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**“This grotesque position”: Hard-boiled crime fiction and
American literary culture**

McCann, Sean Joseph, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1994

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**"THIS GROTESQUE POSITION": HARD-BOILED CRIME FICTION AND
AMERICAN LITERARY CULTURE**

by

SEAN McCANN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1994

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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for Minou

PREFACE

"I had no desire to write it, particularly, and certainly it was a loss to me financially," Raymond Chandler complained of his essay on detective fiction, "The Simple Art of Murder" (Letters 35). The sentiment has returned to me often as I have worked on this essay. No doubt the frustrations Chandler describes are familiar to anyone who labors on a dissertation over a hot and unremunerative Summer. But, as I struggled to understand the literature Chandler's essay so eloquently describes, the contradictions implicit in his disavowal seemed more and more to me to describe something crucial about hard-boiled fiction and about the effort to appraise it critically. The chapters that follow are in one sense little more than an attempt to develop a reasonable account for this impression.

Described generously, Chandler's complaint could be said to indicate a strange will to silence. The letter wishes -- disingenuously, by all appearances -- to retract an essay that Chandler felt compelled to write. The complications it accordingly illustrates among the desire to speak, the need to be quiet, and the paradoxical necessity of enumerating the virtues of holding still look very much like the tense mixture of laconic posture and poetic description that often characterizes hard-boiled fiction's typically first-person narrative. Chandler's essay

concludes with the famous claim that "down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid" (18). The problem is that however much the author emphasizes this figure's heroism by constraining the temptation to brag or complain, however much he or she assumes that the essence of the story should be the protagonist's difficult journey, there will not be much to that story if the danger of the trip and the meanness of its avenues are not fully depicted. The result for the hard-boiled narrator tends to be an uneasy alternation between scenes of stoic immobility and passages of effusive description, prolix assertion, or the occasional paean to the effort not to talk. The hard-boiled protagonist and pulp narrative are left divided between an apparent yearning for silence, a rush toward an end where things can subside into rest, and what one study aptly describes as "linguistic labor" (Freedman and Kendrick 212).

It is part of hard-boiled fiction's unusual appeal that it rarely seems able to bring an effective synthesis to these contradictory desires. The conclusions of its stories are notoriously unsettled, and its heroes appear unable to decide between noble silence and impassioned speech. Thus, Sam Spade closes The Maltese Falcon by trading his usual monosyllabic utterances for a several page-long, almost uninterrupted apologia pro vita sua in which he lives up to his earlier, incongruous assertion: "I like to talk" (105).

But if this soliloquy shows Spade's desire to speak bursting through his "wooden-faced" restraint, it nevertheless strikes most readers as something less than a sudden access of undisguised feeling. The speech is both overwrought and ineffective, a too strenuous and ultimately empty protest. Likewise, the terse machismo that defines Philip Marlowe's interactions with other characters is counterbalanced by the lyricism of his interior monologue. Yet the harsh contrast between the combative dialogue of Marlowe's everyday social life and the rich subjectivity that floats just above and beyond Chandler's plots only makes these two aspects of Marlowe's narration seem hopelessly disparate. Both cases can serve as reminders of a potent but often neglected theme in hard-boiled fiction. These are stories about loneliness, and they describe a mysterious and intractable disconnection that ordinary human communication seems unable to address. Caspar Gutman sums up the situation in The Maltese Falcon by making a toast to "plain speaking and clear understanding," thereby underscoring the fact that the genre's stock in trade is the lost appeal of these antique virtues (105).

Chandler's letter, however, points to still more specific difficulties raised by his essay. The inspiration, he claims, was "a general expression of contempt for what is known as significant writing." Trouble comes therefore in the fact that this expression seems only possible in the "dishonest" language Chandler despises. To be more

specific, Chandler suggests that detective fiction, or at least his own variety, somehow resists the "drivel" of the critical writing that holds it in disdain. Even to begin to defend the fiction in critical terms is therefore to approach it with an unnecessary "apparatus of intellectualism" that betrays the immediacy of the literature. Like Spade's urge to talk and Marlowe's fecund consciousness, pulp fiction appears a cloistered dimension of communication -- at its most irreproachable when it seems nearest to hand. Yet Chandler not only succumbs to the temptation to write and publish the essay, his letters crankily rehash its themes for years. And, as I hope this dissertation will help to show, his fiction circles obsessively around the essay's central problem -- the assumption of an unerasable antagonism between popular fiction and the precincts of critical thought and serious literature. Indeed, the unresolvable nature of the difficulty ultimately appears for Chandler, Hammett, and the best of the hard-boiled writers to issue in their curious taste for silence. By the standards of the successful novelists of their day or, more strikingly still, of the pulp milieu from which they emerge, their output remains halting and brief and has the failure-tinged air of an undertaking abandoned midway. They seem, as Chandler's letter puts it, to struggle with and often to lose the desire to write.

