is world weary and as hard as nails. However they are also, one way or the other, vulnerable and incorruptible.

Thus, both the truth and the hero/ine are the structures which encompass and define the moral fantasy. They combine with the character and background of the text to provide the tensile strength necessary to support that element of surprise which is the space in which the significant writer can make his/her mark. That is to say, both from within and from without his/her formulaic structure. On the other hand, there is always angst and there is always trauma. The force of the fiction strains between the excitement and disorder of the traumatic event and the well ordered benevolent moral fantasy embraced by the heroic resolution. This is where these texts are so very different, so satisfactory, compared to the art of the 'classical detective story.' The art of literary escapism involves catering to two conflicting needs. The first is to escape the boredom of our everyday lives. The second is to escape the fears of our everyday lives. Harry Berger delineated these opposing desires when he wrote in, "NAIVE CONSCIOUSNESS AND CULTURE CHANGE: AN ESSAY IN HISTORICAL STRUCTURALISM: Man has two primal needs.

> First is a need for order, peace, and security, for protection against the terror and confusion of life, for a familiar and predictable world, and for a life which is happily more of the same ---but the second primal impulse is contrary to the first: man positively needs anxiety and uncertainty, thrives on confusion and risk, wants trouble, tension, jeopardy, novelty, mystery, would be lost without enemies, is sometimes happiest when most miserable.

> Human spontaneity is eaten away by sameness; man is the animal most expert at being bored."(35)

The trouble with the moral fantasy innate to the classical 'country-house murder' fiction is that it is far too cosy and self-satisfied. It revolves, largely, around a very clear moral distinction between the 'detective' and the criminal. It is a benevolent world to be sure, but is too benevolent to be in least exiting. The whole production is incapable of incorporating a serious disturbance. The reader is presented with an immunised detective and a sanitised social environment. The bulk of the texts stick very close to their initiating formulae. They, very obviously, satisfy their own kind of clientele. On the other hand, they are too saccharine (and too politically correct or incorrect dependant on your point of view) to offer much as far as I am concerned. Their sole point of interest lies in the ingenuity of the pursued and the pursuer. They tend to be worked, largely speaking, within the stereotypical characters of 1920's drawing-room comedies. Their construct allows for no angst.

However, they do seem to be particularly open to a variety of psychoanalytical critical insights. Freud did like Dorothy Sayers and saw an angst or a dynamic in her writing which I can not find. I am not certain whether to find that a point in her favour or not. On the other hand Julian Symons details the following arguments in BLOODY MURDER when he tries to answer the vexed question of why so many mostly respectable people want stories in which the heroes do things that the readers would strongly disapprove of in real life. Many of these deterministic arguments are of obvious relevance to the whole field of the cultural significance of this form of literature which, in its turn, goes some way towards explaining the dynamic of the moral fantasy inherent to its popular appeal.

Symons supposed that

> the first psychiatric piece of interest on the 'detective novel' is Dr Leopold Bellak's ON THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DETECTIVE STORIES AND RELATED PROBLEMS, written in 1945. Dr Bellack says about the content of detective stories that 'the criminal and aggressive proceedings permit a fantasy gratification of id impulses.' In other words, first the reader is permitted to identify with the criminal. This can safely be done because 'it (the story) is sufficiently removed from reality, and because soon the super-ego is satisfied that the detective and punishment will follow.' (19)

Symons then, quite rightly, points out that this may be true of detective stories circa 1945 and earlier, but different fantasies are often fulfilled according to the climate of the times. He describes Dr Bellak

work as full of "fairly elementary insights." I am not even that sure that I find it of an elementary value. Punishment, as a viable proposition, hardly entered most of the detective fiction that was written between the wars in England. The murderer/ess tends to fade from view. The rather unpleasant details of the actual punishment are very definitely avoided. Thus it is not punishment which is being deliberated upon, but the comforting fiction of justice prevailing whilst nobody gets badly hurt, on stage at least, in the process. Secondly, the reader is offered very little opportunity to identify with the criminal, who is often so badly drawn as to be largely incomprehensible. Cawelti writes

> in Sayers English village evil seems to defined more in terms of nasty aggressive members of the lower classes trying to punch their way up the social scale than as the more universally meaningful sense of mystery and evil ------." (ADVENTURE, MYSTERY, AND ROMANCE: 125)

This is, of course, what I cannot in the end swallow about this kind of fiction. It discomforts me. On the other hand, it could be argued that the comforting moral fantasy that justice can be done without anybody getting seriously hurt, and that all criminal are only people who do not know their place, does have something quite fascinating to say about the social or psychological needs of those who consume these texts.

However Symons also quotes from Charles Rycroft's article in the PSYCHOANALYTICAL QUARTERLY in 1957, and he presume this argument to provide a far more valuable psychoanalytical insight.

> Rycroft begins by considering the hypothesis of another psychoanalyst, Gereldine Pederson-krag, that the detective story has its origins in the 'primal scene' of infancy. The murder represents parental intercourse, the victim is the parent, and the clues are representations of mysterious 'nocturnal sounds, stains and incomprehensible adult jokes.' The reader, according to Pederson-krag, satisfied infantile curiosity by becoming the detective, thus 'redressing completely the helpless inadequacy and unconscious guilt unconsciously remembered from childhood.'(19)

Symons stipulates that Rycroft adds an interesting gloss to this idea:

> If the victim is the parent, who is the criminal? He must personify the reader's own unavowed hostility towards that parent. Thus the reader is not only the detective; he is also

> the criminal, and in the ideal detective story the detective or hero would discover that he is the criminal for whom he has been seeking. (19)

This last is, I would suggest, a rather more useful insight when it serves the purpose of delineating the 'hard boiled' genre. The detective and the criminal are so often shown to be two sides of the same coin. This is the kind of thing one must, of course, examine because there can be no doubt that it is a phenomena worthy of exploration that almost the most popular kind of fiction today, and this has been so for some time, revolves around issues of crime and justice. On the other hand, I have always found it difficult to accept that all human behaviour is generated by unresolved childhood conflicts. It may very well be so but it seems to be a singularly useless piece of information It results in another one of these circular arguments which presume an initiating premise, like Todorov's, which is open to dispute. I would argue that the moral fantasy innate to the detective story satisfies a different need, as deep-rooted in infancy as any of the above, because there is one important signifier which Rycroft, probably through a lack of familiarity with the form, seems to be unaware of:

> in some periods the crime story has followed the pattern he suggests. In early crime fiction, and in much recent work the hero is often identified with the criminal, and in much recent work the hero is the criminal, or pretends to be a criminal, or behaves like a criminal." (20)

This is, to my mind, the fascination of these texts. They examine the fine but finite line between perceptions of moral and immoral conduct and between judgement and justice. The last two, of course, frequently bear no relationship to one another at all.

Consequently, the only insight I find particularly useful about this line of criticism is Roy Fuller's inter-connection between the 'detective story' and the Oedipus myth, and I intend to come in from a completely different angle. The Oedipus myth has been asked to carry the burden of so much re-interpretation that it has almost been squashed out of all recognisable form already. I cannot see why I should not add to its afflictions. It is normally supposed to interpret all sorts of hidden guilt. However, it could be argued, its most constructive intuition is into the absolutely arbitrary nature, the sheer bloody-mindedness (so to speak) of fate. The injustice of the whole matter is what bothers me. At what stage was Oedipus, who believed that he had left his destiny far behind him (supposing so in all good faith and according to the evidence as he understood it to be), going to presume that it was going to turn up and meet him again in a strange country? The whole point to the Oedipus myth, as far as I am concerned, is that Oedipus was not given a 'fair crack at the whip'. I really

cannot say too much about the fantasies of infants. I can say with a great deal of certainty that the most urgent cry I have ever heard, and it goes from the cradle to the grave, is that there is no justice in this world. Life is 'just not fair'. The whole mythology of a christian God surrounds the pivotal point that s/he will offer perfect justice. Everyone is going to be treated according to their just desserts, not only as the world judges these things, but also according to one who is uniquely able to make an absolutely impartial decision. It may be possible to presume that the whole myth gets a little difficult to swallow in places. However, it does demonstrate that the concept of a perfect and rational justice is an urgent desire of the whole human race. It is also, of course, the pursuit of the unobtainable and, it could be argued, only fiction can supply anything of the kind.

Therefore, I would argue that the increasing popularity of books to do with crime and punishment, and the increasingly ambivalent moral stature of the driving force of the resolution and order of the text, is because of a deep-seated cultural and psychological need, in the western world to believe that there can be justice on this earth. As God fades away as a paying proposition this want becomes ever more deeply felt. Crime fictions accept that they cannot right the evils of the world; but they offer the moral fantasy of justice. They pander to a more over-riding demand than the desire of the infant to detect the crimes of the parent. They promise that there can be order, and that there can be 'truth', and that all problems have rational solution. The world ceases to be a place without any due cause within the comforting fiction of the formulaic mystery text. That is to say, even if that order can only be found between the covers of a book.

On the other hand, the whole world of moral fantasy can be said to be fraught with danger because it can become overlaid with concepts of moral worth; and moral worth is what lies at the heart of every debate about, what Cawelti called, impact theories. In other words, theories which revolve around suppositions that fictional patterns of behaviour can have some direct impact on human behaviour. Ian Watts, writing about Richardson's PAMELA, identifies some of these problems, as they are perceived to be. And Pamela is always worth looking at because it laid down so many of the formulas which still govern popular fiction today.

> The story of PAMELA, of course, is a modern variant of the age-old Cinderella theme. As the original occupations of both heroines suggest, both stories are essentially compensations for the monotonous drudgery and limited perspectives of ordinary domestic life. By projecting themselves into the position of the heroine the readers of Pamela were able to change the impersonality and boredom of the actual world into a gratifying pattern whose every element was converted into something that gave excitement and admiration and love. --- This combination of romance and formal realism applied both to external actions and inward feelings is the formula which explains the power of the popular novel; it

satisfies the romantic aspirations of its reader in a literary guide which gives so full a background and so complete an account of the minute-by-minute details of thought and sentiment that what is fundamentally an unreal flattery of the reader's dreams appears to be the literal truth. For this reason, the popular novel is obviously liable to a severe moral censure where the fairy story or the romance is not: it pretends to be something else, and, mainly owing to the new powers which accrued to formal realism as a result of the subjective direction which Richardson gave it, it confuses the differences between reality and the dream more insidiously than any previous fiction." (THE RISE OF THE NOVEL: 205)

Now, despite the collapse of 'realism' as a valuable distinguishing term, its tenets are still implicit to a good deal of critical theory. Also, it is a word which has been very commonly applied to works of crime fiction, and in particular to those novels which have been defined as being within the 'hard-boiled detective' genre.

'Realistic' or 'realism' has now become a word fraught with danger. Critics and academics tend to use the word to define a particular style and type of writing which engages with its fictive construct in a certain, and clearly demarcated, method. This is what Ian Watts has delineated as 'formal realism'. That is all quite straightforward. The problem arises because critics seem to suppose that most readers use the word 'realistic' as though it meant they believed everything they read in print or see on film or on the stage. It could be argued that non-academics employ the term as though it were synonymous with plausible and, it is possible to assume, all they mean by it is that some part of the fiction is a matter which they can identify with and make a sense out of. It is one other area where an academic perception of popular belief can only alienate the so-called general public. Many academics and critics seem to argue as though the public is incapable of perceiving the difference between a moral fantasy and the way most people are able to live their lives. My earlier quotation from Barthes is one example.

Thus, when Ian Watts uses an adverb like 'insidiously' he is really engaging with impact theory. He appears to presume that some readers would confuse the fictive fantasy with the 'reality' or the realisable. The current tendency for books and films who have serious ambitions to be considered as 'art' forms and, thus, loudly stand up and proclaim their fictionality at the slightest opportunity, seems to stem from the same sort of belief. It hardly seems necessary.

On the other hand, I have suggested that, the successful formulas that Richardson developed and

that Watts defined in the above quotation, can still be taken as the blueprint for many of the formulas still in use today. Richardson purported to reveal Pamela's subjective mind. Readers were able to follow the intricacies of her thoughts and fears, her motives and emotions because every intimate detail is carefully laid out on the page for examination. No reader is going to empathise seriously with a cardboard cut out. Readers need sufficient, and personal, particulars to reconstruct imaginatively a fiction into an identifiable object. Secondly, Richardson delineated place as a recognisable social construct. Thirdly, he used the familiar language of everyday converse. Thus some of Richardson's representations, formulas for 'formal realism', could translate into replicas of matters which readers could verify as being an authentic part of their own experience. This is the insidious nature, the fundamental deceit, of the formulaic construct of Watts' 'formal realism'. The improbable story, grounded in plausible background, becomes probable. It is on the same principle as the old saw that the best lies contain a kernel of the truth. On the other hand, I do think that it is possible to presume, as Samuel Johnson did (and I do not mind stating the obvious any more than he did because sometimes it needs to be said), that the truth is that

> the spectators are always in their senses, and know from the first act to the last, that the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players." (THE PREFACE TO SHAKESPEARE: from THE NORTON ANTHOLOGY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE: fifth edition: VOLUME 1: 2415)

In any event, many of the following critics seem to suppose that there is some inter-relationship between 'realism' and a carefully contrived verisimilitude. Hammett, in particular, appears to attract criticism of this sort but Chandler is the one who really suffered as a result of it. Later I hope to demonstrate just how alive the critical perception of 'realism' still is and how dangerous the academic perception is that they know the mind of the public rather better than the public does.

In any event, Peter Wolfe says that Hammett "wrote about what he did or about what he knew. --- This new realism, more than anything else, has won him acceptance as --- America's most important detective writer since Poe " (BEAMS FALLING: 4)

W F Nolan wrote about Hammett's 'objective realism.' (DASHIELL HAMMETT: A CASEBOOK: 3) Ellery Queen said that if they agreed about nothing else 'historians of the detective story at least concur on the view that Hammett was a realist.' (FROM THE GOLDEN AGE TO THE MEAN STREETS: 78) These sorts of views are usually propounded because Hammett wrote about gangsterism and corruption. They are thus holding to a version of 'realism' which seems to suppose that anything which describes the seamy side of life could be properly defined as 'realistic'. However, H R F Keating argues that RED HARVEST despite an

> almost fairytale unlikeliness, --- is splendidly real. --- it could be described as an example before its time of late twentieth century 'magic realism'. Hammett discovered for it a power of visual description not only riveting in itself but laying out characters in front of one with wonderful character." (CRIME AND MYSTERY: THE HUNDRED BEST BOOKS: 36)

I must admit that I was surprised to read that Hammett was a 'magic realist', but perhaps I have misunderstood something. Keating, also wrote that Hammett's objective was to give readers the 'real thing' (35), quoting in support of his argument Hammett's oft repeated comment that the contemporary novelist's purpose in life is to take pieces of life and arrange them on paper. 'And the more direct their passage from street to paper the more lifelike they should turn out.' (35) I wander whether Hammett ever lived to regret that statement because as Gary Day pointed out, in INVESTIGATING THE INVESTIGATOR: HAMMETT'S CONTINENTAL OP:

> There is a contradiction here between the novelist arranging things on paper, and writing them down as he sees them. If he arranges them he is not writing them down as he sees them, and if he writes them down as he sees them then he is not arranging them." (from AMERICAN CRIME FICTION: STUDIES IN THE GENRE: 39)

It can certainly be seen that writers from the 'hard-boiled' school do use Richardson's formulas to some extent. On the other hand, nobody can accuse Hammett of revealing the inner workings of the subjective consciousness of his characters in any great detail. He shows how that consciousness works. He does not delineate it in the Wattsian sense. However, the greater bulk of this kind of fiction does go some way towards structuring plausible emotional states and motivations into its constructs. It does provide a concrete background, and the language is, very clearly, the language of the streets. In other words, these texts are structured in that uneasy space between mimesis and moral fantasy, which always seems to open the door to questions of moral turpitude and/or responsibility which, indisputably, lie within the rather uncomfortable arms of 'impact theory'. However, as I have said, these theories seem to rely on a perception of public gullibility and, therefore, often appear to be addressing issues which are simply not there in the first place. I would suggest that the inter-relationship between fiction and reader is far subtler than these theories, implicit or explicit, in literary criticism allow.

Now theories of this kind are seldom applied with any vigour to literature any more but the hard-boiled thriller has translated into film probably more successfully that almost any other kind of fiction and, whilst there are obvious differences in presentation, the formulaic pattern remains the same.

That is to say, the story type which incorporates the moral fantastic that justice can prevail given a single aberrant, but heroic, figure. There are two areas of debate, in particular, which are still raging about the impact of fictional constructs. Firstly, many people still fear that there is a direct and causal connection between represented violence and violent behaviour. Secondly, the current debate in this country about life-style cigarette advertising, and the fact that many western countries have seen fit to ban such kinds of advertising, indicate that it is generally held that the image of an idealised and morally fantastic way of life, when set within a plausible framework, does have an immediate effect on behaviour.

However, what is generally held can often turn out to have no basis in, dare I say, fact:

> It was thought self-evident that the teaching and reading of great poets and prose writers would enrich not only taste or style but also moral feeling, that it would cultivate human judgement and act against barbarism. " (Steiner: TO CIVILISE OUR GENTLEMEN: 31)

This comforting and supposedly 'self-evident' fiction was dispelled for all time by the advent of the holocaust and the number of concentration camp commandants who emerged at the end of the war clutching copies of Goethe or Rilke. Thus, Steiner asks "are the humanities humane and, if so, why did they fail before the holocaust?"(35) The answer would seem to be that the humanities, per se, did not fail before the holocaust but that the study of the humanities covers an enormous field of divergent literatures, made up of many conflicting ideologies and assumptions about moral worth. Therefore, what precise moral formula was Steiner expecting people to hold onto? The more pertinent question would appear to revolve around the acceptable moral fantasies of the popular fiction of the days before and during the holocaust. It might have been a cause for comment if Hitler had risen to power in the midst of popular fictions which proposed, as their norm, the moral fantasy that the good citizen and the honourable wo/man and the efficient and successful denizen of proper behaviour was one who treated all peoples equally. That is to say, no matter what their racial type or cultural or religious background or whatever. That would have proved for all time that there was no relationship of any kind between popular fiction and cultural norms. To the best of my knowledge and belief no such fictions filled the bookshops during the years of the Third Reich. Thus, the question of the cultural significance of a given school of writing remains wide open.

Cawelti wrote that:

> impact theories are the oldest, simplest, and most widespread way in which men have defined the cultural significance of literature. Such theories assume basically that literary forms and/or contents have some direct influence on behaviour. --- The impact approach

also dominated mass communications research in its earlier years, when sociologists were primarily interested in propaganda and its effects. Propaganda research sought to show just how and in what ways a literary message could have an effect on attitudes and behaviour. This research discovered for the most part, that insofar as any effect could be isolated, propaganda simply caused people to believe and act in ways they were already predisposed toward. It became evident to most researchers in this area that their original quest for a direct link between communication and behaviour oversimplified a more complex social process. Much of the more interesting recent research has tended to focus on the process of communication rather than its impact, showing the ways in which mass communications are mediated by the social groups to which the recipient belongs, or by the different uses to which communications are put. But the more complex our view of the process of communication becomes, the less meaningful it is to speak in terms of cause and effect. ---If such reflections lead us to question the idea that literature has a direct causal effect on behaviour, this must not mean that we must take the position that literature causes nothing and is only a reflection of reality without further consequence than the evocation of some temporary state of feeling. Such a view seems as implausible as the notion that art directly and immediately changes attitudes and behaviour. One of my colleagues has often remarked that all of us carry a collection of story plots around in our heads and that we tend to see and shape life according to these plots. Something like this seems to me to be the basic kernel of truth in the impact theory. Our artistic experiences over a period of time work on the structure of our imaginations and feelings and thereby have long term effects on the way in which we understand and respond to reality---." (23/24)

Cawelti starts off by saying that impact theories are the "simplest" of all theories, but ends up by admitting that they may be the most difficult of all to analyse in depth. There does remain, always, the vexed question of what is cause and what is effect. This is seemingly impossible to resolve chicken and egg argument of the relationship between popular fiction and cultural behaviour. However, Cawelti did close by supposing that this relationship should be studied further; should be determined more conclusively. Popular fiction may not seem to have any definable short term consequences but it very probably has long term effects. Cawelti wrote:

Once we have arrived at a tentative definition of the major formulas used by a culture, we can determine which subgroups of that culture constitute the primary audiences for that formula. --- Through this process of inquiry I believe we will eventually arrive at a much fuller understanding of the complex relationship between a culture's story formulas, and other aspects of individual and social behaviour." (299)

Terry Eagleton is another critic who is also concerned to study

the kind of effects which discourse produce, and how they produce them. --- how --- discourse is structured and organised, and examine what kinds of effects these forms and devices produce in particular readers in actual situations ---. We know that people do not after all believe all they see and read; but we also need to know far more than we do about the roles such effects play in their general consciousness." (LITERARY THEORY: 205 & 216)

Now I am in no better position than either of these critics to delineate the precise relationship between literature and cultural and social practises. On the other hand, I would be prepared to argue that the circular argument of cause and effect is the beginning of the debate and not its ending. It would thus seem of some value to consider the exact nature of the moral fantasy in the hard-boiled genre of detective thriller. As I wrote earlier, a moral fantasy must be acceptable to the cultural grouping it is addressing, otherwise it would not be successful. It could not survive as a viable art form. It must, also, be believable enough to permit the necessary leap of imagination into its structure; for at least as long as it takes to read the book or watch the film. There is absolutely no point in imposing a moral fantasy on a text that is so bizarre that it is considered absolutely irrelevant, or completely morally abhorrent, to the greater bulk of its audience. The two major morally fantastic structures in these types of formulaic fiction are the possibility of a just conclusion on this earth and the incorruptible hero. The first closes the text; the second is the instrument which activates the closure of the text.

The quest for just desserts, and its ever-increasing popularity as a form of entertainment, does seem to me to address the concerns of a perception, which could also said to be on the increase, that the possibility of divine justice is no longer a matter of any certainty. Secondly, there seems to a further perception, from the beginning of this century onwards, that the forces of law and order are breaking down, are inadequate for their purposes, and that true justice depends on the individual and not the state. Naturally enough, Westerns always did affirm that view, but they were set outside the boundaries of state control. These texts are set within the very centres of the jurisdiction of the law. So, if we accept that there is a quality of despair in the air about the systems of available justice, both divine and earthly, then fictions about the pursuit and possibility of justice seems to fulfil an obvious need. It is what people want to believe in. If they cannot get it any other way, they want its fictional construct. The only problems arise as to whether perceptions about crime are a cause or effect of these texts. I would argue that I do not know which is the chicken and which is the egg but the two sides, so-called fact and so-called fiction, probably spur each other on in reflecting reproductions until they run out of steam and turn to change direction. These modes of representation deserve further study because of their close inter-relationship in any given culture, if for no other reason.

Notwithstanding which, formulaic structures around the instruments of justice are a more complex matter than the relatively simple resolution of a just dessert. I said that the figures which work the text were incorruptible, and one way or another they all are; but they are not upright citizens as their world judges these thing and, it could be supposed, as the world judges these things today. Their behaviour deviates from the accepted norms of society. We go back to Julian Symons' argument about why so many people are prepared to accept behaviour in fiction which they would not tolerate in ordinary life. I wrote earlier that crime fiction, as escapist fiction, marries together two distinctive needs. The first is for order, and the second is for freedom from order.

Patricia Highsmith argues that in societies where most people are imprisoned within the mechanisms of organisations, social groups or families, criminals are potentially free

> Criminals are dramatically interesting because for a time at least they are active and free in spirit, and they do not knuckle down to anyone ----- I find the public passion for justice quite boring and artificial, for neither life nor nature cares if justice is ever done. (Symons: 207)

Highsmith may find the public passion for justice boring but, fortunately or unfortunately, the public does not. Thus whilst justice supplies the escapist need for order, the criminal and his/her pursuer (particularly as they are often two sides of the same coin) satisfies the need for excitement and disorder.

Cawelti make the same sort of point about the public's enthusiasm for unlawful conduct in fiction. He quotes from the title character of G P R James's THE BRIGAND:

> It is because man's law is not God's law that I stand here upon the mountain. Were laws equal and just, there would be found few to resist them. While they are unequal and unjust, the poor-hearted may submit and tremble; the powerless may yield and suffer; the bold, the free, the strong, and the determined fall back on the laws of God and wage war against the injustice of man."(57)

Left without the certainties of the laws of God, the 'hard-boiled' detective is left to make some sort of higher alternative out of the laws of man. This, it could be presumed, is a difficult matter at the best of times, and the detective has to remain a man of honour in the same space. S/he has to walk the tight rope between societies craving for the wild and the free, and its equally compelling need for a properly constructed fictive universe.

Consequently these detectives do combine many of the attractions of the 'noble bandit', or Robin Hood type figure, whose own moral code transcends the existing social order. Hammet's detectives often break the law for their own ends. Chandler's Marlowe and Macdonald's Archer articulate very ambivalent attitudes towards the forces of law and order and the accepted social systems of their day. And they are all enormously critical of, what could be defined as, the morality of the dollar. However, and as I will seek to delineate later, they offer very different resolutions to their texts. On the other hand, and like Robin Hood, they are placed within social and political constructs which are structured as though they are inherently corrupt. Thus, morally dissident behaviour is delineated as the only way in which these heroic figures can operate effectively.

Peter Humm notes that:

> Where a detective in the English or Anglophile tradition can rely on everyone staying clearly in place on the Cluedo board, the private eye has to confront a world, which is always shifting. He has to both keep up with the action and make what sense of it he can. This is made more testing because the private eye, unlike the amateur detective with the magnifying glass, is himself directly, often violently, involved with the world of violence he is hired to investigate." (CAMERA EYE/PRIVATE EYE: from AMERICAN CRIME FICTION: 30)

The criminals are a product of their social construct; but so is the detective. The moral fantasy lies in the ways in which their actions differ, given the equivalent social pressures, from the actions of the criminal. The private eye is given no space to stand back and objectify the world of the criminal. S/he is a part and parcel of it him/herself. The 'hard-boiled' detective, unlike their counterpart the 'immune' detective, does not come from an over-privileged world which is part of the moral power structure of the day. The criminal, thus, being drawn as one who is presumed to threaten the established and desirable order of the day because they tried to live outside its systems. Your 'hard-boiled" detective is faced with the same day-to-day problems as the criminals they seek out. They are vulnerable to the same vicissitudes of fortune. They are part of the same system. The difference is that when they behave badly, they are presented as though they do so in a good cause. Consequently, the value the fiction places upon the actions of their heroic structure, the moral worth of their heroism, could be said to relate to the concerns and critical perceptions of a mass audience in ways which the fiction of the 'immune' detective simply could not touch.

Dashiell Hammett's Continental Op says in RED HARVEST:

> 'The closest I've got to an idea is to dig up any and all the dirty work I can find that might implicate the others, and run it out. Maybe I'll advertise - CRIME WANTED- MALE OR

FEMALE. If they are as crooked as I think they are I shouldn't have a lot of trouble finding a job or two I can hand on them.'

'Is that what you were up to when you uncooked the fight?'

That was only an experiment-just to see what would happen.'

So that is the way you scientific detectives work. My God for a fat, middle-aged, 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 up to the top.'

'That should be good for another drink,' she said.' (84/85)

Well, having another drink is often a good idea in these fictions but, other than this solution, the rest of it could be defined as pretty devious behaviour. It really reads very like the survival of the fittest. This justification for conduct may be all sorts of things. However, but it is certainly not honourable, nor is it heroic.

Diana Brand, of course, does not survive. Neither does the boxer the Op 'uncooked the fight' for, or virtually anybody else for that matter. On the other hand, it might be fair to say that this is the most overtly political, and the bleakest, of all Hammett's novels. The construct which Hammett places on most of his detectives is a more complex one, and the social criticism innate to that construct harsher, than those of many of his successors. The Continental Op is the most detached of all the detectives listed here and his very detachment is some part of Hammett's equivocal vision of just what survival of the fittest, and the necessarily close inter-relationship between thief and catcher, means as a long term proposition. The Op is a very efficient operator, but that very efficiency, in the sorts of worlds he operates from within, costs him dear. His function seems to be to serve as a criticism of a moral fantasy rather than to be a moral fantasy in himself.

Marlowe is very different in moral substance. Hammett's operatives are not knights in shining armour. Every now and again Marlowe seems to believe he should be; but even then, he does not quite know how to go about it. Peter Wolfe has quoted Ponder as seeing self-knowledge as the goal of the knightly quest in Chandler: 'In the detective's search for himself, the detective defines himself in a code contrived to reconcile opposites.'(SOMETHING MORE THAN NIGHT: 81) I am not so sure about this but, it could be argued, that there is a clash between Marlowe's perception of what his role should be, and the way he is actually able to function. In his essay, THE SIMPLE ART OF MURDER, Chandler wrote:

> In everything that can be called art there is a quality of redemption. It may be pure tragedy, if it is high tragedy, and it may be pity and irony --- But down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished or afraid ---The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is a hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honour --- he must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world. --- If he is a man of honour in one thing, he is that in all things." (22)

This is so often quoted because it has the most splendid ring to it. Notwithstanding which, all it can really be said to indicate in the long run is that Chandler got carried away by his own prose. After all, why not? He was obviously enjoying himself. On the other hand, it could be supposed that, if Chandler had succeeded in making Marlowe into this sort of heroic structure he would have been of no interest to anyone whatsoever over the age of twelve.

However, as Peter Wolfe has pointed out: 'Few private eyes set themselves standards as high as Marlowe's; few are as sad, confused or lonely.' (81) Marlowe may be a man of honour in some ways but he is also a man of the streets in other ways. These 'mean' streets are not constructed so that a man can survive them long on principle alone:

> 'I'm working for you,' I said, 'now this week, today. Next week I'll be working for somebody else, I hope. And the week after that for still somebody else. In order to do that I have to be on reasonably good terms with the police, They don't have to love me, but they have to be fairly sure I am not cheating on them. ---I still have to tell the cops everything I know ---. And they have to question anybody they want to question. Can't you understand that?'
> 'Doesn't the law give you the right to protect a client?' she snapped. If it doesn't, what is the use of anyone's hiring a detective?.'
> I got up and walked around my chair and sat down again. I leaned forward and took hold of my kneecaps and squeezed the until my knuckles glistened.
> The law, whatever it is, is a matter of give and take, Mrs Murdock. Like most other things. Even if I had the legal right to stay clammed up - refuse to talk - and got away with it once, that would be the end of my business. I'd be marked for trouble. One way or another they would get me. I value your business, Mrs Murdoch, but not enough to cut my throat and bleed in your lap.'(THE HIGH WINDOW: 133/134).

Now, if Marlowe had been the kind of man Chandler had been writing about, in THE SIMPLE ART OF MURDER, he would have protected his client, no matter how much he disliked her, at all costs. He would have been carted off to a police cell on page two of the first novel; and that would have been the last we ever heard about him. Marlowe may agonize over some of the decisions he has to

make; but in the end he does make them. His honour, part of his moral fantastic, is that he never works for reward. Actually, it is often quite difficult to work out how he ever earns a living at all. He does what he has to do; even though his own code of conduct gives him no satisfaction either. The end of THE LITTLE SISTER reads:

> They came fast - but not fast enough. Perhaps I ought to have stopped him. Perhaps I had a hunch what he would do, and deliberately let him do it. Sometimes when I am low I try to reason it out. But it gets too complicated. The whole damn case was that way. There was never any point where I could do the natural obvious thing without stopping to rack my head dizzy with figuring how it would affect somebody I owed something to. (247)

Chandler's man of honour, as he finally appeared on the page, was a man who suffered. He was not a man who necessarily did well, but whether he did well or ill, he suffered for it. Marlowe never gets any money. The only time he gets the girl is when she turns out to have been the criminal all along. He never gets to pat himself on the back in the recognition of a job well done. And he always ends up alone again:

> The office was empty again. No leggy brunettes, no little girls with slanted glasses, no neat dark men with gangster's eyes.
> I sat down at the desk and watched the light fade. The going home sounds had faded away. Outside the neon signs began to glow at one another across the boulevard. There was something to be done, but I didn't know what. Whatever it was it would be useless. I tidied up my desk, listened to the scrape of a bucket on the tiling of the corridor. I put my papers away in the drawer, straightened the pen stand, got out a duster and wiped off the glass and then the telephone. It was dark and sleek in the fading light. I wouldn't ring tonight. Nobody would ever call me again. Not now, not this time. Perhaps not ever.
> I put the duster away folded with the dust in it, leaned back and just sat, not smoking, not even thinking. I was a blank man. I had no face, no meaning, no personality, hardly a name. I didn't want to eat. I didn't want to drink. I was the page from yesterday's calendar crumpled at the bottom of the waste basket. (177)

This is ANGST in capital letters. It really is splendid stuff. We may not look upon its like again. On the other hand, and despite his faults Marlowe does embody the moral fantasy of the incorruptible hero who can single handedly overcome the pressures of a corrupt universe to a far greater extent than the others do. And it may be possible to conclude that if he had not been ridden by angst and a continual sense of failure he would have been quite as unbearable as the hero Chandler sought to create when he wrote A SIMPLE ART OF MURDER.

Ross Macdonald's Archer did his fair bit of bleeding across the page, but he tended to bleed more on behalf of others (or so he is presented) than because he saw his own construct as sufficiently flawed to cause him to tear his hair out. Archer is, in the long run, rather pleased with himself. Macdonald wrote that the essential problem was

> how you are going to maintain values, and express values in your actions, when the values aren't there in the society around you, as they are in traditional societies. In a sense you have to make yourself up as you go along." (Speir: ROSS MACDONALD: 10)

However Macdonald also wrote that he saw Archer as representing

> modern man in a technological society, who is, in effect, homeless, virtually friendless, and who tries to behave as though there was some hope in society, which there is. (10)

Archer, like Marlowe and nearly all of Hammett's detectives, is essentially alone and has to make up his own morality as he goes along because the world he lives in is questionable. Its rules and regulations are not good enough to offer him unconditional moral support.

In any event, Macdonald objected Chandler's simplistic analysis of the 'hard-boiled' detective in THE SIMPLE ART OF MURDER, pointing out that while there may be a

> quality of redemption in a good novel, it belongs to the whole work and is not the private property of one of the characters --- The detective as redeemer is a backward step in the direction of the sentimental romance, and an over-simplified world of good guys and bad guys."(Speir: 110)

This last statement of intent raises a couple of issues. Firstly, it does not much matter what an author means to do with his text: it is what the text actually manufactures that counts. It is a fairly well accepted marxist insight that between a writer's "explicit ideology; and the representation of life which he in fact conveys, there may be a contradiction". (Steiner: MARXISM AND THE LITERARY CRITIC: 51) Marlowe, as we have seen, is not just 'a good guy'. Secondly, the text in all these fictions deals with a troubled world and the only resolution in the text, the only hope for justice works through the machinery of the detective; who is neither altogether good nor altogether bad. However, the one thing they always are, in a workable text, is alone. So a greater part of their construct implies a social criticism of the established order of the day. They cannot function within its guidelines. They

may not be redeemers, but they carry the message of the only redemption these texts can allow. And the quality of that redemption is the active ingredient of the resolution and, thus, it is the 'private property of one of the characters.'

So, these fictions are patterned on a perceived dichotomy between public and private morality. The public area is drawn as being of dubious worth or practical value. Consequently, the mark of the hero/ine is that they make up their own code of behaviour as they go along; because the authority of the day is not good enough to offer them acceptable moral support. However, after all the excitement of the chase, the comfort factor of formulaic fiction comes into its own. The criminal, perpetrator, victim, call them what you will, often constructed as though they were as much a consequence of the same inadequate social system as the forces of law and order are often thrown back to the tender mercies of the system which deformed them in the first place. At the end of THE ZEBRA-STRIPED HEARSE Archer says:

> 'He loved you to the point of death, Harriet.'
> She shook her head, and began to shiver more violently. I put my arm around her shoulders and walked her to the door. I opened, filling with the red sunset. The beggar woman appeared in it, black as a cinder in the blaze.
> 'What will happen now?' Harriet said with her head down.
> 'It depends on whether you're willing to waive extradition. We could go back together, if you are.'
> 'I might as well.'
> The beggar held out her hands to us as we passed. I gave her money again. I had nothing to give Harriet. We went out into the changing light and started to walk up the dry river-bed of the road.'"(218)

Archer can offer the beggar woman the easy answer of money, not a very satisfactory solution but a solution of sorts nevertheless. He can offer Harriet nothing but the comfort of his arm. What lies ahead of Harriet is the due process of the law and that, as these fictions construct it, never understood anything at all and never will. If some one is drawn as beyond the pale, however sympathetically their circumstances are posited, they either die or are left to the tender mercies of the state. Thus, it must be concluded that these fictions know their limits. Their structure is quite happy to encompass any amount of social and political criticism as long as the public can rest assured that, in the end, established justice will prevail.

On the other hand, Macdonald reads as though he accepts this process as a moral norm. His

predecessors appear more critical of the process. The Op works as a criticism from inside his social construct. Marlowe is only constructed to function, as a man of any honour at all, if he is outside his given world. Archer is the only one who is drawn as a very part of the status quo, and as though that status quo is nothing much to worry about.

Thus the resolutions of these texts, as achieved by their fantastical hero/ines, are very different in their individual achievement of their means to an end.

Comfort Factors In Moral Fantasy

So we need to return to the argument of why such formulas, patterns of behaviour are acceptable to large enough groups of the populace to sustain their status as popular fictions. The first, the fantasy that there can be a just resolution and a rational explanation, and that problems can be re-ordered into a passable order in the world of fiction, is easy enough to understand . I see no reason to reconstruct it any further than I already have.

On the other hand, I have argued, that it is the constant, and working interaction between the formulas of the fictive world and the formulas of the ordinary world that best explore the relationship between cultural patterns and fictional patterns . Thus, formulaic evolution and change are one process by which new interest and values can be assimilated into conventional imaginative structures. The rise of the woman detective, the black detective, and the lesbian detective, all patterned around the formulas which Hammett and Chandler laid down, is proof of this if nothing else. The absolute absence of, may I be pardoned for calling them smoking detectives, in the eighties and early nineties is another case in point. I was very pleased to note that Patricia Cornwall's new heroine smokes like a chimney. James Herbert's ALCHEMIST, an otherwise unremarkable text which I picked up in passing from somewhere, all the 'good guys' smoke and drink and the 'bad guys' are total absteemers. This novel was published in 1996. Perhaps, we are beginning to pass a post in the inter-relationship between popular formulaic fiction and the formulas of cultural belief. It may be possible to presume that the somewhat dreary correlation between a long life and a moral life is reaching the end of a particularly thorny, and incredibly boring, patch of cultural ideology. The leap necessary to suppose that it is honourable to be healthy, not just practical but somehow ethically sound, has always taken more imagination than I have at my disposal. Also, it may be possible to return to Hammett. He wrote during the prohibition years in America. If he had written overtly in support of prohibition, his texts would have been very different and, I venture to suppose, nobody would be reading them today. My argument is that successful formulaic fiction can simply reflect the perceived wisdom of the day. Great formulaic fiction will always show it for what it is.

In other words, we return to the central premise that the one inescapable factor about these texts is their popularity. Their formulas are, thus, satisfying to large groups of people, and large groups of people do not want to read texts which promulgate careful and tidy behaviour. Outlaws are not supposed to be careful people. A good many comfort factors of the 'hard-boiled' thriller have already been stipulated. However, I think the time has now come to try and define as many of the other sets of stories and patterns of behaviour and acceptable fantasies which these fictions incorporate as a

general rule. That is to say, those factors which they have in common, before I go ahead and distinguish the differences between the texts of those I consider to be the founding fathers of the 'hard-boiled' school of detective fiction. Contextualising them specifically into the cultural wisdom of the, so to speak, ordinary world, must remain the subject of another and longer and more inter-disciplinary study.

The morally fantastic hero/ine is a many faceted being and is the peg, as I have written, for most of the moral fantasies and many of the comfort factors of the hard-boiled thriller. Firstly, these beings are tough guys who know all the angles of the 'mean streets' they walk through, can handle everything life throws at them, and still remain tender and true when push comes to shove. They may get beaten to a pulp, and frequently do, but they never reveal all. They are world weary and cynical, life may be passing them by and usually is, but they always hold onto their own code of conduct. This formula varies slightly, but its basic construct remains fairly constant and translates its format quite faithfully between book, television and film. These are enormously satisfying and splendid fictional constructs. The saga of the chivalrous knight who rides out into the badlands, and slays the monsters of the underworld, and makes the world safe for civilisation is after all as old as the hills and, as these texts prove, has never lost its ability to thrill and to excite. I am sure this formula will last forever. The shape of the hero/ine will adjust and convert as conventional ideologies alter and change. This timeless figure has proved to be the most versatile creature. Obviously, this is a moral fantastic. A being tough enough to fight and win, but tender enough to love and loose (and the best of them always love and lose) is not a thing that anyone in their right minds is going to believe in. However the sheer comfort is knowing that while the book is open or the film lasts, these guys are never going to let you down.

The second story pattern that prevails follows on from the motif that I have just mentioned. These magnificent creatures work best when they ride alone. It is all very well to love and lose, but the splendid image of the conquering hero is quite diminished if they have a wife and children strapped on their backs. It is just not the same thing at all. Firstly, it could be argued that wo/man alone is less corruptible than one who is constrained by the demands of family life or calls and duties of public office. The life of outlaws, living by their own code of ethics is one thing when only they suffer the consequences of their actions. It changes in moral flavour when such behaviour may mean endangering others as well.. Secondly it is an obviously comforting fantasy, to the man or woman caught in the servitude of the humdrum concerns of everyday family life, to believe that they could have achieved so much more if only they did not have to temper their lives to the vicissitudes of paying the bills and making sure the children have done their homework.