It is this situation that suggests Chandler's complaint is something more than a naive anti-intellectualism or a romantic appeal to the immediacy of the aesthetic, and the argument that this dissertation attempts to develop is based on the premise that his concerns are just and important. During the period from the 1920s through the 1950s, when hard-boiled writing developed as a recognizable genre of popular fiction, American literary activity achieved an unprecedented volume and cultural significance, and it was necessarily subjected to forms of demarcation that the hard-boiled writers were uniquely positioned to appreciate. Poised between the lowbrow anonymity of pulp publishing and the legitimation of critical success, figures like Chandler and Hammett are able to survey the field of American literature and recognize the way that the domains they straddle are fundamentally at odds. Put another way, hard-boiled fiction develops during a period in American life when a dramatic expansion of education and cultural activity both promises an egalitarian marketplace of ideas and secures the institutionalization of what seem to be separate realms of highbrow, lowbrow, and middlebrow culture. The hard-boiled genre that writers like Chandler and Hammett help to create becomes in good measure a critical expression of the division and professionalization of cultural life.

That these are matters of fundamental concern to hard-boiled fiction became more apparent to me as I worked on this dissertation. When I told friends or acquaintances about my topic, their responses tended to fall into two camps. The predominant group expressed an unusual satisfaction and often congratulated me on a presumed boldness. There was sometimes even a sigh of relief that I was not going to produce another rehash of Melville or Milton to be swallowed by the mirthless gullet of academic industry. And even when I hastened to assure people that I was no pioneer and would be preceded by many fine or well-forgotten critical studies, some of whose parched air could rival the most recondite scholarly investigations, they frequently reassured me that I was doing exactly what was needed to shake up academia's stodgy groves. The second kind of response was simpler and usually came in the form of a brutal question. "Do you really like this stuff?" one person asked. A friend put it in even more devastating terms: "Yes, it's interesting material, but isn't this detective business all rather puerile?"

At first both of these responses struck me as almost beside the point, not to mention seriously outdated. By the time I conceived this project, pop culture studies was a solidly established, flourishing genre of academic inquiry. The notion that in this context my dissertation would be a particularly rebellious or invigorating undertaking seemed

optimistic. By the same token, I felt safely insulated from fears that the immaturity of my material might reflect badly upon me, and the thought that it could be unworthy of study never crossed my mind. Surely, the expanding shelves of ideology critique and cultural criticism would convince anyone who mattered that popular literature could bear all kinds of assiduously loaded freight. In retrospect, the attitude that swathed me in this confidence is easily named; I looked at hard-boiled crime fiction with the cool eye of the professional, occupationally disconnected from all but the most scholarly concerns and secure in the knowledge that my critical training would isolate the most important issues.

It comes as little surprise, therefore, that the longer I worked on this project, the more my confidence in its unshakable status was undermined. For professionalism is the special enemy of hard-boiled fiction. At first this may seem an exaggerated claim, given the emphasis that the stories typically place on learned skill and on a confident, imperturbable demeanor. But what those qualities usually depict is professionalism driven to its wits' end and beyond. The quintessential hard-boiled protagonist, the private-eye, is always forced to exceed the ethical canons and common sense constraints he or she has picked up through years of training, and in the process the commercial basis for the hero's efforts is likewise forgotten. The success

the private-eye has by thus stepping beyond the various forms of law is invariably contrasted to the rigid thinking and bureaucratic habits of the true professionals, the police. More pointedly, hard-boiled writers like Chandler and Hammett inveigh against cultural professionalism. As Chandler's letter suggests, "the apparatus of intellectualism" is associated with the unfortunate errors of the police, lifeless routine and abusive authority. Pulp fiction by contrast remains even today a refuge for a resolute cultural amateurism trumpeted in the enthusiasms of its protagonists and writers. Whether they indulge a taste for boxing or pop music, chess or gourmet cooking, pro sports or fanatically collected obscure writers, hard-boiled figures tend to substantiate an ideal of taste as individualistic, undisciplined, unsanctioned, informal knowledge. Like the workings of the hard-boiled protagonist, this is cultural activity as undirected bricolage, implicitly contrasted to the rigors of scholarly thought and the apparently institutional forms of legitimate literary culture.