Now, of course, detective fiction has produced many hero/ines who were also married and/or parents. However, they are often policemen and so their stories emerge from a different heroic mould which could probably best be delineated within the Sisyphus myth. It may only be necessary to give two examples; to prove my point that loneliness is an essential ingredient of the heroes of the 'hard-boiled' school and that they become relatively colourless when they become attached to any one for any length of time. Firstly, the last book Hammett wrote, THE THIN MAN, has a happily married man as the detective. The dialogue sparkles, it is full of wit and repartee, but the terrible angst of a man who has only himself to blame for everything that befalls him is quite gone. My second example is even better, or worse, depending on which angle you come in from. Robert B Parker is an irredeemably second rate writer. However, and to do him justice, he has probably been very damaged by the fact that he is constantly compared to Chandler. POODLE SPRINGS demonstrates, beyond all possible doubt, the difference between the real thing and the plastic copy. It would have been of no consequence if it had not pretended to be the product of the combined efforts of Chandler and Parker. If there is anything of Chandler in it, I can only be pleased he never lived to write it. Mind you, it might have been better if he had decently passed away before he wrote PLAYBACK as well,. However, there is no point in crying over spilled milk. In any event, there is a quote from Ed McBain on the cover of my Futura edition which reads: "A rattling good thriller --- At his best Parker sounds more like Chandler than Chandler himself." I can only suppose that McBain never read Chandler. In any event, I would argue that these fictions do not have the same sort of appeal, function within the same critical and emotional climate, when the hero/ine breaks with his lonely construct, Parker's usual hero frequently works with his girl friend who is a politically correct social worker. His best friend is a politically correct black guy who always, and note this well, plays second fiddle to Spencer. Hawk is all brawn and no education and careful about the way he dresses. Spencer is about as alone as a bucketful of maggots. He is also careful about his clothes, drinks decaffeinated coffee. He does not smoke and he uses alcohol only in moderation and always with due care and concern for his health. He is incapable of demonstrating any angst. I simply cannot see why anybody ever confused Spencer with Marlowe. Added to which can you really compare, in terms of their quality, the following absolutely disparate passages so far as content goes or panache or wit or humour or style or anything else you can think of?

Parker's Marlowe is now married and living in a 'nice' house with his wife who has more money than she know what to do with:

> The smaller hood had started running. The other was still on his sitter. I hopped out of the Fleetwood and fired a shot over his head.
> The other hood stopped dead, six feet away.
> 'Look darlings,' I said, 'if Lippy wants to talk to me, he can't do it with me full of lead. And never show a gun unless you are prepared to use it. I am. You're not. ---'

'You got a pretty wife,' the little hood said nastily,
'And any punk who lays a hand on her is already half cremated. So long putrid. See you in the boneyard.'" (Chandler and Parker: POODLE SPRINGS: 27)

This next is the real thing:

'I'm afraid I don't like your manner,' he said, using the edge of his voice.
'I've had complaints about it,' I said, 'But nothing seems to do any good.'" (Chandler: FAREWELL MY LOVELY: 48)

Chandler is full of lines like this. I could go on for pages.

She opened a large blue bag and pulled a handkerchief out of it and sniffed.
'That's your story,' I said. 'I don't have to get stuck with it.' (THE LADY IN THE LAKE: 101)

We could break you for that,' French said to me without inflection.
'Consider me broke,' I said. 'I never liked the business anyway.'" (THE LITTLE SISTER: 169)

'So long putrid. See you in the boneyard', is to Chandler what oil is to water. Paretsky and Grafton are probably better representatives of the Chandler type formula and their hero/ines always end up alone. Naturally enough it is a fictive devise so that they can move more readily from one adventure to another. However, I do not think that is essential ingredient of these structures. They have to be drawn as being relatively free to make their own decisions. Any being who risks their own lives can be presented as a noble wo/man. Anyone who risks the lives of dependants, as I said earlier, is a necessarily more morally ambivalent figure.

Therefore, another part of the story pattern, formulaic structure, is that they are outlaws. They work on the periphery of the law, if they work with the law at all. Their bandit status, their determination to make their own way in world at whatever cost to themselves is a large part of the implicit and explicit social and political criticism of the texts. To wit; that the machinery of the law is helpless against the forces of lawless men who are often corrupt because the law is corrupt. Thus, only the lone figures of the private eyes, armoured by their own codes of conduct, are pure enough to be effective. They are unsullied by the fraudulent social mores of the time and place, and outside the tainted ideology of the legal system. If they are, as Spencer is, and the best way I can think of describing him is as a

cliché of trendiness, then these texts only perform one half of their function. They are a soporific, but not a stimulant.

Thus, another formula in these texts is that crime is not defined as the product of, shall we say, original sin. Crime is as a consequence of political corruption, social pressure or childhood trauma. In other words, it can be rationally explained but not, in a corrupt world, rationally dealt with by the authorities. Now it is commonly accepted that part of the function of the crime novel is to explore in 'fantasy the boundary between the permitted and the forbidden and to experience in a carefully controlled way the possibility of stepping across this boundary.' (Cawelti: 35) Freudian type theories, which hold that crime fiction is a vehicle for the reader's psychological need to resolve in fantasy the repressed conflicts of the very young child, obviously accede to this type of theory. I can see that this is a workable explanation, the exploration of the forbidden, for the fascination innate to story types about ruthless business tycoons or gangsters like THE GODFATHER. These propose that the pursuit of illicit wealth and criminal behaviour may be a success story. Tales about whores who make good and put their past behind them, which infer that you can make your bed but you do not have to lie on it, also appeal to a similar cultural fantasy. Quite how this theoretical concept can be worked to explain the public's recent interest in books about serial killers, particularly in view of the graphic gory details these fictions often delineate, I dread to think. In any event, the criminal or gangster in the 'hard-boiled' formula is not drawn as an enviable character and, by the very nature of the text is usually unsuccessful. Thus, the exploration in fantasy of the forbidden fruit of socially unacceptable behaviour which, nevertheless, has an enormous popular appeal is within the province of the detective who, in this fictive formula, fills the role of the gangster or outlaw. They are often not far short of criminals themselves, on the there but for the grace of God principle, and are frequently drawn as the only person around who really understands the criminal. This passage is from THE INSTANT ENEMY, possibly one of the darkest of Macdonald's fictions. The probation officer says to Archer:

> 'I don't pin labels on young people. I see their adolescent storms. I've seen their adolescent storms. I've seen them take every form that you could possible find in a textbook abnormal psychology. But often when the storms pass, they're different and better people.' His hands turned over, palm upward, on the table.
> 'Or different and worse.'
> 'You're a cynic, Mr Archer.'
> 'Not me. I was one of the ones who turned out different and better. Slightly better, anyway. I joined the cops instead of the hoods.'
> Belsize said with a smile that crumpled his whole face. 'I still haven't made my decision. My clients think I'm a cop. The cops think I'm a hood lover. ---'(32)

There is a very fine line between the criminal and the cop and the private eye but, so that readers can explore in comfort the behaviour of the outlaw, the private eye has to be shown to be morally and intellectually superior to the forces of law and order and, naturally enough, the criminal. Various writers achieve this in different ways, and I will be looking at some examples later, but many work around a motif which supposes that an individual determination is, somehow inherently, a better choice. Archer gives his reasons for leaving the police force as follows:

> 'There were too many cases where the official version clashed with the facts I knew ---. Most good policemen have a public conscience and a private conscience. I just have a private conscience, a poor thing but mine own.'" (THE DROWNING POOL; 35)

It is fine line these constructs tread; but it is a finite line and the skill of the writer is to hold that balance.

This is another part of the social critique of these novels, the area in which the corruption, incompetence and inadequacy of officialdom and public office can be explored,. However, it is carefully controlled by the closure of the text and, to some extent, the nature of the setting Macdonald wrote that he saw

> plot as a vehicle of meaning. It should be as complex as contemporary life, but balanced enough to say true things about it. The surprise with which a detective novel concludes should set up tragic vibrations which run backward through the entire structure. Which means that the structure must be single and intended." (Speir: 146)

I am not certain that the surprise which ends most of Macdonald's texts is not that a text that has spent its entire life loudly proclaiming that its viable moral formula is outside the due process of the law, should end by having nothing better to do with the criminal but to hand them over to the established morality of a particularly conservative order. However, in one sense, the end does reverberate backwards through the structure of the fiction because it brings forth the comforting moral fantasy that crime will never, in the end, pay. It allows the reader to indulge in a comfortable slice of social idealism along the way, secure in the knowledge that their temporary belief that all crime is not, of necessity, the fault of the criminal, will not be exposed to its logical conclusion. To wit, that if crime is the consequence of ineffective and insufficient communal ideals of behaviour; then the only hope for society is to disregard all existing structures and make up some new ones. Thus, this formulaic pattern, the outlaw detective, the explicable crook, corrupt society and a resolution which delivers the whole text, kindly but firmly, back into the arms of the accepted

ideology and perceived wisdom of the day, solves all the problems of the conflicting escapist needs for excitement and order.

I did say earlier on that the nature of the setting is also relevant; and I also stipulated my argument that the oft praised 'realism' of the background to these texts is, to all intents and purpose, a fiction. It seems possible to suppose that these 'unrealistic' settings also represent another comfort factor. They allow the reader to examine the structures of unjust and deficient social structures without depositing these construct squarely in the reader's own back yard. Thus the setting provide the excitement of a foreign place, vibrating with local colour, but they also permit an examination in fantasy which might be extremely uncomfortable if it came too close to home. It is all very well to read about debauched officials and debased forms of government in another place. Most of the cultural groups who appear to enjoy this sort of fiction do suppose in a half hearted sort of way that they are not living in the best of all possible worlds. It is very satisfying to play in fantasy the game of 'knocking the cops'. However, it becomes a very different matter if one seriously has to suppose that the forces of law and order, which govern our everyday lives, are completely untrustworthy. This could be dangerously unsettling. No matter what people may say about their local police force, and I have said most of it, they still expect that police force to support them. It may be possible to presume that people living in Mannenberg today may have a completely different inter-relationship with the structures of this sort of text, be it via book or television or film or whatever, from the inhabitants of Newlands or Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey, England.

Anyway, I am supposing that one of the functions of the unrealistic framework of most of these fictions is to allow the exploration, at a safe distance, of the dangerous and exciting world of corrupt government. This argument might be easier to support if I had ever lived in Miami or Los Angeles or even Glasgow for any length of time. On the other hand, I am postulating that, even if readers or viewers do live in Miami, their place of abode is unlikely to bear much resemblance to the worlds of MIAMI VICE or Elmore Leonard.

Naturally enough there are many other sub-texts, recurring fictional patterns, which shape the 'hard-boiled' novel into what it is. The hero/ine never works for money alone. After all, a greater part of their construct is to serve as a critical insight into the lives of the rich and the famous, which terms can be seen to be synonymous with authority and status. The private eye has chosen his way of life because he puts honour and integrity before fame and fortune. The other side of this argument is supposed to be, of course, that those who achieve fame and fortune do so at the expense of honour and integrity. The audience can thus briefly enter into the fantasy that they are poor because they are honest. These texts thus frequently centre round scenes where private eyes turn down lucrative

employment, refuse bribes, and take up the cause of the impoverished and destitute for no other reward but their own sense of self-worth. However, they always win in the end, so the success ethic is not seriously questioned, just its means in fantasy. The attractions of this formulaic model seem obvious for ninety percent of any audience who are never going to climb to the top of any ladder.

Hammett, Chandler and Macdonald are frequently criticised for their attitude towards women. Peter Wolfe writes that

> ambivalence is Chandler's outstanding psychological trait, and nowhere did it rule him more than in his outlook towards sex. Writing from his most private self, he doesn't hide his vulnerability behind literary technique in LADY. The inner conflict that made Al Degarmo kill Muriel also gripped Chandler or he would not have perceived it or outlined its destructive effects so accurately." (SOMETHING MORE THAN NIGHT: 164)

Now, the school of criticism which seeks to find an author in his texts is not one which I find helpful or wish to engage in. Firstly, I perceive of it as an invasion of privacy and it offends me from that point of view. Secondly, it proves nothing of value about the literary qualities of the text. If I want to know about Chandler's private life, and I do not, I will buy a biography or autobiography. Thirdly, and whilst freely admitting that there is no woman, as drawn in THE LADY IN THE LAKE whom I would care to meet on a dark night, the point of interest is what Chandler made of these characters and how he used them to construct his fiction. I do not know what Chandler thought about women and care less. Muriel is a device structured to a purpose and I will write more about this when I come to delineate Chandler as a separate issue.

Notwithstanding which, and as can be supposed from the above quote, the fathers of the 'hard-boiled school have been attacked for their attitudes towards women. Macdonald is, I think, at fault but as far as the other two go I do think that it is a mistake to take a stereo-typical hero/ine and fault them for attributes which work to support their formulaic construct. The cultural significance of a particular role model is another matter and should be the subject of a different kind of study. These figures are part and parcel of escapist literature and should not be critically perceived from the angle of another kind of literature. Thomas Edwards, in his review of THE BLUE HAMMER warned that it is 'hard for sophisticated people to like something simple without overrating it.' (TOUGH GUYS: The New York review of Books: 30 September 1976: 13) I am not so certain that I am prepared to use terms like under or overrate. However, I do think that this is a pertinent warning. No literature should be judged outside its context.

In any event, I have already said why I consider the unmarried, or unattached detective to be a more satisfying figure than their attached counterpart and have, I hope, delineated precisely what popular imaginative fantasy they appear to fulfil. One may equally accuse Paretsky or Grafton of being anti-male. They may very well be. However, this also establishes nothing useful about the construct of their hero/ines as instrument of escapist literature. That is to say they could not be both comfortable and morally fantastic if they were attached. However, and in any event, one other well established formulaic pattern of these fictions is that if the hero/ine meets any one who is sexually attractive and seems about to fall in love, the audience can simply sit back and wait for that person to be killed off, prove to be the villain, or both. That is part of, what I have already defined as the angst factor, and which I consider to be an intrinsic part of the emotional flavour of these texts.

The last particular formula, innate to this story type, which I am going to specify as a part of the 'hard-boiled' school, is also a device which is used in most other fictive constructs. Things are seldom what they first appear to be. The fundamental principle of a mystery story, and any detective fiction is also by its very definition a mystery story, is the discovery of hidden secrets. Obviously, suspense being a vital ingredient to nearly all popular fiction, this is a widely used device. Notwithstanding which, in the 'hard-boiled' variety the first suspect is seldom the last suspect. These fictions do not use the construct of the 'red herring' as remorselessly as the "classical" formulas do, but a very greater part of their structure lies within the deceit inherent to all appearances and to all easy judgements. The problem then arises as to why this formula is appealing. Firstly, mystery intensifies and complicates any story. Anyone over the age of twelve is going to grow very tired of stories when they know precisely how they are going to end. Knowing that the detective is going to win is one thing. Knowing how he is going to win is quite another. Controlled suspense, neither too much, nor too little, is a vital component of any successful popular fiction. The attraction of the excitement of, in this case, the chase is easy enough to understand. It is also quite obvious to suppose that all audiences would, because most people have believed themselves to be misunderstood at some time or another, find comfort in watching others triumph over an unfair accusation.

However, the fictional formula, almost the most predominant fictional formula of all time, of unjust accusation and appearance does not seem to inter-act with a popular cultural formula. Judging on hearsay, a necessarily dubious procedure, many people may be very prepared to believe themselves to be misrepresented. On the other hand, very few are similarly prepared to believe that others may be. Perhaps the rational nature of the closure, the pretence that all has been dealt with and explained at the end of all popular fiction is to blame for this as well. Still, it does still seem a little odd that the fictive formula of false appearance does not appear to translate in any identifiable form with a perception of the factual experience. It is only possible to surmise, considering the number of people who are quite prepared to hang, or draw, or quarter anyone on suspicion alone (never mind

arrest and due legal process) that this fictive formula fails to have any popular appeal in, so to speak, ordinary life. On the other hand, I believe that Dreyfus, some years after he was released from Devil's Island, was heard to say, about a fellow officer who had been accused of cheating at cards, that: "There was no smoke without fire." My personal opinion is that he should have been shot on the spot. Notwithstanding which, it may be possible to presume that if people like Dreyfus do not learn from their own experience, then there is hardly any point to expecting the general populace to take a fictive formula seriously. And this may be particularly so when that structure has already been quite firmly designated as having all its feet dangling in the air. In the end, the comfort factor of the closure seems to predominate over all content.

Social And Political Criticism: The Spice Of Life

Anyway those, I would argue, are the principle recurring fictive patterns in all the major successful 'hard-boiled' story types. I hope that is also become quite clear that, I presume, that the social and political critique implicit, and often explicit, to these texts is a greater part of their appeal. It hardly matters how circumscribed, how safely packaged, that critique may be. Except, of course, when entering into the vexed question of impact theory. These writers distinguish their particular fictive concerns largely through this area, which is why I intend to deal with their issues individually. On the other hand, it is very possible to argue that their very formulaic construct, because of the comfort factors inherent to its form, do allow them to operate with a greater freedom in the territory of political and social evaluation. They certainly reach a far wider audience, than they ever would have been able to do if their texts had been packaged in the mould of the 'art' novel. Ross Macdonald argues that the very structure of these stories allow writers and readers to confront and try to understand aspects of life which they may otherwise reject as too painful or disturbing if it were not mediated through the guise of a formulaic construct. Macdonald wrote about Lew Archer that:

> He can be self-forgetful, almost transparent at times, and concentrate, as good detectives (and good writers) do, on the people whose problems he is investigating. The other people are for me the main thing: they are often more intimately related to me and my life than Lew Archer is. he is the obvious self-projection which holds the eye (my eye as well as the reader's) whilst more secret selves creep out of the woodwork behind the locked door. Remember how the reassuring presence of Dupin permitted Poe's mind to face the nightmare of the homicidal ape and the two dead women." (131)

Cawelti does propose another theory, which I think rather trivialises the social and political comment of these texts but which should, in any event, be examined. To some extent, it belongs under the heading of moral fantasy but because, I would argue, its political implications are so obvious I have chosen to delineate in this section which deals, largely, with the social content of these texts. Cawelti said that there is a tension between confidence and guilt, brought about by the rise of the lower classes, which lay at the heart of middle-class values and techniques of child rearing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The ethic of individual achievement is instilled early in the child in a production-oriented society. It replaces previously held internalised sets of motives and values. The child is driven to a high standard of achievement, independence and self-reliance by a threatened withdrawal of parental affection. However, because these goals are essentially intangible, the individual can never be certain that s/he has attained them to his/her full capacity. S/he can never be satisfied by his/her actual accomplishments. The surface of the disciplined achievement-oriented ego hides an inner self that, if it could rise to the surface, would reveal a deep

resentment against the earlier internalised parental standards. Cawelti has called this psyche the 'other directed' personality type and he quotes David Reisman as defining this personality as having a greater sensitivity to the attitudes and values of others:

> Under these newer (other-directed) patterns the peer group (the group of one's associates of the same age and class) becomes much more important to the child, whilst parents make him feel guilty not so much about violations of inner standards as about failure to be popular or otherwise to manage his relations with these other children. Moreover, the pressures of school and the peer groups are re-enforced and continued --- by the mass media: movies, radio, comics, and popular culture media generally." (158)

This is fair enough as far as it goes, and is certainly a reasonable analysis of the kind of deformation of personality pressures to conform and succeed may place upon children in any society which makes a god out of success. However, it is where this kind of contention is implicitly made to lead that, I would argue, results in a totally false premise. Cawelti goes on to suggest that the rewards are great for those who succeed in conforming to the demands of their various peer groups. However, 'other directed' characters will continue to fear that they will not be able to meet the standards as laid down by their friends and associates. Consequently, to compensate for this continued anxiety, the 'other-directed' personality often become hostile towards others whose expectations and judgement they fear. They substitute, so to speak, all of society for parental control. They believe that their own behaviour is governed by the codes of conduct of others and that, if left to their own devices, they would behave in a totally different way. This tension between others and self is intensified when this personality type fails to achieve their share of the rewards within any given social system. They, thus, talk themselves into believing that those who have achieved success must be even more corrupt, or perhaps it could be said better at being corrupt, than they are. They are, thus, caught by unresolvable tension between hostility and desire:

> Thus the 'hard-boiled' formula resolves the tension between admiration and hostility for the symbols of success and esteem in a society where the individual feels the strongest pressure to achieve the elusive esteem of the social groups to which he belongs. --- In its pattern of action, the hard-boiled formula also resolves the characteristic social and psychological needs of the other directed character. When the story opens, the hero's marginal position is made fully clear. He is a relatively unsuccessful, lower middle-class entrepreneur with a grubby office and he leads a life of constant risk and tension. --- Exposing the inefficiency and corruption of legally constituted social authorities like the police, the hard boiled detective pursues his mission until he has defined its moral implications in such a way as to satisfy his own sense of honour and integrity. --- In this process of eliminating the anxiety associated with social and sexual goals, the reader

> momentarily resolves his ambiguous feelings about the central symbols of success." (160/191)

This argument, taken to its own logical conclusion, is a very tired old argument. I have already said why the attributes of the morally fantastic hero/ine of these story types are both comforting and satisfying. However, I am also arguing that it is within the realm of social and/or political criticism that the writers of these fictions spread their wings. This theory of the social construct and comfort factors, innate to the 'other directed' personality, follows the line that is so often thrown at all those who criticise a given political socio-economic structure. It is frequently called the 'politics of envy'. In other words, all those who dare to censure any political system only do so because they have not, to use the parlance of the day, made it within that particular context. Hammett was a Marxist because he was a failed businessman. Figures like Mandela and Tutu were only critical of the Apartheid government because they were failed white men. This argument, of course, neglects to take into account all the countless people who have sustained a political stance which was nothing to do with their own particular socio/economic circumstances. It presumes that all human beings are governed by narrow definitions of self-interest only and it irritates me. I have heard it now just once too often. It also presupposes, perhaps more relevantly within the context of this study, that Hammett, Chandler and Macdonald had nothing pertinent to say about the social and political constructs of their time. They were only creating comfort figures for the greater mass of the populace who must be considered to be, within the explanation as promoted by this theory, both inadequate and envious of those who are, as this theory delineates social structures, their betters. This would seem to belittle the achievement of the above writers.

Hartmann supposed that:

> the trouble with the detective novel is not that it is moral but that it is moralistic; not that it is popular but that it is stylised; not that it lacks realism but that it picks up the latest realism (Freudianism in Macdonald's case) and exploits it. (Speir: 155)

It would appear thus that Hartmann is criticising crime fiction, not for being concerned about human behaviour, but for proposing easy answers. He is supposing that its stylised content is a fault in itself, and not a means to an end. He is implicitly stating that popularity is synonymous with the second-rate. He is further supposing that this kind of fiction only works within the perceived wisdom of its day, and exploits and trivialises it. His argument appears quite useful to me because he is paraphrasing all the old arguments which suppose that popular fiction cannot be 'good' fiction; and it might be better to get them out of the way before I proceed any further. His motif is really that what

is the product of its times must be trite because it cannot engage, in any meaningful way, with those times. His arguments do hold good about certain writers. The example I used earlier was Robert B Parker and my complaint about him was not that he was 'trendy' but that he made a cliché out of 'trendiness'. It is no so much that he takes the idea that a long life is necessarily a moral life which I object to, among other matters. It is that he does not question this somewhat dubious proposition in any way whatsoever. He does not even delineate it as a question worth speculating about. It is just there, as though it were some kind of a god-given absolute, on every page. That is moralistic. It could be argued that Macdonald is often moralistic. The point about Hammett's Marxism and Chandler's rejection of the market economy, is that when they use these devices successfully they are always self-critical: They may write popular fiction but their answers are never easy

> A sprawling threatening world is made manageable by being seen in terms of a deliberately limited range of issues.
> But if the limitation of the private eye's perspective constitutes a necessary means of keeping this world under control, it also often provided a highly effective means of evoking a world where such control seems impossible. For writers like Hammett, Chandler and Macdonald, this is done by repeated apparent transgression of the nominal barrier separating the detective from the world he investigates ---." (Martin Priestman: THE FIGURE ON THE CARPET: 170)

In other words these texts not only propose a threatening world, which they simplify for ease of reference as all fiction does, but they participate fully in that world. They, thus, reconstruct its issues as they evolve on the page. The engagement between the protagonist and their social and political construct is an active one. They are, one to the other, both cause and effect. Nothing remains static in the Lukcasian sense of a 'finished' or completed or, in one sense, complacent universe. "And the static presentation of average characters in surroundings conceived of 'finished' must of necessity cause literature to fall short of reality." (Lukacs: STUDIES IN EUROPEAN REALISM: 169)

Lukacs supposed that

> content determines form. But there is no content of which man is not the focal point. --- man is a zoon politikon, a social animal --- (whose) human significance cannot be separated from the content in which they were created." (REALISM IN OUR TIME: 19)

Realism, for Lukacs, was a matter of an active social engagement, and the crux of his complaint about what he called the 'new realists' or 'naturalists' (he used the terms somewhat interchangeably)

was that the writers of these texts observed experience rather than participated in it:

> Only illusions motivated by the social movement depicted, i.e. illusions - often tragic illusions - which are historically necessary, do not prevent the writer from depicting social reality with objective truth. --- The old writers were participants in the social struggle ---. The Bourgeois artist has, in fact two choices. He can swim against the current or --- allow himself to be carried by the mainstream of capitalism." (Lukacs: STUDIES IN EUROPEAN REALISM: 139-156)

It could be supposed that Chandler and Hammett, and Hammett in particular, owed rather a lot to naturalists like Zola and Dreiser. However, I am not certain that this totally negates the argument that they do meet a good many of Lukacs' criteria. These novels were written between 1930 and the 1960's. They covered the years of the depression and prohibition, labour unrest and the heyday of organised crime, the years of the New Deal, isolationism and the Second world war, the McCarthy era, the civil rights movement and race rioting, the Korean war and the Vietnam war, the years of the Cold war, the anti-Vietnam demonstrations and the youth revolution. The United States was in a process of transformation and whilst many of these matters are not even touched upon in these fictions, and their most active engagement is with the politicised issues of crime, the constant rub of changing times and the uncertainty that such a state generates is a veritable part of their texture. Their protagonists are participants, and not observers, in the on-going processes of their day. Often, in the way they delineate the illusions of their day, they put a clearer construct upon the ideology of their day than other kinds of fiction can do. After all they are, by their very nature, closely in touch with the fears and desires of their mass audience. Consequently their structures move constantly between the particular and into the general in ways which both illuminate, and are illuminated by, their socio/ideological construct.

I do not know what Lukacs would have thought about texts of this type, some of which he certainly could have read. I have never come across anything that he wrote about them. On the other hand he was a convinced disciple of the critical theory which proposes that it does not matter what structure a writer proposes to place on his text, it is what he manages to achieve that counts. Following this argument to its logical conclusion, it could be presumed that there might be a contradiction between the texts a critic presumes will support his literary theories, and the range of texts which actually do. What is sauce for the writer, so to speak, is sauce for the critic. I would argue that Lukacs definitions of the active social engagement necessary to what he calls 'realism' offer me a more valuable insight into the social and political critique imposed upon the structure of these novels than do many other theories more intimately bound with fictions of this nature. Apart from anything else, Lukacs' definition of the choices open to a 'bourgeois artists' go a long way to

explain why Hammett and Chandler are better writers than Macdonald is. They 'swim against the tide'. Macdonald allows himself to be carried along by the 'mainstream of capitalism'.

In any event, I do suppose that Lukacs was a much misunderstood man. So frequently accused of arrogance, his principle characteristic as revealed to me by his writing is his optimism. George Steiner called this his "ascetic, optimistic, morality." (REALISM IN OUR TIME: Preface: 15) These texts, at their best, just because they are active and not passive, are optimistic. They accept nothing, which they do question, as a situation which cannot be susceptible to change. Their questions may be few, and limited by their fromulaic construct, but they are urgent and pressing.

Hammett: Or Tell It Like It Was

Naturally enough, some might argue that any socialist, believing that society can change if its conditions are re-arranged, would need to be an optimist. I think that it is possible to presume that any capitalist who believes, or who purports to believe, that unbridled greed can lead to the greater good of all mankind, needs to be a good deal optimistic. In any event Hammett, was of course a Marxist. Lillian Hellman wrote that:

> I don't know if Hammett was a Communist Party member: most certainly he was Marxist. But he was often a very critical Marxist, often contemptuous of the Soviet Union ---. He was often witty and bitingly sharp about the American Communist Party but he was, in the end, loyal to them. --- I knew that, unlike many radicals, whatever he believed in, whatever he had arrived at, came from reading and thinking. He took time to find out what he thought ---. (THE BIG KNOCKOVER: Preface: 12/13)

I know that I have written that I am not interested in finding the author through his text. On the other hand, Hammett's political beliefs were a matter of public record, and he suffered for them. To draw attention to them, to say that his Marxism was an important ingredient of his fiction is not the same thing as making wild guesses about a writer's sex life or other private obsessions from the construct of his characters. An argument which always seems to suppose that a fiction cannot be a carefully worked out structure, placed in a text for a particular purpose; but presupposes that a writers' imaginative achievement is limited to an the concretization of their subconscious. And even if that last argument were to hold good, it is the fictive use that they make of their subconscious that counts. It is not the content of that subconscious.

Notwithstanding which, it is generally supposed that a vital constituent of 'hard-boiled' detectives are their private conscience and/or particular code of honourable behaviour. Hammett, according to Hellman

> made up honour early in is his life and stuck with his rules, fierce in the protection of them. In 1951 he went to jail because he and two other trustees of the bail bond fund of the Civil Rights Congress refused to reveal the names of the contributors to the fund. The truth was that Hammett had never been in the office of the Committee and did not know the name of a single contributor. The night before he was to appear in court (he said): 'I hate this kind of damn talk, but maybe I better tell you that if it were more than jail, if it were my life, I would

give it for what I think democracy is and I don't let cops or judges tell me what I think democracy is.' (Preface: 11)

I consider this story to be a particularly good definition of the construct of private honour, frequently at odds with public ideology, which shapes the code of ethics of the 'hard-boiled' hero/ine. On the other hand, Hammett' detectives are probably more complex in their social structure, and rather less conventionally honourable, that either Marlowe or Archer. The Continental Op, Sam Spade, Need Beaumont and, to a lesser extent, Nick Charles are shown to be products of a corrupt political system, and within their delineation lies a good deal of what Hammett has made of the ills of capitalism. Hammett wrote about Sam Spade in 1934:

> He is what most of the private detectives I worked with would like to have been. --- Your private detective does not want to be an erudite solver of riddles in the Sherlock Holmes manner, he wants o be a hard and shifty fellow, able to take care of himself in any situation, able to get the best of anybody he comes into contact with, whether criminal, innocent by-stander, or client." (Wolfe: BEAMS FALLING: 119)

The point to this is that Spade is not made up of a fantasy of moral rectitude. He is a construct of a success ethic which is being delineated as a part and parcel of 'the will to win' at all costs and which; it could be argued, is one of the principle critiques Hammett is levelling at the ethics of capitalism. The Op and the rest of them do have a code of conduct, but it is pragmatic; and the constraints of that pragmatism reveal the limited choices their worlds offer them. It is the fine but finite line that lies between perceptions of the corrupt and the incorrupt in a basely drawn universe.

In any event, in one of Hammett's earlier short stories, THE GUTTING OF COUFFIGNAL, the Op explains why he will not take a bribe:

> 'Let me straighten this out for you, ---. We'll disregard whatever honesty I happen to have, sense of loyalty to employment and so on. You might doubt them, so we'll throw them out. Now I'm a detective because I happen to like the work. It pays me a fair salary, but I could find other jobs that would pay more. Even a hundred dollars more a month would be twelve hundred a year. Say twenty-five or thirty dollars in the years between now and my sixtieth birthday.'
>
> 'Now I pass up about twenty-five or thirty thousand of honest gain because I like being a detective, like the work. And liking the work makes you want to do it as well as you can. Otherwise there'd be no sense to it. That's the fix I'm in. I don't know anything else, don't enjoy anything else. You can't weigh that against any sum of money. Money is good stuff. I

haven't anything against it. But in the past eighteen years I've been getting my fun out chasing crooks and solving riddles. It's the only kind of sport I know anything about, and I can't imagine a pleasanter future than twenty-some years more of it. I'm not going to blow that up!'

She shook her head slowly, lowering it so that now her dark eyes looked up at me under the thin arcs of her brows.

'You speak only of money.' she said.' I said you may have whatever you ask.'

That was out. I don't know where these women get their ideas.

'You're still all twisted up,' I said brusquely, sanding now and adjusting my borrowed crutch. 'You think I'm a man and your'e a woman. That's wrong. I'm a manhunter and you're something that has been running in front of me. There is nothing human about it. You might as well expect a hound to play tiddly-winks with the fox he's caught." (THE BIG KNOCKOVER: 50/51)

This is the closest the Op comes to voicing his professional credo and, as can be seen, the job is the source of all his moral values and ethical standards.

Sam Spade gives the woman he loves up to the forces of law and order for reasons which are as pragmatic and as dominated by his work ethic, as those of his fictive predecessor:

> Spade's face was yellow-white now. His mouth smiled and there were smile-wrinkles around his glittering eyes His voice was soft and gentle. He said 'I'm going to send you over. The chances are you'll get life. That means you'll be out again in twenty years. You're an angel. I'll wait for you.' He cleared his throat. 'If they hang you I'll always remember you. --- You're taking the fall. One of us has got to take it, after all the talking those birds will do. They'd hang me for sure. You're likely to get a better break. --- I won't play the sap for you. --- I don't care who love who. I'm not going to play the sap for you. --- I can't help you now. And I wouldn't if I could. --- Miles was a son of a bitch. I found that out the first week we were in business together and I meant to kick him out as soon as the year was up. You didn't do me a damned bit of harm by killing him. --- but --- When a man's partner is killed he's supposed to do something about it. I doesn't make any difference what you thought of him. He was your partner and you're supposed to do something about it. Then it happens we were in the detective business. Well when one of your organisation gets killed it's bad business to let the killer get away with it. It's bad all round - bad for that one organisation, bad for every detective everywhere. Third, I'm a detective and expecting me to run criminals down and then let them go free is like asking a dog to catch a rabbit and let it go. It can be done, all right, and sometimes it is done, but it's not the natural thing. --- Fourthly, no matter

> what I wanted to do now it would be absolutely impossible for me to let you go without having myself dragged to the gallows with the others. Next, I've no reason in God's world to think I can trust you and if I did this and got away with it you'd have something on me that you could use whenever you happened to want to. ---The sixth would be that, since I've got something on you, I wouldn't be sure you wouldn't decide to shoot a hole in me one day. Seventh, I don't even like the idea of thinking that there may be one chance in a hundred that you'd played me for a sucker. And eighth - but that's enough. And all those on one side. Maybe some of them are unimportant. I won't argue about that. But look at the number of them. Now on the other side we've got what? All we've got is the fact that maybe you love me and maybe I love you.'" (THE MALTESE FALCON: 195-199)

There is a terrible emptiness, a restriction to all human possibility and endeavour in these demarcations. Hammett, more than any other writer, invented the 'hard boiled' detective. What he made of him is what he, and later she, became. However, Hammett's style, the achievement of his style," is to have evolved a prose in which the most grotesque or shocking details are handled as though they were matters of routine, part of the job." (Alvares: THE NOVELS OF DASHIELL HAMMETT: 211) Chandler's Marlowe shares many of the attributes of Hammett's detectives but, because Chandler's prose has a sensual and a lyrical property to it, Marlowe becomes a far more romantic figure than Hammett ever constructed. Dorothy Parker wrote in the NEW YORKER of April 1931, that Hammett does his readers the infinite courtesy of allowing them to supply descriptions and analysis for themselves, 'he sets down only what his characters say and what they do.' (135) Hammett allows his figures to tell us what they are, and what they have to do to earn a living, and what this living has done to them. He does so without comment and because his detectives accept themselves as though they were a matter of course; their moral construct opens out before the readers horrified eyes as a barren abyss and void of all feeling but the necessities of the job. There is very little moral struggle. By the time his detectives appear on the page, they are all made up. The detective, it should be remembered, Hammett specified as a man who wanted to win at all costs. The cost, Hammett appears to be arguing, is the loss of all self. The Old Man, the head of the agency, the pinnacle of success, is what lies ahead of them all. He is the true cost of a work ethic that presumes that it does not matter how you play the game; it only matters who wins:

The Old Man, with his gentle eyes behind gold spectacles and his mild smile, hiding the fact that fifty years of sleuthing had left him without any feelings at all on any subject." (THE BIG KNOCKOVER: 99)

Hammett has made the Op and Spade into men who have nothing but their work to guide them. So let us look at the cost that Hammett counted. The crook, as Hammett has made them, is free

enterprise gone berserk. The detective is free enterprise contained. However, the small range of choices Hammett offers to all his constructs makes them what they are and defines the nominal barrier between them. His entire environment provides a constant evidence of the degenerating influence of the times. The operatives are as caught by this all pervasive smell of corruption as the crooks are.

The Op turns down the twin bribes of money and sex because he likes his work. However, despite what he says to the contrary, the inference is clear that his only other alternative would be the life of crime. And the point is that if he were to accept bribes, of whatever type, he would lose his job and have nowhere, even half way honest, left to go. Thus, instead of a moral code which could bear examination outside the construct of his work, he turns his sense of self into what the work asks him to be. He is a hunter and hunters have set patterns of behaviour. He could have been either a fox or a hound. Both are bound by the law of the jungle, and are no better than they have to be. On the other hand, the Op became a hound and, because he has no other principle to advise him, he borrows the construct of that animal to excuse his own behaviour. I think that it is quite appropriate that at the time of this particular little speech the Op is resting on the "borrowed crutch." of his job definition. The frightening thing about the way these men are presented does not lie in their twisted construct. It lies in the matter-of-fact way they accept themselves. They talk about having the traits of a hunting dog as though this is quite normal behaviour instead of an aberration which, it could be supposed, most people would consider it to be.

Sam Spade turns Bridget O'Shaughnessy over, not because he believes that she deserves all that is coming to her but because, in the law of the jungle if he "plays the sap" for her, shows any signs of weakness or lets her smell blood she will, or may, turn and rend him apart. The possibility, no matter how remote is sufficient. On the other hand, the evidence of the text presumes this possibility to be very real. I have quoted this passage as extensively as I have because I wanted to make it quite clear how little room Hammett has given Spade to manoeuvre within. Given the constraints of Spade's world, as he lays it down, point after merciless point, there was nothing else he could do but hand Bridget over to the police. Hammett's vision has been likened to a Hobbesian vision of the universe and, to quote Hobbes most famous phrase, the life of man is "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short." However, the central point to Hobbes metaphysical theory could be said to be that a man's perception of the physical world is in itself an utterly unreliable guide as to what there is in the world, There is no secure knowledge of anything outside an individual's own skull. Thus there can be no objective perception. His/her own thoughts and desires are all that can guide his/her actions, This was therefore as far as moral language could go

--- whatsoever is the object of any man's Appetite or Desire; that is it, which he for his part

calleth Good. And the object of his Hate, Aversion, Evil; And of his contempt, Vile, and Inconsiderable. For these words of Good, Evill and Contemptible, are ever used with relation o the person that useth them: There being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any common Rule of Good and Evil, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves." (POLITICAL THOUGHT FROM PLATO TO NATO: 103)

Hobbes has thus disposed of conventional ideas about free will.

On the other hand, Hammett was a socialist and, as I have argued, a socialist is one who deems that a being's world, and their perception of that world, can be altered if their socio/economic construct changes. Thus, whilst I am presuming that some part of Hobbes thought informs Hammetts world as he has drawn it in these texts, I am also supposing that Hammett has drawn this world in the way that he has to a purpose. He allows his detectives very little, if any free will. They are the construct of their socio/economic structures, which is, of course, a perfectly proper marxist angle of thought. Hammett said about the criminal that:

> Few criminals of any class are self-supporting unless they toil at something legitimate between times. --- I have never known a man capable of turning out first rate work in a trade, a profession or an art, who was a professional criminal." (From MEMOIRES OF A PRIVATE DETECTIVE: Wolfe: BEAMS FALLING: 16)

That is to say: a criminal is not one who chooses this way of life from the midst of many alternatives. A criminal is one who had no other choice he could make.

Hammett, unlike Chandler and Macdonald, does not glamorise his detectives. He shows them for what they are; "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish." They are the product of their environment. They hang onto the 'borrowed crutch" of the morality of the hunter because that is the only 'reality" they know. It could, thus, be argued that Hammett, by placing their lives flat on the page without comment or excuse, and constructing his detectives as the logical consequence of their work ethic, is designating just how little freedom of choice the (dog eat dog or be eaten) world of free enterprise allows. Hammett's genius is that he takes a social type and defines it within the construct of a logical conclusion.

On the other hand, although Hammett does not comment directly he often interposes strange stories or dreams in the midst of his texts which clarify, up to a point, his underlying purpose. The

two most ambivalent of these are the story about Flitcraft in THE MALTESE FALCON and, perhaps the oddest of the lot, the story about Alfred G Packer in THE THIN MAN. Flitcraft was a successful business man in Tacoma who suddenly disappeared for no discernible good reason whatsoever. He turned up again in Spokane five years later; living to all intents and purposes, precisely the same sort of life as he done previously. Apparently he had gone out to lunch in Tacoma and passed a building that was being erected:

> A beam or something fell eight or ten stories down and smacked the side walk along side him. --- It only took a piece of his skin off, but he still had the scar when I saw him. --- He was scared stiff, of course, h said, but he was more shocked than really frightened. He felt like somebody had taken the lid of his life and let him look at the works.
> Flitcraft had been a good citizen and a good husband and father, not by any other compulsion, but simply because he was a man who was most comfortable in step with his surroundings. He had been raised that way. The people he knew were like that. The life he knew was a clean, orderly, sane, responsible affair. Now a falling beam had shown him that life was fundamentally none of those things. He, the good citizen-husband-father, could be wiped out between office and restaurant by the accident of a falling beam. He knew then that men died at haphazard like that, and lived only while blind chance spared them. --- What disturbed him was the discovery that in sensibly ordering his affairs he had got out of step and not into step with life. --- he found his means of adjustment. Life could be ended for him at random by a falling beam: he would change his life at random by simply going away. --- For a couple of years he wandered around and then drifted back to the North-west, and settled in Spokane and got married. --- He wasn't sorry for what he had done. It seemed reasonable enough to him. I don't think he even knew he had settled back naturally into the same groove he had jumped out of in Tacoma. But that's the part of it I always liked. He adjusted himself to beams falling, and then no more of them fell, and he adjusted himself to them not falling." (59/60)

Naturally enough this passage has been taken to mean many things. Of course, some part of it reflects Hammett's vision that life is irrational and that the all-seeming solidarity of matter and routine and custom can be overturned in a moment. However, what it specifies in particular to me, is the inordinate lengths people will go to impose an order on their universe. A beam fell, and it was a random event. Consequently, Flitcraft thought that he could make an order out of his life by behaving randomly. No more beams fell, so he returned to his earlier world which presupposed that things happened to a purpose. Through juxtaposition, Hammett delineates that neither supposition is particularly useful. Beams can continue to fall or not fall as the case may be. However, Flitcraft could not live if he felt his life was out of step with the meaning of the universe. As soon as he made a sense out of what happened to him; he made that into the way of all of the world. What happened

to him, and the way he could articulate it, he moved from the particular and into the general. A beam fell. His world was made up of falling beams. No more beams fell. His world became a place where beams do not fall. Therefore, as Hobbes supposed, men make up the order of the universe out of their own heads and their own circumstances.

Now this, of course, shines a further light into the way Hammett constructs his detectives. They live in a world that is made up of the hunter and the hunted. They thus reconstruct the world as though it offers no other perspective. They are the hunters and they abide by all the rules of the hunter and try and make them into a moral absolute because that is the only way they can make a sense out of the particular corner of the universe they have experienced. This is why their code of conduct revolves around ideas of an appearance of strength and the solidarity of the pack: "Well when one of your organisation gets killed its bad business to let the killer get away with it." Any sign of weakness in a world where the dividing line is fine between the winner and the loser; but the rewards and punishments are so great (to live or to die) must be avoided at all cost. The smell of blood, one wounded member, might be enough to bring the whole shaky structure down. He who weakens, so to speak, for even one second, is lost. Hammett's particular construction of the detective is, thus, part of his general vision of how people impose structures on their lives.

The story of Packer is even odder. In the fall of 1873, Packer and nineteen other men set out from Salt Lake City to prospect for minerals. After weeks of hard weather, they saw an Indian camp in the distance and whilst worried about their reception "in the hands of the 'reds'"(67) they decided that any death was preferable to starvation. In any event, they were made welcome and, on the advice of the chief, ten of the party returned to Salt Lake City. Why they had decided to set of in the fall in the first place, with nothing but the winter before them is never explained. Four of the remaining ten followed the route the chief had recommended to them, if they really would insist on continuing their journey. Two of those survived and finally reached the Los Pianos Agency in February 1874. The other two died of starvation and exposure along the way.

The other six, led by Packer had decided to go try and find some particularly rich mines which Packer claimed to have knowledge of. They predictably fell onto hard times again and nothing further was heard about them until Packer turned up at the Los Pianos Agency in the March of that year. He said that he had been deserted by his five companions whilst he was ill. A perfectly believable story in that day and age one must presume. Anyway, he then proceeded to behave so irrationally, tell so many conflicting stories, and flash so much unaccountable money around that he aroused suspicion. He was already under arrest when two Indians turned up in the Agency in April "holding strips of flesh in their hands that they called 'white man's meat.' (68) They declared they

had found them just outside the Agency when the snow thawed. On catching sight of these grisly exhibits Packer broke down and admitted to eating his companions as an alternative to starving to death. After he had killed the last man, which as he told the story was really a kill of be killed situation, he then

> cut his flesh into strips which I carried with me as I pursued my journey. When I espied the Agency from the top of the hill, I threw away the strips I had left, and I confess I did so reluctantly as I had grown fond of human flesh, especially that portion around the breast.(69)

This last is particularly chilling if the reader recalls that Packer was unable to keep down any normal food when he first turned up out of the blue.

The story continues and gets even more bizarre. It deserves a full-length study all on its own. The bodies of the five victims are finally recovered and, whilst no specific issue is made about this, are still easily identifiable. This presupposes that they had none of them been completely eaten:

> He probably spoke the truth when he stated his preference for breast of man, as in each instance the entire breast was cut away to the ribs. A beaten track was found leading from the bodies to a near-by cabin, where blankets and other articles belonging to the murdered men were discovered and everything indicated that Packer lived in this cabin for many days after the murders, and that he made frequent trips to the bodies for his supply of human meat.(70)

Packer is then finally charged. It may be possible to assume that this was not before time. However, while the sheriff was away getting the warrants, Packer escaped. Nothing further is heard about him until 1883 when he was recognised and identified in Cheyenne, Wyoming. He was then brought back and tried, for some strange reason, for the murder of the one man he had claimed not to have committed. He was found guilty of murder with the death penalty attached. On the other hand, for reasons that are again not clearly specified, a stay of execution was granted and Packer was retried. He was found guilty of five counts of manslaughter and sentenced to serve eight years for each offence in October 1885, making a total of forty years in all. The story ends: "He was pardoned on January 1, 1901, and died on a ranch near Denver on April 24, 1907."(71)

Firstly one can read this story as an attack on mimesis which often seems to suppose that one can reconstruct events, make a rational explanation out of them, by the introduction of so-called factual detail. The only order to this sample of life in the wild is the constant repetition of the dates on which events occurred. It looks, thus, on superficial examination as though it makes sense. Actually, it makes no sense at all on any plausible level. It could also be supposed that this bizarre extract, claiming another authenticity because it professes to be taken from Duke's CELEBRATED CRIMINAL CASES OF AMERICA, is purporting to demonstrate certain issues in common with the story of Flitcraft. There is a motif that runs through it which delineates the arbitrary nature of suffering. Some men die, some survive, some starve, and some are eaten for reasons that make very little sense if one were to suppose a rational universe. The only point of departure where it could be supposed that some of them went the right way and some of them went the wrong way is if the Indian chief is taken as the moral centre of the story. The Indians are, of course, called 'Reds'. This would then suppose that Hammett is proposing a theory which supposes that disregarding an earlier wisdom of a people who were in closer touch with the rhythms of the earth, in favour of the pursuit of wealth, is likely to prove fatal. There may be something to this but it seems too neat a summary of the way of the world for Hammett. It might be possible to draw out some sort of an analogy between Indian 'reds' and communist 'reds', if only because both terms are frequently used in a derogatory sense. However, I would find it difficult to drag this equation out into any conclusion which sounds like Hammett. It could only be done by suggesting that Hammett is paralleling the wisdom of those in touch with the earth and those in touch with the true consequences of capitalism. I think that this sort of argument, although textually based, tends to end up sounding a bit ridiculous.

Anyway, it may be possible to suppose that the story continues the dog eat dog theme which is so much part of Hammett's vision of the world of his texts. It could be concluded that he is saying that, when push comes to shove, all human beings will do anything in order to survive. On the other hand, there is the rather odd detail that the corpses, when discovered, had not been stripped of all their flesh. It could be argued that many people would rather eat their fellow beings than starve to death. Hammett may be drawing an analogy here between an actual cannibalism and the cannibalism of free –enterprise. However, I would presume that the implicit critique of the story is much darker. Men do not kill one another in order to survive. They kill because they want "the breast meat." They do not just kill because they would starve otherwise. If Packer and his companions had killed, only in order to live they would have dined of all the parts of each corpse before they started on the next one. They kill because they want, so to speak, the juicy bits. I cannot think what else this story is carrying as its sub-text, other than this particularly bleak insight into the initiating premises of human endeavour, whether that is structured by laissez-faire economics or whatever. Greed is not purely a matter of survival, it is just what it is called: greed. This story does, of course, serve as a reminder of the dark underbelly of an American way of life in stark contrast to the somewhat over-privileged and glamorous life style of Nick and Nora Charles. Hammett's interposed

his most ambivalent story in the midst of his most superficial text. It seems possible to conclude that he did so to serve a purpose.

Notwithstanding all of which, RED HARVEST and THE GLASS KEY are the texts which offer the most valuable insights into Hammett's political and social vision. Julian Symons has argued that THE GLASS KEY is

> the peak of Hammett's achievement, which is to say the peak of the crime writer's art in the twentieth century. --As a novel THE GLASS KEY is remarkable, as a crime novel unique. --- It can stand comparison, for example, with SANCTUARY (1931) by his friend William Faulkner." (BLOODY MURDER: 157/8)

This is as it may be. I am not about to get into a Faulkner versus Hammett debate. However, I do think that THE GLASS KEY is a remarkable book and I do think that if any one writer can demonstrate the dangers implicit to evaluating a text through its cover; then that writer is Hammett. On the other hand, RED HARVEST is the text where Hammett drew his vision of the world of free-enterprise into a particularly logical and grim conclusion. It is also the clearest example of Hammett's technique of taking the particular and making it into a general argument.

Hammett opens the text with

> I first heard personville called poisonville by a red-haired mucker named Hickey Dewey in the Big Ship in Butte. He also called his shirt a shoit. I didn't think anything of what he had done to the city's name. Later I heard men who could mange their r's give it the same pronunciation. I still didn't see anything in it but the kind of humour that used to make richardsnary the thieves' word for dictionary. A few years later I went Personsville and learned better. (3)

One of the matters that should be remembered, at this point, is that the Op, unlike his successors, Ned Beaumont or Sam Spade,or Marlowe or Archer, belongs to an organisation. He is accountable to his Agency and the Agency has to account to the justice system. The RED HARVEST could be said to be about the clash of two organisations, free enterprise and the forces of law and order, which should be necessarily discrete in their initiating premises. RED HARVEST shows what happens when they both run amuck and obey only the rules of 'winner takes all'.

Elihu Willson had, for forty years

> owned Personville, heart, soul, skin and guts. He was president and majority stakeholder of the Personville Mining Corporation, ditto of the First National Bank, owner of the MORNING HERALD and EVENING HERALD, the city's only newspapers, and at least part owner of nearly every other enterprise of any importance. Along with these pieces of property he owned a United States senator, a couple of representatives, the governor, the mayor, and most of the state legislature. Elihu Willson was Personville, and he was almost the whole state." (8)

In any event, Elihu was determined to rid himself of constraints of organised labour. He hired gunmen, strike-breakers, national guardsmen, and even parts of the regular army to break the power of the unions. He broke it quite conclusively but found, to his surprise, that he was then hoist with his own petard:

> Elihu didn't know his Italian history. He won the strike, but he lost his hold on the city and the state. To beat the miners he had to let his hired thugs run wild. When the fight was over he couldn't get rid of them. He had given his city to them and he wasn't strong enough to take it away from them. Personville looked good to them and they took it over. They had won his strike for him and they took the city for their spoils. He couldn't openly break with them. They had too much on him. He was responsible for all they had done during the strike." (9)

The message is quite clear. Those who live by the sword should not whine when they also die by the sword. Free enterprise, taken to its logical conclusion, deems that fortune belongs to those who are in a position to take advantage of it.

This is, then, the position when the Op gets to the town. Hammett has written a gangster ridden environment, where there is nothing else available for consumption but the structures of gangsterism. It is also a prime example of the technique I wrote about earlier when a writer makes the environment 'simpler than life'. And it is the answer to any argument that Hammett was a so called 'realist' concerned to represent a mimetic imitation of life simply because he described an ugly situation. Personville only shows one small part of its society. Hammett has tidied it to fit his purpose. Notwithstanding which, it is the behaviour of the Op that is really the centre of the moral construct of the action. He seems primarily concerned, not with cleaning up the town because it is corrupt, but to ensure that he gets his revenge upon it. It may be useful at this point, to remind ourselves that Hammett supposed that the predominant motivation for the average private eye was the will to win and to get the better of anybody they come into contact with. The Op says:

> 'No I don't like the way Poisonville has treated me. I've got my chance now, and I'm going to even up. I take it you're back in the club again, all brothers together, let bygones be bygones. You want to be let alone. There was a time when I wanted to be let alone. If I had been, maybe now I'd be riding back to San Francisco. But I wasn't. Especially I wasn't let alone by that fat Noonan. He's had two tries at my skull in two days. That's plenty. Now it my turn to run him ragged and that's exactly what I'm going to do. Poisonville is ripe for the harvest. It's a job I like, and I'm going to do it.'(87/88)

The Op sets all the villains against one another and proceeds to rid the town of them by letting them kill one another. Wolfe wrote

> the distrust shadowing crime rules out all civilised values. Because the criminal always faces the threats of arrest, beating and death, he can't trust anybody. There is no honour among Hammett's thieves. Animal survival at any price has overwhelmed all. Thus life is a jungle and crime, the most savage, self-defeating activity of all. --- Their small range of choices makes criminals dull and predictable. A shrewd detective can outmanoeuvre a crook easily. (BEAMS FALLING: 16)

Thus, we return to the argument that human beings can only make up their code of conduct from within the parameters of their own experience. A crook, who will cheat and kill anyone who stands in his way, must presume that the world is made up of people who will cheat and kill him. It seems possible to argue that the distrust and fear such convictions must breed make the criminal easy to manipulate. He can easily be talked into believing that everybody is out to 'get' him, because he is out to 'get' everybody. Hammett frequently uses the solution of setting thief against thief.

On the other hand, pragmatic as this answer may be, it is only short term effective and the cost may be high. There can be little doubt that Hammett is making a particular political point here. That is to say that short term effective may very well be long term stupid. After all Elihu used a version of short term pragmatism in the first place. The Op begins to count that cost when he says

> this damned burg is getting to me. If I don't get away soon I'll be going blood-simple like the natives. There's been what? A dozen and a half murders since I got here. ---I've arranged a killing or two in my time, when they were necessary. But this is the first time I've got the fever. --- Play with murder enough and it gets you in one of two ways. It makes you sick, or you get to like it." (155)

Now however dubious we may be about the Op's concept of a necessary killing, he is recognising here that he has stepped over some line which previously separated the hunter from the hunted. He comes face to face with his own image in the mirror and recognises the danger that he is in if he can no longer vindicate his conduct even by his own standards of justifiable behaviour. Thus, Hammett is presenting a couple of general conclusions from the particular matter he is describing. Firstly, it is extremely difficult for any being to operate outside the construct of his time and place. The Op has lived too long in a lawless environment and too far away from the constraints of the Agency. Secondly, he is showing that the principles that guide the Agency, which the Op stipulated in THE GUTTING OF COUFFIGNAL, are insufficient to withstand any real pressure because they are too akin to the law of the jungle themselves. Thirdly, he is demonstrating, again, the dangers inherent to making over the world in one's own image. A beam fell, so the Op is beginning to make sense of the world through the eyes of a criminal.

Thus, it would seem very possible to argue that Hammett is using Personville as a critical representation of how a free-enterprise capitalist society works. Competition is based upon the structural premise that if some win then others lose. The moral worth of survival of the fittest is based on the premise that anything is permissible as long as the fittest can remain 'top dog'. The deserving, thus, become synonymous with the achieving. Elihu believes that he is somehow more virtuous because he is successful. "Son, if I hadn't been a pirate I'd still be working for the Anaconda for wages." (151)

However, the other side to this coin is that the losers, judged to have no merit whatsoever because they are losers, tend to be irritated by all this. Those who have no secure social status, seeing that success counts as an absolver of all evil (and that a successful criminal becomes, so to speak, a good man) will of necessity look at crime as a serious option. I argued earlier that part of the social and political criticism innate to these texts is in the very nominality of the barrier between the criminal and the law maker. In RED HARVEST the Op starts to break out of his respectable, law-abiding framework as soon as he is threatened by the social insecurity of the environment he finds himself in. The world of Personville is based on a very shaky moral premise (right is might) and Hammett demonstrates its worthlessness for all concerned, winners and losers, under pressure. Christopher Bentley points out that

> the imaginative reach of the novel embraces not only Personville but the whole of America. In the first of his drug-induced dreams in chapter 21 the Op hunts a woman through the named streets of a number of American cities - Baltimore, Denver, Cleveland, Dallas, Boston, Louisville, New York, Jacksonville, El Paso, Detroit, and Rocky Mount, North Carolina. In case it should still not be clear that Personville contains these and all other

American cities, the Op later remembers his dream when walking for the last time to Elihu Willson's house: 'I must have walked as many streets as I did in my dreams.'" (from AMERICAN CRIME FICTION: RADICAL ANGER: 65)

Therefore, Hammett is delineating American social and political structures, as embodied by Personville, as inadequate. However, he is also deeming that the system of justice, as embodied by the Op, is also inadequate. Hammett, unlike his successors, does not presume a clear division between his protagonists and their social environment. His detectives are not bandits or outlaws because they are outside society. They are bandits because they are within society. The law, and all forces for order, are shown from the inside as tools of capitalism, and not from the outside, as defined by Chandler and Macdonald. All that the Op achieves in the end, after he so-called purified the city by arranging for half the population to kill of the other half, is to hand the whole issue back to Elihu, who started the rot in the first place, "all nice and clean and ready to go to the dogs again." (203)

THE GLASS KEY, although a subtler evocation of the personal consequences attendant on living in a world gone mad under the ethical structure of gangster rule (or in Hammettian terms capitalism taken back to its initiating premises and forward into its logical conclusion) does not give as clear a insight into Hammett's vision of America struggling to make a viable structure out of something which is unfit for human consumption.

Chandler: Or You've Gotta Play Hurt

Marlowe is a very different matter altogether. He comes under the guise of a knight errant or Robin Hood type figure and, however flawed he may appear in that role, he does belong in that tradition in a way that Hammett's detectives never do. Marlowe seeks a moral justice which transcends the corrupt routines of his world's legal systems. His cry is akin to the old outlaw cry that "man's law is not God's law." On the other hand, Chandler has also patterned him in the shape of a "Byronic' hero:

> Byron's chief claim to be considered an arch-Romantic is that he provided his age with what Taine called its 'ruling personage; that is, the model, the model that contemporaries invest with their admiration and sympathy.' This personage is the 'Byronic hero'. He occurs in various guises in Byron's writings, but from the first sketch in the opening canto of CHILDE HAROLD, and in the verse romances and drams that follow, his persistent character is that of a moody, passionate, and remorse-torn, but unrepentant wanderer. ---But though Byronism was largely a fiction, reproduced by a collaboration between Byron's imagination and that of his public, the fiction is historically more important than the poet in his actual person. ---As Mary Shelley wrote six years after his death, when she read Thomas Moore's edition of his LETTERS AND JOURNALS: 'The Lord Byron I find there is our Lord Byron-the fascinating-faulty-childish-philosophical being-daring the world-docile to a private circle-impetuous and indolent-gloomy yet more gay than any other ---(and) the delightful and buoyant tone of his conversation and manners.' Of his inner discordances, Byron was well aware--- (but) As he went on to say to Lady Blessington: 'There are but two sentiments to which I an constant - a strong love of liberty, and a detestation of cant'."(from NORTON: Fifth edition: VOL 2 502-507)

Marlowe is thus an outlaw with his own code of ethics and, because of that, he also a wanderer and always marginal to society. He does love liberty but it often appears as though his predominate constructing force is his hatred of hypocrisy. He hates the legal system, not only because it is corrupt, but also because it pretends to offer justice and all it really does is "make business for lawyers." (THE LONG GOODBYE: 277) He hates the social system, not only because it is unjust, but because it pretends that the acquisition of wealth can be a moral process:

> Crime isn't a disease. It's symptom. We're a big rough rich wild people and crime is the price we pay for it, and organised crime is the price we pay for organisation. We'll have it with us a long time. Organised crime is just the dirty side of the sharp dollar.'
>
> 'What's the clean side'
>
> 'I never saw it.'"(THE LONG GOODBYE: 309/10)

He rejects the ordinary concepts of success and respectability, not only because he sees them as tawdry but because, as he is honest enough to admit, they bore him:

> The other part of me wanted to get out and stay out, but this was the part I never listened to. Because if I ever had I would have stayed in the town where I was born and worked in the hardware store and married the boss's daughter and had five kids and read them the funny paper on Sunday morning and smacked their heads when they got out of line and squabbled with the wife about how much spending money they were to get and what programmes they could have on the radio and TV set. I might even have got rich - small town rich, an eight-room house, two cars in the garage, chicken every Sunday and the Readers Digest on the living room table, the wife with a cast-iron permanent, and me with a brain like a sack of Portland cement. You take it, friend. (THE LONG GOODBYE: 218/9)

A married Marlowe is a contradiction in terms. The ending of PLAYBACK is not its only weakness, but it is a major flaw.

In any event, Marlowe's professional ethics and social conscience are a more personal matter. Hammett's people accept their world and are shaped by it and so delineate the constructing force of its political systems. Chandler's critical perceptions of his social and political structures are depicted through the eyes of Marlowe's rejection of public morality. Stephen Knight, in A HARD CHEERFULNESS, outlines Chandler's modus operandi:

> Essentially the novels have double plots. There is an outer structure where what has gone wrong is loosely associated with corruption, gangsters, professional crime. This is the plot that is offered first, and so a Hammett-type novel about corruption seems under way - blackmailers and racketeers in THE BIG SLEEP, jewel gangs and gangsters in FAREWELL, MY LOVELY, forgers and gambling in THE HIGH WINDOW, police corruption and drug doctors in THE LADY IN THE LAKE, gangsters and Hollywood hypocrisy in THE LITTLE SISTER, racketeers and high-lie corruption in THE LONG GOODBYE. But none of these people or patterns turns out really to have been behind the central crime, and they fade from the action as the inner, personalised plot is steadily revealed, as the actual betrayer and killer becomes exposed. (from AMERICAN CRIME FICTION: 82/83)

In other words, Chandler uses the structures of corrupt organisations to frame his texts, but then defines the true cost of such corruption by examining the private consequences of the distorted

ethics and, in particular, the moral cant innate to such corrupt political and social systems when they try and justify their own ends.

The perceived moral worth of rugged individualism is shown to be a cover, in Chandler's Los Angeles, for the selfish behaviour of those intent on pursuing their own lives and liberties and happiness at the expense of other people's freedom. Cawelti shows how Chandler's technique of the inner working of the double plot clarify his perception of the moral workings inherent to the power and the mythology of the American dream:

> Thus the quests of Moose and Velma become sources of a kind of moral infection that spreads through the social order and involves the crooked policemen, phoney spiritualists, and racketeers who try and stop Marlowe from completing his investigation. There is also a cultural allegory in Chandlers treatment of those two characters. Moose and Velma embody the dreams of youthful romance and success, which Chandler, like many writers if his period, saw as characteristic American illusions." (Cawelti: 181)

Notwithstanding which, Marlowe, hardly surprisingly because he is a Romantic hero is constructed as though he is in sympathy with the romantic dream. However, he does show it as an illusion. Chandler and Hammett, both artists working within the field of illusion, lay claim to an excellence because they count the cost of illusion. They show its end results. Marlowe says of Velma who pursued the illusions of success and happiness, but ended up hoist on the petard of the illusions of love:

> I'm not saying she was a saint or even half-way nice girl. Not ever. She wouldn't kill herself until she was cornered. But what she did and the way she did it, kept her from coming back here for trial. Think that over. And who would that trial hurt most? Who would be least able to bear it? And win, lose or draw, who would pay the biggest price for the show? An old man who had loved not wisely, but too well. (FAREWELL, MY LOVELY: 253)

THE LITTLE SISTER ends on a similar note: "I guess somebody lost a dream,' the intern said. He bent over and closed her eyes." (247)

On the other hand, THE LADY IN THE LAKE which continues, and expands on, the theme of the temptation of illusion and dream, ends on the most ambivalent message of all:

> A hundred feet down in the canyon a small coupe was smashed against the side of a huge granite boulder. It was almost upside down, leaning a little. There were three men down there. They had moved the car enough to lift something out.
> Something that had been a man. (237)

It may be possible to suppose that Chandler is purely making a comment about the physical condition of the body but it hardly seems likely. "Something that had been a man" is far too emotive a statement to be taken at that face value and Al Degarmo is drawn as a particularly unpleasant character:

> A large freckled hand appeared on the sill of the car door at my elbow. A large face, deeply lined, hung above it. The man had eyes of metallic blue. He looked at me solidly and spoke in a deep harsh voice. (28).

He manages to upset Patton, who normally appears to be placid enough.

> This big bruiser showed his picture to darn near everybody in town before he showed it to me. That made me kind of sore. It looked some like Muriel, but not enough to be sure by any matter of means. I asked him what she was wanted for. He said it was police business. I said I was in that way of business myself, in a ignorant countrified kind of way. He said his instructions were to locate the lady and that was all he knew. Maybe he did wrong to take me up short like that. So I guess I done wrong to tell him I didn't know anybody that looked like his little picture." (75)

He threatens Marlowe, which is the only reason why Marlowe even begins to take an interest in Dr Almore. He hits Marlowe, which achieves nothing, other than to alienate Marlowe even further. Degarmo is the epitome of police brutality and a greater part of Chandler's delineation of the brutality and corruption of the police force proposes that, not only is it an abuse of power, but that its evil serves no viable purpose. It is pointless.

> I stopped the car and the sentry threw his piece across his body and stepped up to the window.
> 'Close all the windows of your car before proceeding across the dam, please.'
> I reached back to wind up the rear window on my side. Degarmo held his shield up. 'Forget it buddy, I'm a police officer,' he said with his usual tact.
> The sentry gave him a solid expressionless stare. 'Close all the windows, please,' he said in

> the same tone he had used before.
>
> 'Nuts to you,' Degarmo said, 'Nuts to you, soldier boy,'
>
> 'It's an order,' the sentry said. His jaw muscles bulged very slightly. His dull greyish eyes stared at Degarmo. 'And I didn't write the order, mister. Up with the windows.'
>
> 'Suppose I told you to go jump in the lake,' Degarmo sneered.
>
> The sentry said: 'I might do it. I scare easily.' He patted the breech of his rifle with a leathery hand.
>
> Degarmo turned and closed the windows on his side. (218)

Degarmo was trying to exercise power and, not only does he fail, but it reads like a completely pointless exercise in the first place.

He tries to pin murders on others that he has committed himself. Chandler has made Degarmo into a degenerate man. A man constructed out of base metals who is poisoned by the illusions of power but, and this is why he dies, he is also driven by the power of love or lust. You may call it what you will. In any event, he is obsessed with his ex-wife who Marlowe says

> got the men that way, she could make them jump through hoops. I didn't know her long enough to see why, but her record proves it. What she was able to do with Lavery proves it." (229)

Degarmo is the one "who covered the girl up. You were in love with her still. You scared her out of town, out of danger, out of reach, but you covered up for her" (216).

However, in the end he kills her. She was killed by

> somebody who thought she needed killing, somebody who loved her and hated her, somebody who was too much of a cop to let her get away with any more murders, but not enough of a cop to pull her in and let the whole story come out. Somebody like Degarmo. (232)

Notwithstanding all of which Marlowe says that he was: "Something that had been a man." Which raises the very vexed question of quite what Chandler meant to imply by all this and, I think, I can only go back to my earlier argument that Chandler' principle critiques are of the hypocrisy of social

structures which pretend to a moral worth they do not possess. Business practices which pose as justice. Money hunger which poses as free enterprise. Corruption which poses as efficiency. It is the sheer pettiness and cant of it all that Marlowe cannot live with. Delgarmo, whatever else he may have been and most of it was undeniably unpleasant, was in the grip of a grand passion and in the final resort was "too much of a cop" to let it ride him further into the dark. And his death, like Velma's, also reads as though he could have avoided it. After his earlier run in with the sentry, he could never have doubted that the man would shoot to kill. Delgarmo's death was not petty and that seems to be the reason why Chandler calls him a 'man'.

Nobody in this text is quite what s/he seems to be. All appearance is an illusion. The drowned woman in the lake is Crystal Kingsley not Muriel Chess. Muriel Chess is, variously, Muriel Haviland and Muriel Degarmo and Mrs Fallbrook. Chandler does define Muriel largely in terms of the effect she has on men. However, and insofar as this work deals with the temptations and the illusions of dreams, I think this is fair enough. Chandler, as I have said, is so often accused of hostility towards women. Marlowe could very well be said to be afraid of the power of sex. He is world-weary and cynical. It is difficult to see how you can draw a man who has been there, seen it all, and lived through most of it without making them wary of the opposite sex. Paretsky and Grafton have delineated heroes who are, and understandably so, frightened of emotional attachment and wary of the chauvinism of men. A cynic is one who is sceptical about all the world has to offer; and in particular it's illusory dreams of true love and easy success. Chandler never pretends to offer well-rounded women. He offers only the appearance of the illusion. An illusion is, by its very nature, only an appearance. It seems to me a proper use of a stereo-typical product which defines its process through the shallowness of its construct.

Lukacs wrote, and it may be borne in mind that as far as he was concerned the value of a text lay in its active social engagement with its climate and times and that I am arguing that the bite of these novels lies in their active social engagement with their climate and times:

> Typical circumstances may be depicted abstractly or concretely, even if they are directly described, so far as their social nature is concerned. --- men and women grow out of an infinite wealth of circumstances they have encountered and how the turning points in their lives are indissolubly linked with the typical conditions prevailing in their sphere of life." (STUDIES IN EUROPEAN REALISM: 155)

Chandler, by taking his typical characters into their logical conclusion, delineates not only the perceived wisdom of the day about its types, but he postulates the dangers of that perceived

wisdom. Macdonald, on the other hand, and in a concrete rather than an abstract manner because of the way he has written his female characters has something to say about the perceived wisdom of Archer's world which he probably did not know he was saying. Chandler uses his stereo-types self-consciously, and with all due regard for their fictive construct both inside and outside the covers of a book. This seems to me to serve a perfectly proper literary purpose. Muriel is the face of sex used as power. That is her fictive function. Chandler is not trying to make her into anything else.

Chandler, for some reason, attracts a more virulent brand of criticism that any of his predecessors or successors. John Williams quotes James Ellroy as saying

> You know the private eye icon hero who has become such a ritual, such a cliché. He hates authority ---, he'd really like to be with a woman but no woman would go with him because of the violent lifestyle he leads. --- He hates big money. He has a witty riposte and an astute sociological observation for every situation that comes his way. I think that the character that Raymond Chandler created and which has spawned so many imitators is essentially bullshit." (INTO THE BADLANDS: 90)

Well, of course it is "bullshit". Can I just remind Ellroy that we are talking escapist literature, and that it is only a common courtesy to suppose that "the audience is always in their right minds."

Anyway, this sort of criticism seems to gather a momentum of its own. And it could be supposed that it demonstrates, as its initiating premise, a fundamental misconception of the purpose of Chandler's fiction. I would argue that he juxtaposes moral fantasy and social criticism, and lets them demonstrate, through their juxtaposition, the nature of their construct. Julian Symons wrote that

> Philip Marlowe became with each book more a piece of wish-fulfilment, an idealised expression of Chandler himself, a strictly literary conception. (BLOODY MURDER: 164)

Macdonald has argued that Marlowe's voice is too rigidly stylised and limited by his role as a hard-boiled hero. 'He must speak within his limits as a character, and these limits are quite narrowly conceived.' (Wolfe: SOMETHING MORE THAN NIGHT: 73)

Wolfe points out that Chandler is often accused of racism and anti-semitism:

> Denis Porter cites 'Chandler's racist innuendo' while the Australian Clive James only absolves Chandler from racism by calling him a crypto-sociopath: 'His race prejudice would amount to outright fascism if it were not so evident that he would never be able to bring himself to join a movement.' Reasoning more soberly but agreeing in principle with James and Porter, Stephen Pendo complains that Chandler ruined FAREWELL, MY LOVELY with his 'very definite bias against blacks --- . Not only does Marlowe label blacks 'niggers' but also the novel contains the stereotypic black who rolls his eyes. All the book's blacks are loud dressers --- and we never meet an admirable black although the other characters, no matter how unsavoury, usually have some admirable side.'"(14)

Wolfe goes on to specify various other occasions were he deems that Chandler has racially stereotyped in a derogatory way. His list includes, what he called, the Hispanic Dolores Gonzales, a blackmailer and murderess in THE LITTLE SISTER, and argues that

> Chandler libelled minorities the whole of his writing career. --- To fend any accusations of anti-semitism, Chandler renamed the blackmailer and smut merchant Harold Hardwicke Steiner (the final e of whose middle name implies that, were he Jewish, he'd rather not be) of KILLER IN THE RAIN. --- Nor can Chandler's opinion of blacks be ascertained. Words like shine, dinge and smoke appear in FAREWELL, MY LOVELY in dialogue. Marlowe will only say them to ignoramuses like Police Lieutenant Nulty and the alcoholic widow, Jessie Florian, who use them routinely. By intentionally using language he disapproves of to Jessie and Nulty, though, Marlowe is resorting to base means to establish justice. He also miscues when he calls Jessie's greeting 'as weak as a chinaman's tea' and when he says --- 'he was pulling a piece of weed --- and sneering at it the way Jap gardeners do.' Such blanket judgements have always been hostile in Chandler. They should have been left out. They undermine the novel as badly as does Marlowe's saying of a shabby old man in THE HIGH WINDOW. 'He had a sort of dry, musty smell like a fairly clean Chinaman.' Such descriptions carry a nasty implication. If Chandler used racial slurs to shore up his hero's hardboiled pose, then he might have been patronising his readers just as his hero did Lt Nulty and Jessie Florian.' (15/16)

I am not sure, quite who is confusing the dream with 'reality' here. Marlowe is a moral fantasy and, thus, of necessity a formula based on 'wish-fulfilment'. Raymond Chandler fretted against the limitation of formula fiction; but he never pretended that he had succeeded in writing anything else. Describing his own apprenticeship with the BLACK MASK, he wrote:

> some of us tried pretty hard to break out of the formula but we usually got caught and sent

back. To exceed the limits of a formula without destroying it is the dream of every magazine writer who is not a hopeless hack. ---(However) my whole career is based on the idea that the formula doesn't matter, the thing that counts is what you do with the formula; that is to say, it is a matter of style." (from; AMERICAN CRIME FICTION: Peter Humm: CAMERA EYE/PRIVATE EYE: 33)

Leaving aside Chandler's style for the moment, I would argue that he managed to achieve a real distinction within, or because of, the limitations of his formulaic construct. On the other hand, the point still remains that it is unreasonable to judge a formula as though it were pretending to a 'realism'. Secondly, Symons castigates Chandler for writing Marlowe, and I think this what he means, as a means to satisfy Chandler's own daydreams. Well, if he did, and nobody knows or should want to know the nature of Chandler's private fantasies, then still all that matters is what he placed on the page and whether his construct was successful or not. Thirdly, I do not know what Symons means by calling Marlowe a 'literary conception." I thought all fictive structures were? Symons is doing what Ellroy did. He is arguing as though Marlowe is the product of a different type of fiction. Macdonald, and I will argue later that Archer is a far more limited figure than Marlowe no matter what Macdonald said about him, is really falling into the same trap.

The question of Chandler/Marlowe's stereotyping and deemed prejudices is a more vexed one because, to use Watts' term, it is more insidious. Firstly, and because Wolfe will keep doing this, let just disregard whatever he has to say about Chandler as seen through his construct of Marlowe. Chandler's art works through the delineation and function of stereo - types, as I tried to demonstrate earlier with Muriel. Marlowe is a 'hard-boiled' hero figure. His women are representations of types, quite often sexual stereotypes. A good many of his characters are gangster-types or doctor-types or policemen-types or lawyer-types or whatever.

However, what matters is whether a type, or what a given society accepts as characteristically typical behaviour, is fictionalised in such a way as to specify that this is a perceived prejudice and not an impartial representation. Macdonald pretends to an impartial representation, and his drawings of women are chauvinistic to the extreme.

Notwithstanding which, it may be useful to have a look at another text which I do suppose is using racial prejudice to a, it may be fair to say, didactic purpose and compare it with Chandler. I picked up a book by Edmund Crispin in a second hand bookshop the other day called THE GLIMPSES OF THE MOON. I knew I had read him before, but could remember nothing about him. In any event,

this is one of the 'idyllic english village' school of detective fiction, but it was published as late as 1977, and so has nothing to do with the so-called 'golden age' of the classic detective story. Anyway, the fete was opened (there is nearly always a fete in books of this ilk) by a:

> short, slim affable, loquacious Negro, educated at Winchester and New College, who --- had begun his writing career with delicate studies of coloured men teetering between two cultures, but these, though gratifying to the OBSERVER and THE NEW STATESMAN, had in addition to selling poorly proved too much like hard work, since the author had no recollection at all of what Negro culture was like and was obliged to look it all up in books. (76)

I was not taking this book very seriously and so I just let this float past me. I presumed that Crispin had a particular prejudice he wanted to air about a type of fiction, possibly writers like Ngugi and Chinua Achebe and Ayi Kwei Armah who must have been coming to the attention of the English literary establishment at about that time. I thought that was why he had interjected this improbable and unnecessary figure into the midst of a stylised English village. His hero, a man called Fen, is supposed to be a professor of English Literature at Oxford and the book is littered with rather, and I cannot think of a more appropriate word, facile literary criticisms. Fen's views on African writers seemed about as ridiculous as the rest of his views about the modern literature of his day. However, I should have been warned but, as I said, it was just a book to drift of to sleep over. Then I came to this passage. I got such a shock I sat bolt upright in bed and two very large dogs and one medium sized cat flew of in every direction. Dermot McCarthy, or the negro as Crispin called him, says:

> My people are mostly dolts, I'm afraid. --- Dolts or barbarians or both. They believe things which are either nonsensical or else manifestly untrue, such as that they are collectively capable of managing their own affairs, and that black is beautiful, and that Jazz is an art form. (101)

NOW THIS IS RACIAL PREJUDICE and carries the full weight of the author behind it. Dermot contributes absolutely nothing to the plot and is the only person in the whole book who is absolutely irrelevant to its overall structure. I read it through to the bitter end just to make sure. If a Colonel Blimp type figure had said something like this, it could have been acceptable within the terms of a deemed verisimilitude. The fact that Crispin goes to all the trouble to get a black African into the text so as to give a spurious authority to statements of this sort is very offensive and seems to serve a racist purpose.

Chandler's interjections of, what can be called, racist language and description are very differently

voiced. FAREWELL MY LOVELY seems to attract the greatest critical attention so it is probably a good starting point. Firstly, there is a part where a black barman is described as 'rolling the whites of his eyes." (13) On the other hand, he is being confronted by an extremely large and, on the evidence of his behaviour up to that point in the story, certifiably insane and maniacally violent man. It would be enough to make any man, white, black, green or pink, role his eyes. I don't think one should take this too seriously as a piece of racial stereo-typing. Secondly, Pendo complains that all the blacks in these texts are loud dressers. Well, that is actually a middle class perception of working class dress sense. It may be possible to presume that Pendo should get his stereo-types sorted out. It may be worth having a good look at the following passage. It also has the merit, as far as I am concerned of supporting my class versus race theory:

> Slim quiet negroes passed up and down the street and stared at him with darting side glances. He was worth looking at. He wore a shaggy borsalino hat, a rough grey sports coat with white golf-balls on it for buttons, a brown shirt, a yellow tie, pleated grey flannel slacks and alligator shoes with white explosions on the toes. There were a couple of coloured feathers tucked into the band of his hat, but he didn't really mind them. Even on Central Avenue, not the quietest dressed street in the world, he looked about as inconspicuous as a tarantula on a slice of angel food cake." (FAREWELL, MY LOVELY: 7)

This, of course, is Moose and I always presumed Moose was white. Perhaps I missed something somewhere. In any event, he is obviously the loudest dresser around for a very long way. What racist stereo-type was he guilty of? I can think of several. Thirdly (I'll get to the "nigger' issue when I deal with the rest of the words Wolfe deems Chandler guilty of to no good effect) Pendo claims that all Chandler's characters, other than blacks, "have some admirable side." I do not want to be caught out in an inexactitude here but it might be fair to say that many of Chandler's characters have no discernible admirable side at all. What can anybody find to say in support of Mrs Morrison or Mrs Florian or Nulty, as Marlowe represents them for instance? And, in the interest of sticking to the same book, the behaviour of the black bouncer is a good deal more rational and 'admirable' than Moose's conduct, at that point.

Wolfe goes on to argue that Chandler, because he uses the Hispanic Dolores Gonzales as a murderer and a blackmailer, is again showing his racist colours. These books are, hardly surprisingly, crawling with murderers and blackmailers and most of them are white. It could even be considered rather democratic that Chandler added Dolores Gonzales to his list. Anyway, Dolores comes from Cleveland so she is the one who is stereo-typing Hispanic women in the way she has chosen to remake herself, and Chandler draws her quite clearly as a manufactured stereo-type. Orfamay Quest is also a blackmailer. Are we then to suppose that Chandler is stereo-typing all

those who come from Manhatan, Kansas? The evidence is rather stronger. "Come on in" says Marlowe, "But not if you're from Manhattan, Kansas." (THE LITTLE SISTER: 5) It may be possible to suppose that Wolfe is falling into the racist trap of demanding that all characters who are not drawn as WASPS must be, so to speak, whiter than white.

Wolfe's argument gets worse and worse. Chandler is supposed to have given Steiner the middle name of Hardwick with an e so as to avoid accusations of anti-semitism. I am not quite sure how this was supposed to work but, to the best of my knowledge, Harwick with or without and e, is not jewish name. A good many English surnames acquired a final e, either because people couldn't spell, or because, like my husband's family, they thought it gave a touch of class to the family name when written up over the shop front. Wolfe is another one who is getting his stereo-types confused.

The words 'nigger' and 'shine' and 'dinge' and 'smoke' do appear frequently in FAREWELL, MY LOVELY. The character I first noticed using them was Moose, and they just seemed in keeping with his given type. I would have been rather more surprised if he had used the terminology Afro-American and would have concluded that Robert B Parker had been rewriting Chandler again. Wolfe, to do him justice, does admit that when Marlowe uses these words, he uses them to people who use such language as a matter of course. Marlowe is, it must be remembered, a man of the streets. His use of colloquial language is part of his construct as a 'common man', a 'hardboiled' man. Chandler argued, IN THE SIMPLE ART OF MURDER, that

> Hammett gave murder back to the kind of people who commit it for reasons, not just to provide a corpse; and with the means at hand, not with handwrought duelling pistols, curare and tropical fish. He put these people down on paper as they are, and he made them talk and think in the language they customarily used for these purposes" (23)

The purpose to this quote is not to support any argument about 'realism' but to presume that Chandler used colloquial language deliberately in order to differentiate the 'hardboiled' detective from the kind of detective who was constructed as a part and parcel of the 'classical' detective story. It is a fictional device. It may very well be that, as Wolfe supposes, Marlowe is patronising Nulty and Jessie Florian by using their own type of language. I would have presumed that he is sneering at them myself, but no matter. On the other hand, I would argue that Chandler is making two quite valid points. Firstly, there is very little point to talking to people, constructed as Chandler has constructed these two, unless you use words they can understand. If Marlowe had used 'high-falutin' language in their presence, he would only have alienated them further. Secondly, insofar as Marlowe is, therefore, patronising them; Chandler is making Marlowe use language critically. He is stereo-typing the people who use racial language, not offering them up as moral norm. Wolfe is the

one who is patronising the reader by supposing that they cannot tell the difference between racist language used either critically or in the interests of verisimilitude, and racist suppositions interjected for didactic purposes and with the full approval of the author as Crispin appears to use them.

THE HIGH WINDOW starts with a description of the type of building a prospective client lives in. A fictive device Chandler uses quite often to clearly delineate the client into their social milieu. In this case, as Marlowe walks towards the house he sees:

> At the end of the walk, on a concrete block, there was a little painted Negro in white riding-breeches and a green jacket and a red cap. He was holding a whip, and there was an iron hitching ring in the bock at his feet. He looked a little sad, as if he had been waiting for a long time and was getting discouraged. I went over and patted his head while I was waiting for somebody to come and open the door. (5/6)

I suppose, if you really wanted to, you could read something patronising into Marlowe patting the boy on the head. I presumed Chandler was using this perfectly horrible little figure, image reminiscent of slavery, to specify Mrs Murdoch's type. She is left over from a by gone era. She could be referred to as a slave driver, treating both her grown son and her secretary as slaves, and is quite clearly unsympathetically drawn. It thus seems possible to argue that Chandler is using the figure of the boy to present a critical insight both into the kind of people who would have such a thing on their front doorstep and, thus, into his construct of Mrs Murdoch.

The problem innate to a 'chinaman's tea has completely bewildered me. All I have to offer, empirically speaking, is my experience of drinking tea in chinese restaurants; and it is rather more delicately flavoured than the stuff served up in your average fish and chip shop. I would have thought that would be a point in its favour and so find it difficult to see what Wolfe found so offensive about the phrase 'as weak as a chinaman's tea'. However, maybe there are some connotations I do not know about. Otherwise the issue makes no sense at all. I would agree that Chandler could have written 'as gardeners do' without losing too much of the pithiness of his simile. On the other hand, maybe he saw a Japanese gardener sneering at a weed on his way to the shops, or whatever, the morning before he wrote this passage. The image struck him as an effective one and he, living in an age less sensitive to racist innuendo than the present day, used this phrase without meaning anything particularly derogatory about the Japanese in particular or gardeners in general. After all, the sneer cannot be Japanese racial stereo-typing. Marlowe never stops sneering. Wolfe, in pursuit of racism, is beginning to sound like McCarthy in pursuit of 'reds under the bed'.

However, I cannot think of any real excuse for "He had a sort of dry musty smell like a fairly clean Chinaman". Hammett also made some fairly unfortunate comments about Chinese people. However it must be said in Hammett's defence that the only (what could be called) gangland leader who the Op shows any respect for, and could be said to be positively afraid of, is a Chinaman. I do not know to what extent this sort of simile was part of the common parlance of Chandler's day, and could have crept in without meaning anything very much except that Chandler was, unsurprisingly and as we all are, structured by the ideology of his time and place. Notwithstanding which, if this is the worst that Wolfe can throw at him then he has a very weak case.

On the other hand, and to go back to my initial premise that Chandler seems to attract more of this kind of criticism than Hammett, for instance, ever does; it does seem to be because Marlowe is far more of a conventional hero figure and is far more 'romantically' appealing than Hammett's people ever are. Consequently, critics seem to have a higher expectation of his moral structure, almost as though he should have a didactic purpose instead of a fantastical one. I am not quite sure how this logic is supposed to work but it does seem as though it goes back to the argument about confusing the dream with the realisable. It is hardly Chandler's fault if critics presume the general public to be unable to judge texts and, I would argue, that a supposition of this kind is evidenced by the nature of the criticism.

On the other hand, the 'Byronic hero' may have been all sort of things, and Marlowe is obviously constructed out of good many of them However nobody ever assumed that Byronic heroes were, or should be, morally or politically correct. A very great deal of the above sort of criticism seems to try and impose an authority, an inter-relationship between text and reader, which is no part of the concern of any fiction. It is certainly nothing to do with popular formulaic fiction. It also demonstrates, quite clearly, how alive both a critical perception of 'realism' is and to what extend impact theory is still in motion as an underlying presumption. That is to say, critics and academics presume it on the public's behalf.

In any event, if the 'buoyant tone' of Byron's conversation and manners can be taken as another starting point, we arrive at another essential ingredient of Marlowe's appeal and, possibly, another aspect of Chandler's social critique. Chandler is particularly scathing about those who give up all active engagement and remain motivated by malice and small-minded meanness only. "Thick cunning played on her face, had no fun there and went somewhere else." (FAREWELL, MY LOVELY: 32) On the other hand, and as we have already seen, Chandler always allows a certain sympathy to creep in when he writes about those that he structures as being the victims of emotions too strong for them. Marlowe's sheer persistence in the face of misfortune is a part of his heroic

construct. Stephen Knight draws attention to what he calls a hard cheerfulness in his article bearing the same title. He quotes from FAREWELL, MY LOVELY:

> They had Rembrandt on the calendar that year, a rather smeary self portrait due to imperfectly registered colour plates. It showed him holding a smeared palette with a dirty thumb and wearing a tam-o'-shanter which wasn't any too clean either. His other hand held a brush poised in the air, as if he might be going to do a little work after a while, if somebody made him a down payment. His face was ageing, saggy, full of the disgust of life and the thickening effects of liquor. But it had a hard cheerfulness that I liked, and the eyes were as bright as drops of dew." (39)

Marlowe, as Knight says, always perseveres. He is at least alive and can still kick, even in Los Angeles and even in the twentieth century. He may be ground down but he not yet out. It may not be much of a life, but he is alive. Part of the enormous attraction of Byronic heroes, as people perceived him to be, was their vibrant inter-action with their lives to the bitter end. Marlowe, at his best, is disillusioned but indomitable. He may be bowed but he is never broken.

And Marlowe is at his best when he meets Orfamay Quest. Chandler's most perfect example of the respectable face of greed and self interest. Chandler uses a barely sketched in type to delineate a general criticism of society to superb effect. Marlowe's pithy remarks and the inter-play of the dialogue say all that needs to be said about the kind of character Chandler wants to present:

> There she was. She didn't even have to open her mouth for me to know who she was. And nobody ever looked less like Lady Macbeth. ---'That's no way to talk to people ever the telephone,' she said sharply, 'You ought to be ashamed of yourself.'
> 'I'm just too proud to show it,' I said. 'Come on in.' I held the door for her. Then I held the chair for her.
> She sat down about two inches of the edge. 'If I talked like that to one of Dr Zugsmith's patients' she said' 'I'd lose my position. He's most particular how I speak to the patients - even the difficult ones.' --- 'Yes,' I said, 'I talk too much. Lonely men always talk too much. Either that or they don't talk at all. Shall we get down to business? You don't look the type that goes to see private detectives, and especially private detectives you don't know.'
> 'I know that,' she said quietly, 'And Orin would be absolutely livid. Mother would be furious too. --- 'I'm terribly afraid of Orin's temper. And well, I can always call you up, can't I?'
> 'Uh-huh. Just what are you afraid of, besides Orin's temper, Miss Quest?' I had let my pipe go out. I struck a match, and held it to the bowl, watching her over it.
> 'Isn't pipe smoking a dirty habit?' she asked.

> 'Probably,' I said but it would take more than twenty bucks to make me drop it. And don't try to side-step my questions.'
> 'You can't talk to me like that,' she flared up. 'Pipe smoking is a dirty habit. Mother would never let father smoke in the house, even the last two years after he had his stroke. He used to sit with that empty pipe in his mouth sometimes. But she didn't like him to do that really. We owed a lot of money too and she said she couldn't afford to give him money for useless things like tobacco. The church needed it much more than he did.'
> 'I'm beginning to get it,' I said slowly." (THE LITTLE SISTER: 7-13)

And so, it could be presumed, will the reader. Chandler has drawn a perfect archetype of the 'good woman'. Orfamay will be, I would stake my life on it, a pillar of the community. She will be the minister's right hand. She will always be ready with a bowl of soup and words of advice for a stricken neighbour. Words which will ensure, naturally enough, that the neighbour knows that whatever has happened to her was through her own fault. She will be a leader of the PTA, a faithful wife and a good mother. Her children will always be neatly dressed and her house clean. She will be content to dwell in decencies forever, and will live and die in an odour of sanctity. And all around her the world will be a more miserable place because she passed through it

> I thought of her tripping back to Manhattan, Kansas, and dear old Mom, with that fat little new little thousand dollars in her purse. A few people had been killed along the way so she could get it, but I didn't think that would bother her for long. I thought of her getting down to the office in the morning ---. Dr Zugsmith, when he thought about her all, thought of her with self-satisfaction. He had made her what she was. She was just what the doctor ordered. --- 'Well, Dr Zugsmith,' I said out loud, just as if he was sitting there on the other side of the desk with a drink in his hand, 'I don't know you very well and you don't know me at all. Ordinarily, I don't believe in giving advice to strangers, but I've had a short intensive course of Miss Orfamay Quest and I'm breaking my rule. If ever that little girl wants anything from you, give it to her quick. Don't stall around or gobble about you income tax and your overhead. Just wrap yourself in a smile and shell out. Don't you get involved in any discussions about what belongs to who. Keep the little girl happy, that's the main thing. Good luck to you, Doctor, and don't leave any harpoons lying around in the office.'" (234/5)

I do not think this could have been done better. Every little detail is carefully laid down in order to expose this sort of type for what she is. Chandler may have been severely critical of the influences of corrupt social systems on the private lives of the citizens they control; but it is the moral cant innate to those processes which really make him show his teeth. Orfamay's crooked face is nowhere near as viciously delineated as her cloak of moral rectitude.

Macdonald: There Is Nothing Like Safe Sex

Cawelti, who normally writes a good deal of sense, wrote than:

> "It seems not unlikely to me that future generations may well view certain writers of detective stories - my own predictions would be Dashiell Hammett, Ross Macdonald, Georges Simenon, and possibly Raymond Chandler - as among the major artists of our age. (299)

The prediction business is an uncertain one; and I do not intend to fall into the same trap. I would certainly agree that Simenon and Hammett are major artists. However, I would also argue that Macdonald does not even begin to hold a candle to Chandler. In any event, Julian Symons wrote that with Hammett, Chandler, Ross Macdonald "the line of the hard boiled thriller really ends." (215) Later he amended this view to include some more recent writers. Eudora Welty said of Macdonald's style that it was one of

> delicacy and tension, very tightly made, with a spring in it. It doesn't allow a static sentence or one without pertinence --- It is an almost unbroken series of sparkling pictures." (THE STUFF THAT NIGHTMARES ARE MADE OF: 30)

Thus, there can be no disputing the fact that, in his day, Macdonald attracted an great deal of critical acclaim. I doubt many people, outside the aficionados of the genre, have heard of him today. Partly, it is because he was not frequently translated into film; and when he was those films have not made it into the archives of film history in the same way as THE MALTESE FALCON and Chandler's Marlowe have. On the other hand, his major failing was that he deemed he was addressing the popular interests of his day, and he failed, utterly, to even incorporate feminist concerns into his texts. Macdonald, so to speak, missed the boat on an issue which is now burning, and should have been a matter of consequence to anyone who wrote his latter fiction in the sixties and early seventies. Thus, he now reads as dated. Every time I read yet another critic holding forth about Chandler's problem women which, as I hope I have managed to establish, are not a problem at all as far as I am concerned, I think about Macdonald. Lukacs wrote that:

> "Only illusions motivated by the social movement depicted, i.e. illusions - often tragic illusions - which are historically necessary, do prevent the writer from depicting social reality with objective truth." (STUDIES IN EUROPEAN REALISM: 139)

Macdonald now reads as though the only point to examining him at all is because he reflected, so accurately, the attitudes of his generation towards woman. On the other hand, he does not even read as though he were, in Lukacsian terms, an active participant in his historical construct. It could be argued that Hammett and Chandler are, but Macdonald reads as though he were an approving spectator. He was not as bad a writer as Parker is. That would take some doing, but he does fall into the same category of one who makes a cliché out of trendiness. His delineation of the typical concerns of his day remains particular. They do not move from the demonstration of a type into a general social concern. However, he is of importance to any study of popular formulaic fiction because, unlike Hammett or Chandler, he panders to the perceived wisdom of his day. His texts do contain social and political criticism but their resolution always returns the reader firmly back into the comforting arms of the establishment. A good many writers have followed in his footsteps and, thus, one of his claims to fame is that he firmed up the formulas which can support the comfort factors of this particular moral fantasy. I think the best way I can describe his kind of writing is to say that it is a bit akin to having safe sex. The readers can have all the pleasure of regarding themselves at the forefront of the avant-garde, without having to face any of the real issues which such an engagement with a critical perception should actually take them.

Notwithstanding which, Macdonald addresses certain social and political issues of his time very adequately. His view of California as a place of great natural beauty which is being made increasingly uglier by man's insistent drive towards the use of more and more sophisticated technology is expressed with passion. It is an ever repeating theme running through his work but is perhaps best expressed in one of his very last texts THE SLEEPING BEAUTY:

> As we approached Los Angeles, the Mexicana plane dropped low over the sea and I caught my first glimpse of the oil spill. It lay on the blue water off Pacific Point in a free-form slick that seemed miles wide and many miles long. An offshore oil platform stood up out of its windward end like the metal handle of a dagger that had stabbed the world and made it spill black blood. --- Pacific point is one of my favourite places on the coast. As I made my way out to the airport parking lot, the oil spill threatening the city's beaches floated like a depression just over the horizon of my mind. --- I turned south along the coast to Pacific Point. The sun was low when I got there. From the hill above the harbour, I could see the enormous slick spreading like premature night across the sea. At its nearest it was perhaps a thousand yards out, well beyond the dark brown kelp beds which formed a natural barrier offshore. Workboats were moving back and forth, spraying the edges of the spill with chemicals. They were the only boats I could see on the water. A white plastic boom was strung out across the harbour entrance, and gulls that looked like white plastic whirled above it, --- The surf was rising sluggishly. A black bird with a sharp beak was struggling in

it. The bird had orange-red eyes which seemed to be burning with anger, but it was so fouled with oil that at first I didn't recognise it as a western grebe." (1/2)

There is no doubt that there is real anger in this description but, on the other hand, it is quite a safe anger. The fault for the oil spill is firmly laid at the door of one man, Ben Sommerville. The whole issue of oil, and quite what everybody would do without it, is avoided. The rest of the text revolves around Macdonald's usual thematic structure of the wrongs of the past returning to haunt a new generation.

Macdonald does capture the mythology of the youth rebellion of the sixties even before it happened and does, thus, justify his claim to be "generally a little ahead of his audience, but not light years ahead." (Speir: 156) He is, in the main, sympathetic to his youthful protagonists. A very early book, published in 1950, tells the story of a wealthy young girl, Cathy Slocum, who kills her grandmother because (a somewhat inadequate reason, as far as I am concerned) she wants her parents to stop quarrelling. She wants them to get a divorce so that she can live with her father who, predictably enough as it turns out, is not her real father anyway. The meaning of Macdonald's texts, as I argued earlier, can be said to lie in their endings. A poor (in every sense of the word) young man, who claims to have committed the murder but didn't, is ruthlessly gunned down in the course of novel. Cathy, who did commit murder, is returned at the finish, to the bosom of her real father and all is forgotten and forgiven. The sins of the fathers are thus, quite firmly to blame for the sins of the child. Macdonald's ending appears to make her reason for killing her grandmother an acceptable one. It was all her parents' fault.

Sandy Sebastion, in THE INSTANT ENEMY published in 1968, runs away from her quarrelling parents with a young man from a poor background (I will return to this recurring theme in a moment), and is guilty of kidnapping and grievous bodily harm. She does, at least, have a better cause for her actions. However, she only misses being implicated in a murder by the skin of her teeth. The man she runs away with is shot in an episode that makes very little sense to me. It reads as though he had become a nuisance. Earlier it was said of him that: "He got lost in the shuffle" when he was three years old. He seems to die for the same sort of reason. Sandy is last seen reunited with her family and in the pink of health. The list could go on and on. If the conclusion is supposed to reverberate the meaning through the text then it seems to suppose that the rich are innocent, per se, and the poor are guilty

Macdonald does write, more lucidly than most, about what he perceives his function to be:

The essence of popular art, I think originates in the writer's desire to reach the public and take it with him. I have a very strong feeling that it's the duty of a writer, or at least of this particular writer, to write popular fiction. Ideally a community tends to communicate with itself through fiction, and this communication tends to break down if there are Mandarin novels written for Mandarins and low-brow novels written for lowbrows, and so on. My aim from the beginning has been to write novels that can be read by all sorts of people." (Speir: 11)

Obviously, I absolutely agree with him about popular fiction. However, my problem with this extract is the didactic flavour of MacDonald's purpose. It would not have mattered except that it is borne out by his texts. It is quite a difficult matter to pin down precisely and, naturally enough, must to a very large extend depend upon the ideological construct of the reader. However, the best way I can think of delineating the distinction between didactic literature and literature which carries a social and political critique as part of its structure is to suppose that Hammett and Chandler question their social commentaries. Macdonald displays his as though it were self-evident that the rich are more deserving than the poor; and that the young merit more sympathy than the old. This is the text that he is preaching to the public.

Macdonald considered THE GALTON CASE to have marked his transition from the conventional detective form to his own interpretation of that tradition. Thus, it is quite a useful text to explore in some detail so as to delineate how he actually structures his social message. He wrote that he was increasingly concerned to explore evil within the personal context of the family, and to construct the family as the base of all corruption.

In any event, he used the Oedipus myth as the initiating premise in a good deal of his work. He wrote that his initial conception of the GALTON CASE appeared in one of his notebooks as simply "Oedipus angry vs. parents for sending him away into a foreign country." He explains that:

This simplification of the traditional Oedipus stories, Sophoclean or Freudian, provides Oedipus with a conscious reason for turning against his father ---. It re-reads the myth through the lens of my own experience, and in this it is characteristic of my plots. Many of them are founded on ideas which question or invert or criticize received ideas and which could, if brevity were my forte, be expressed in aphorisms." (Speir: 54)

This is as it may be. THE GALTON CASE does revolve around the twinning formulas of the missing heir and a young man in search of his past. The past governs the present, as in so much of Macdonald's fiction. Anthony Galton, the missing father and/or the missing heir, is delineated as one who

> 'did feel that having money cut him off from life. Tony hated social snobbery - which is one reason he was so unhappy at college. He often said he wanted to live like ordinary people, lose himself in the mass. --- Tony wouldn't use the family name. 'John Brown' had a special meaning for him, besides. he had a theory that the country was going through another civil war - a war between the rich people and the poor people. He thought of the poor people as white negroes, and he wanted to do for them what John Brown did for the slaves. Lead them out of bondage in the spiritual sense, of course. Tony didn't believe in violence.' (25)

This, of course, sounds rather ridiculous and, it is possible to assume that, Macdonald intended it to. Tony's mother defined him rather differently:

> 'He was perversely bound to sink in the social scale, to declass himself. I'm afraid my son had a nostalgie de la boue - nostalgia for the gutter. He tried to cover it over with fancy talk about re-establishing contact with the earth, becoming a poet of the people, and such nonsense. His real interest was dirt for dirt's own sake. I brought him up to be pure in thought and desire, but somehow - somehow he became fascinated with the pitch that defileth. And the pitch defiled him.' (17)

This passage serves the purpose of saying rather more about Mrs Galton than it does about her son. However, it does go to show why Tony may have been attracted to any social milieu that did not include his mother. Macdonald has carefully ticked both mother and son into place.

Anthony Galton leaves home accompanied by a young woman who his mother, predictably enough, described as

> 'a cheap little gold digger. --- She dresses and painted like a woman of the streets, and when she opened her mouth well she spoke the language of the streets. She made coarse jokes about the child in her womb, and how - her voice faded almost out - it got there. She had no respect for herself as a woman, no moral standards. That girl destroyed my son.' (16)

Well, somewhat unfortunately, she did. On the other hand Galton, also, stole several thousands of

dollars from his father before he set off to live "to live like ordinary people." This proved to be as much his undoing as his wife was.

We next see the young couple through the eyes of the doctor who attended at the birth of their son:

> 'It occurred to me he might be a remittance man - one of those n'er-do-wells whose families paid them to stay away from home. I remember when his wife was delivered, Brown paid me with a hundred dollar bill. It didn't seem to suit with their scale of living. and there were other things, his wife's jewels, for example - diamonds and rubies in ornate gold settings. one day she came in here like a walking jewellery store.
> 'I warned her not to wear them. They were living out in the country, near the old Inn, and it was fairly raw territory in those days. Also people were poor. A lot of them used to pay me for my services in fish. I had so much fish during the depression I've never eaten it since. No matter. A public display of jewels was an incitement to robbery. I told the young lady so, and she left off wearing them, at least when I saw her.'---
> 'Did she talk about her background?'
> 'She didn't have to. It had left its marks on her body, for one thing. She'd been beaten half to death with a belt buckle. --There had been other men in her life, as the phrase goes. I gathered she had been on her own from an early age. She was one of those wandering children of the thirties - quite a different sort from her husband.'" (60/61)

Anyway, and in continuation of Macdonald's principle theme, Anthony Galton is killed for the money he brought with him from his past by a man who came back to his wife from her past. So far, it is all quite neat. Perhaps a bit too neat, like so much of Macdonald's fiction. The past is very busy governing the future.

In any event the grieving widow leaves the country with her husband's murderer because, as she explains to her son during the final scene in the book:

> 'It was to save your life that I married him. I saw him cut off your daddy's head with an axe, fill it with stones, and chuck it into the sea. He said that if I ever told a living soul, that he would kill you too. You were just a tiny baby, but that wouldn't have stopped him. He held up the bloody axe over your crib and made me swear to marry him and keep my lips shut forever. Which I have done until now.'
> 'Did you have to spend the rest of your life with him?'
> 'That was my choice,' she said, 'For sixteen years I stood between him and you. Then you

> ran away and left me alone with him. I had nobody else in my life excepting him. Do you understand what it's like to have nobody at all, son?' (196)

This is a truly appalling portrait of a woman. It could read, if it had been a one off, as a sympathetic portrayal of one weak woman's limited choices in a male dominated society. Archer says:"don't be too hard on your mother. Even the law admits mitigation, when a woman is dominated or threatened by a man." (196) On the other hand, too many of Macdonald's older women are like this. And while they often cling onto men because they can think of nothing better to do with their lives, and as often use the excuse that they do so in order to protect their children, they usually fail abysmally to shield those children in any meaningful way. Mrs Fredericks, Mrs Galton as was, allows her husband to beat her child with the same sort of belt buckle that had left marks on her own body. Archer delineates her, and the words he uses to describe her carry the weight of his disgust with ageing female flesh:

> Her face moved sluggish, trying to find the shape of truth and feeling. She leaned back on her arms and let her gaze rest on the swollen slopes of her body, great sagging breasts, distended belly from which a son had struggled headfirst into the light. Over her bowed head, insects swung in eccentric orbits around the hanging light bulb, tempting hot death." (163)

All of Macdonald's young women are sympathetically detailed, physically and emotionally. Ninety percent of his older women are depicted, not as old which would be fair enough, but as soiled. Mrs Matheson, erstwhile nurse to the infant Galton, is nowhere near as hideous a picture as Mrs Fredericks is, but Macdonald's disgusted, eye is still in evidence:

> A woman in a dark cloth coat came in, paused at the doorway, and looked around the huge room. Her eye lighted on me. She came towards the table, clutching her shiny leather purse as if it was a token of respectability. --- She nodded and sat down hurriedly, as if she was afraid of being conspicuous. She was an ordinary-looking woman, decently dressed, who would never see forty again. There were flecks of grey in her carefully waved black hair, like little shards of iron." (41)

However, her appearance is not her point in this argument. She is married to a good man, and Macdonald accepts as though it were self-evident that he is a good man. In a later scene their relationship is displayed for attention:

The little boy burst through the door. Matheson came at his heels, balancing the cake box in his hands.
'Well, I got the darn thing.' he thrust it into my hands. 'That takes care of the church supper.'
'Thanks'
'Don't mention it,' he said brusquely, and turned to his wife. 'Is supper ready? I'm starved.'
She stood on the far side of the room, cut off from him by the ugliness. 'I didn't make any supper.'
'You didn't make it? What is this? You said you'd have it ready when I got home.'" (90)

The point to quoting this rather unpleasant little episode is the way that it is presented. Macdonald obviously accepts that it is perfectly in order for a man to shout at his wife, in front of a total stranger, just because his supper is not ready. This puts Mrs Matheson firmly in the place where Macdonald appears to think she belongs.

The only older woman that Macdonald portrays at all sympathetically and as though he totally approves of her, is Mrs Cramm. She has a rich gurgling voice and is drawn as being "a fat and fading blonde, happily married." (THE MOVING TARGET: 27) She is never seen outside a domestic or nurturing role."Mrs Cramm hovered breastily over me and poured me another cup of coffee" (28) In the end, after Archer has extracted the information he came to get:

> I handed him his bill. He kissed it and pretended to use it to light a cigarette. His wife snatched it out of his hand. When I left they were chasing each other around the kitchen, laughing like a couple of amiable maniacs."(29)

It might be fair to say that a writer does not show his ideological construct by what he says, but by what he presents as normal behaviour and does not view through a critical eye. Hammett, as a literary devise, let his people speak for themselves to indicate their social and political construct, and thus lays it bare for the attention of the viewers. Macdonald does not even realise that there is anything in what he is drawing that is worthy of a critical attention. He does, thus, fulfil one of the functions of popular fiction. He demonstrates the cultural conventions of his time and social type without being aware that they were at all odd or liable for change in the foreseeable future.

Anyway, Mrs Frederick's son who is really John Galton, but who thinks he is John Fredericks although he hopes he is not, leaves home after he thinks he has killed his father, who is really his

stepfather and he has not really killed him any way. He turns up in Luna Bay, twenty odd years after the death of his real father, looking for his past. He is accepted as John Galton and thus becomes the missing heir to the Galton millions. He meets and falls in live with a young and innocent girl who loves him in return and all seems set for the happy ending; except that Archer is suspicious that he is not John Galton. However, after a great deal of to-ing and fro-ing, it turns out that he really is John Galton, although he thought he wasn't, and, as the last paragraph of the book clearly indicates, he and the girl live happily ever after. Order is restored and the money is in the hands of its rightful owner.

Missing heir formulas are notorious for their implausible plots and the strange convolutions of the text is just part of its formulaic structure, and there is nothing wrong with that. Macdonald says he is concerned to 're-read the Oedipus myth' and that he uses Archer as his (my phrase) comfort factor so as to give him a greater freedom to investigate the problems of his subsidiary characters which he calls "the main thing." However, it is worth continually stressing that Macdonald said his endings were the surprise --- which --- should set up tragic vibrations which run backward through the entire structure." (Speir: 146)

Archer says about one of the lesser characters of the text, who fulfils the major function of providing the thread which stitches the whole plot together:

> His life ran through the case like a dirty piece of cord. He had marked Anthony Galton for the axe and Anthony Galton's murderer for the knife. He had helped a half-sane woman to lose her money, then sold her husband a half-sane dream of wealth. Which brought him to the ironic day when his half-realities came together in a final reality, and Gordon Sable killed him to preserve a lie." (195)

So the problem is quite what vibration, by which I am presuming Macdonald means something along the lines of moral sense, does Macdonald think he has imposed on his fictive construct through the resolution of his ending? Firstly, it could be said that in the original myth Oedipus is guilty because he killed his father although he thought he had not. John Galton seems to be innocent because, although he thought he had killed his father, he had not. He really is the missing heir, although he thought he was not. So he is judged to be innocent of lying and cheating to establish a false identity, even though he did lie and cheat. Anthony Galton is killed because he takes his past with him whilst he is trying to escape. Culligan dies to preserve a lie. Fredericks, deeply regretted by nobody, hangs himself. John Galton scoops the jackpot. The inversion, the re-reading, of the Oedipus myth is easy enough to follow and the conclusion of text does support the

Sophocleasian conclusion that no man can escape his destiny. However, Sophocles is presenting Oedipus, I said before that I have always considered this downright unfair, as one who was guilty of hubris because he tried to avoid his fate. That, in essence, is what he is being punished for. The moral worth of rewarding Galton because he really was who he pretended to be, as it imposes a meaning on the rest of the text, is more ambivalent. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the true moral centre of this text is the supposition that any attempt to struggle against the vicissitudes of fate, the social and economic circumstances which an accident of birth has determined as a character's destiny, is doomed to failure. Evil, in other words, is being defined in the same terms as Dorothy Sayers, et al, defined it. That is to say, the nasty aggressive attempt of the lower orders to take over the wealth and status of their so-called betters. Macdonald, who presents himself as anti-establishment, is actually an establishment figure preaching a very old message. The good know their proper place and do not try and move out of their social construct. Women, when young are there to play for attention and find a good man. When they are past their best, they belong in the kitchen and out of sight.

So, Macdonald is purporting to display personal greed as the root of all evils and family life as the source of all suffering. However his true anger, as revealed by his writing, is directed at those who do not accept the lot in life which their socio/economic and sexual construct has pre-determined. The plotting of BLACK MONEY twins the two lives of men from slum backgrounds who try and to make it up the social and economic ladder. Pedro Domingo, a very young and exceptionally intelligent Latin American, gets himself accepted in various establishment institutions, including government office. He also gets involved with a big time Los Vegas gambler and, it would appear, is living rather dangerously. However, his fatal flaw seems to be that he marries above himself. This is what gets him killed. Tappinger struggles up the academic ladder from the slums of Chicago. He kills Domingo and finally himself, in pursuit of this self-same girl who, or so the message of the text reads, actually belongs in the arms of Peter Jamieson. Jamieson looks “like money about three generations removed from its source." (7) The resolution of the text restores her firmly back to where, Macdonald would appear to be arguing, she belonged in the first place. That is to say with her own kind of monied people.

Albert Graves in THE MOVING TARGET kills because he wants the boss' money and his daughter. Macdonald tries to contextualise this into a setting where he appears to be critical of the ethics of monied society:

> 'There may have been a time when Graves didn't care about money. There may be places where he could have stayed that way. Santa Teresa isn't one of them. Money is the lifeblood of this town. If you don't have it, you're only half alive. It must have galled him to

work for millionaires and handle their money and have nothing of his own. Suddenly he saw his chance to be a millionaire himself. He realised that he wanted money more than anything else on earth. ---You can't blame money for what it does to people. The evil is in people, and money is the peg they hang it on, They go wild for money when they have lost their other values.' (187)

However, Archer shows his true colours when he says:

> 'He wasn't looking down; he was looking up. Up to the houses on the hills where the big money lives. He was going to be a big himself for a change, with a quarter of Sampson's millions.'(189)

Graves, it must be supposed, had ideas above his station and got, so to speak, too big for his boots.

THE BLUE HAMMER, the last and, to my mind, probably the best of Macdonald's works, does continue the theme of a man who tried to fill a place that was not his by birth and inheritance. William Mead, illegitimate son of a beautiful painter's model, kills his legitimate half-brother Richard Chantry, who, of course, turns out not to have been his half brother after all. He has seven glorious years living as a successful artist in Santa Teresa with his, supposed, brother's wife. He then spends the rest of his life, before his past catches up with him even further, living in virtual imprisonment within the confines of the home of his first wife. So far, the story sounds familiar enough.

However, and although Macdonald does offer massive mitigating circumstances in support of many of his characters, this time he seems to detail the limits of Mead's choices more sympathetically. Macdonalds' other villains, no matter how difficult their initiating premises may appear to be, he destroys with gay abandon unless they are young and pretty and from a monied middle class background by birth. William Mead kills his brother because

> When William came home to Arizona on leave he found that his so-called half-brother Richard had taken some of his work and assumed credit for it. The Chantry imposture really started with Richard Chantry himself, when he stole William's paintings and drawings, and incidentally married William's girl Francine.
> The two young men had a fight over these matters. They fought to the death. William killed Richard and left his body in the desert, dressed in William's own army uniform. He was an

illegitimate son who had probably dreamed all his life of taking Richard's place. This was his chance to do it, and incidentally to get out of the army and out of a forced marriage. --- I don't know why he took the risk of coming back here. Perhaps he had some idea of keeping an eye on his son. But as far as I can tell, he didn't see Fred in all that time. It may be that his living here, so close to his wife and son but invisible to them, was part of the game of doubleness he was playing, He may have needed that kind of tension to keep him in orbit and sustain the Chantry illusion and his art. The main thing was to get out of Arizona, free and clear, and it was his mother who made that possible for him. What Mildred did was probably the most difficult thing of all. She looked at the young Richard Chantry's dead body, and identified it as the body of her son William. It was a bold action and not her last. She loved her bastard son, no matter what he was guilty of. But it was a fierce and tragic love she had for him. This morning she tried to reach him with a stiletto.'

'To kill him?' Ruth Biermeyer said.

'Or to let him kill himself. I don't think it would have made much difference to Mildred. Her own life is pretty much finished.' ---. 'There's something else you need to know Ruth. William is my son, too. My illegitimate son by Mildred. I was just a kid in my teens when he was born. ---' It was an accident, 'he said, just one of those accidents that happen to people. I met Mildred after a high school football game. Old Felix Chantry threw a party at his house. I was invited because my mother was his cousin. You know, a poor relation. --- I was seventeen when William was conceived, eighteen when he was born. Mildred told Felix Chantry that the child was his. --- She did what she could for me, too. She helped me to get a football scholarship and when I graduated she saw that Felix gave me a job at the smelter. She helped me up the ladder.'(249/251)

Macdonald's approach is different here. Firstly, by the time we meet him William Mead is a drunken sot, and has killed quite a few people. He is old and damaged by time and circumstance and Macdonald, as we have seen, normally saves his sympathetic reconstructions for the young and beautiful. However, both the accident of his birth and the accident of his first killing are sympathetically drawn. It is hard to blame a man for killing one who is trying to steal his meaningful life. That is to say, both his work and his romantic dream. He is delineated as atoning, quite horribly, for his sins. It may be fair to say that if he had not returned to Santa Theresa, driven by whatever guilt, he would never have had to kill another man and end up incarcerated in his first wife's mercy. Mead is sympathetically drawn as a victim of his circumstances in ways which none of his similarly placed predecessors are.

Secondly, we finally have an older woman and Mildred is very old by the time we meet her, who is not defined as soiled and predatory and/or helpless. Mildred has confronted her own destiny. She

shaped it to her own ends. She did her level best for her son under very trying circumstances, and remained loyal to her discarded lovers. She makes a very refreshing change.

Thirdly, in this text Macdonald also produces Betty Siddons. She is presented as a successful working girl who is making her own way in life. She is thirty if she is a day and, it might be possible to presume that, in earlier fictions Macdonald would have written her in as an extremely unattractive proposition. Possibly, if Macdonald had lived a little longer, he might have finally caught on, rather too late, to some feminist concerns.

However having said that, William Mead's first wife is the usual Macdonald horror story;

> She mimed laughter, and managed to produce a high toned giggle. If I had heard the giggle without seeing its source, I might have taken her for a wild young girl. And I wandered if this was how she felt in relationship to her son. --- She leaned forward with her hands on her knees, sober and serious. The woman who had giggled a moment ago had been swallowed up like a ghostly emanation by her body" (67)
>
> She offered me a ghastly embarrassed smile, the kind you see on dead faces before the undertaker does his work." (219)
>
> She had grey-streaked black hair drawn back from a face whose history and meaning were obscured --- by an inert layer of flesh. Her heavy body was strictly girdled, though, and her white uniform was clean." (20)

This last, no doubt, looks forward to the point in the story where Betty Siddons says of her:

> She's one of those wives who can watch a man commit murder and feel nothing. Nothing but her own moral superiority. Her whole life's been devoted to covering up. Her motto is save the surface and you save all. (234)

She is not the only one. Every woman over thirty, other than Mildred, is produced on the stage accompanied by a cheap sneer.

Ruth Biermeyer is defined in the terms of her

> pared-down middle-aged body (which) seemed to be hyperconscious of my eyes. (5)

Francine Chantry appears as one who

> seemed to be playing a complex role. Part salesperson and part guardian of a shrine, and part something else. I couldn't help wondering if the undefinable part was an angry widowed sexuality." (19)

Mrs Grimes, and it would have been easy enough to draw her sympathetically without damaging the story

> smiled without warmth but so broadly I could see that one of her molars was missing. Both physically and emotionally, I thought, she was a bit dilapidated. (121)

I could do this with every single one of Macdonald's texts. Pull out quotation after quotation of derogatory and derisory descriptions of older women. Now, naturally enough, it must be borne in mind that on each occasion we are seeing these women through the eyes of Archer. He is not a particularly attractive figure at the best of times and nowhere near as thematically important as Hammet's detectives and Chandler's Marlowe. This is why I have not spent as much time on him as an individual. He does his fair share of cheque burning and so demonstrates his incorruptible construct. He is brave under torture, physically competent and verbally adept. He fills his role of the 'hardboiled' hero quite adequately, but is nowhere near as 'lovable' a figure as Marlowe is. This, apparently, was some part of Macdonald's purpose. He wanted to make him into a character 'as capable of selfishness and failure as any human.' (Speir: 155) Notwithstanding which, and on the vexed question of his delineation of non-nubile women, it must be considered whether Macdonald made Archer like that deliberately. Also, what his purpose could possibly have been if that was indeed the case.

It seems unlikely. Firstly, it is strange that a writer like Macdonald, who is so anxious to explain his own intentions, never mentions this part of his construct of Archer. This is what he did say: 'The main trouble with Archer, and its also his saving grace --- (is that) he doesn't become so involved --- that he is used up by a book'. (Speir: 118) Speir goes on to argue

> since Archer is a reappearing character, he cannot establish relations that must be carried from book to book. The form virtually demands an isolated, singular protagonist; it reflects the alienation of an age and appeals to the sensibilities of an alienated reader who, perhaps, views him- or herself as an isolated resolver of the mysteries of the world. (118)

This is fair enough as far as it goes and I have argued along similar lines myself. However, it says nothing to justify Archer's continual verbal abuse of any woman over the age of twenty-five to thirty.

Macdonald wanted to make him into a 'democratic kind of hero' (123) and spoke of him as 'fairly good sort of man --- (who) embodies values and puts them into action.'(123) If I could have found any good reason for Macdonald's endless procession of shop soiled women; I would have accepted it gladly. I would have been perfectly happy if Archer had been drawn as one who was the product of a predatory mother. I would have been happier still if Macdonald had shown him to be the victim of a rape by a decaying old prostitute. However, I can find nothing to indicate, in his texts, that he is placing Archer's opinions of women on the page in such a way as to invite a critical examination. I am afraid that I must assume the way Macdonald constructed older women is so much a part of his ideological construct, the 'tragic illusions' of his age, that he never even paused to think that there was a matter he should have been concerned about.

Macdonald told Speir, during a telephone interview, that he wanted to grapple with and present the most profound human conflicts (evil death sexuality love) "so that the humanity of all sides is made clear."(123) I do not dispute that there are some memorable scenes in his work. I do not dispute that his fascination with, and the good use he makes of, freudian theory adds an enjoyable zest to his texts. However, because the resolutions of his work, the moral structure his endings place upon his meaning, accept and perpetuate the success ethic as a moral norm, he has somehow failed to achieve stature of a Hammett or a Chandler. He is too firmly grounded in the mores of his ideological construct. He swims along very safely in the 'mainstream of capitalism'. On the other hand it is perfectly adequate formulaic fiction. It is just not 'great' formulaic fiction which should, as I have attempted to prove, be critically aware of the climate of the times.

Conclusion: These Books Are Good Books

I wrote when I started this exercise that I had chosen these books because I enjoyed reading them. Even Macdonald, for all his faults still has a touch of magic; though he has dated so significantly.

Susannah Radstone, in her work on SWEET DREAMS; SEXUALITY GENDER AND POPULAR FICTION, writes;

> However, time and time again, in accounting for the way our lives have taken shape, we return to the novels that we've read. Indeed, what continues to perplex and fascinate me is the force and urgency with which, in our search for influences; we repeatedly and emphatically refer to novels. In the common sense we have made of the way our lives have taken shape, novels form landmarks, signals reference points and sources of intense and lasting pleasure. They mean a lot to us. Sometimes we even say that they have 'changed our lives'. --- (particularly) popular texts.

It is always difficult to say how particular texts may have changed our lives. I started reading books of this nature when I was, I think, a teen-ager. Hammett certainly influenced my political thinking, but I was already in sympathy with him then. I would have married Marlowe if he had been available. It is probably fortunate that he was not , but I dread to think what influence he may have had on the choices I made in later life. I am pleased to report that Macdonald's drawing of older women annoyed me even when I first read him, and at an age when I was not taking them personally. I suppose if he taught me anything it was to be wary of men's contempt, or perhaps one should call it fear, of older women. It was, possibly, my first introduction to what I am going to call 'gut reaction" feminism. I do not suppose Macdonald intended to do anything of the kind. Mind you reading PAMELA made me forever determined never to be a 'good woman', and that is certainly not what Richardson meant to do. However, the strongest influence these texts have had upon me, as far as I can tell, is that I feel that never want to sit on a jury. I have never met anybody else who has had a similar reaction no matter how many of these kinds of books they have read. In other words, who can tell which came first? The chicken, or was it the egg?

I hope that I have achieved what I set out to do, and that was to write in the kind of English which is readily accessible to all comers. I do believe that it is an error of somewhat major proportions to keep on using language which only serves to alienate the greater bulk of the population. I, also, suppose that it would be beneficial, to the study of literature, to stop making a perceptual distinction between the 'art' novel and popular fiction. It hardly appears to serve any useful purpose. It might also help if critics would stop assuming that the 'man in the street' is not, to quote Johnson 'in their right mind'.

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