It is to this situation that Chandler responds when he recognizes that hard-boiled fiction needs no exegesis. As any fan of the various genre fictions or any visitor to specialized bookstores like the Mysterious Book Shop or Murder Ink knows, trash fiction does depend on a kind of deeply developed critical literacy. Both the readers and

the texts of detective stories refer as a matter of course to other examples of the genre, defining styles, traditions, and sub-genres that, in a process somewhat akin to the one Eliot describes in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," shift constantly as new texts come into play. To walk through the door of one of the mystery book stores is almost automatically to fall within range of this conversation, since the shops are usually filled with debate and discussion on the merits of assorted authors and stories; plot, character, setting, and style are bandied about like statistics in the talk of dedicated sports fans. Yet it is in the very nature of this conversation to be intensely self-contained and self-sufficient. In a way, genre fiction is already so purely self-referential that its criticism seems part of its creation. The critic like Chandler who attempts to step outside the game and construct a more permanent theoretical edifice upon this conversation is building on sand and is apt to end up feeling something like the wry nostalgia that troubles Noam Chomsky when he listens to sports radio call-in shows. In the democratic little publics of sports fandom and genre fiction, expert opinion exists largely to be scorned or dismantled, and the intelligent observer drawn to the energy of this world can't help but recognize his or her superfluity.

The best writers of hard-boiled crime fiction -- people like Chandler, Hammett, and James M. Cain -- remain troubled

by this situation throughout their working lives, and this dissertation will attempt to show that the fiction they create in many ways realizes and struggles with the tensions inherent in their divided positions. I hope, though, that this essay will also leave the impression that the difficulties they experienced continue to hold some relevance for our own situations. The aridity of institutionalized culture, the stifling lack of vitality in professionalized learning, and the contrary yearning for the vigorous freedom of popular community are recurrent features of post-Romantic cultural life. They are matters particularly bothersome for the contemporary business of literary scholarship and criticism -- as Geoffrey O'Brien pointedly suggests when he begins his book Hard-Boiled America (perhaps the best study of the genre) by quoting the poet Jack Spicer on "the English Department of the Spirit" (4). They are in any case certainly matters that lie back of this dissertation.

My own adolescent love for pulp fiction was reawakened during my first year of graduate school while I was working, in addition to several other part time jobs, the graveyard shift as a legal proofreader. The empty, fluorescent-washed halls of the Wall Street law firms were a strangely bohemian world during the mid to late eighties, and I met there struggling artists and intellectuals of all stripes -- painters, musicians, dancers, writers, film-makers, and, of

course, actors. Like myself, they tended to be people with good college educations and few immediate prospects, and along with large amounts of cultural capital they had accrued a healthy distaste for most forms of authority. Among the many trivial fascinations they shared was frequently a love for pulp writers like Chandler, Hammett, and, especially, the more bizarre and extreme characters such as Jim Thompson, David Goodis, and Charles Willeford. The associations now seem to me to be fairly obvious. The dim demi-mondes of pulp fiction, inhabited by grotesquely marginalized figures and defined by petty struggles for survival, resemble closely enough the seedy, insular terrain of bohemia. But still more important was the formal and thematic emphasis that hard-boiled fiction places on the quality that Chandler often admiringly referred to as "impudence." Both the tawdriness of pulp fiction and its anti-authoritarian attitude gave credence to our own marginality and reinforced a self-image of snotty but hopeless rebellion.

I began this project several years after having found less onerous ways to support myself and after having been more easily absorbed into academic life than I would have imagined, and I soon forgot the attitudes that first informed my affection for the genre. This essay has been in some respects an exercise in getting back to those feelings and to realizing the extent to which they informed the

making of hard-boiled fiction from the first. Anecdotal evidence -- from the books one sees lying around in bars and video stores and copy shops and from the people one sees buying Thompson novels from sidewalk vendors in the East Village -- suggest that the genre's largest audience remains disenchanted and disenfranchised college students and grads locked into postures of adolescent rebellion. I have tried to suggest in this essay that some of the problems and preoccupations of their lives resemble in striking ways those of hard-boiled fiction's creators. In the process, I have also wanted to reaffirm the genre's status as a minor literature, one understandably obsessed with its own position and with questions of literary value and authority. Academic study of popular culture, and of detective fiction especially, has often worked to legitimize its subject matter by suggesting that aesthetic discriminations are invidious per se and that pulp materials are therefore unquestionably worthy of advanced study. A complementary position holds that pop texts reveal the most important features of our society and ideology. To make either of these arguments, however, is to create an environment in which the most distinctive features of hard-boiled fiction make little sense. Pulp writers assume the importance of a literary realm that is divided along cultural and aesthetic lines. They struggle to remake the important boundaries of that field, but they are consequently uninterested in a

world where aesthetic discriminations would not be vital matters, and they are all but unable to imagine a future to which they would themselves not be marginal figures.

If academic or intellectual study of pop culture is to avoid the facile or the hyperbolic, it needs, I believe, a similar perspective. Those of us determined to bring together or to juxtapose pop culture and professional discipline must recognize how inextricably we are moored in contradictions similar to those of pulp fiction and its audience. We must assess likewise the possibility that the adolescent features of cultural nose-thumbing are closer to our own agenda than we might have thought. The analysis of pulp fiction, like its creation and appreciation, belongs, more than to anyone else, to marginal intellectuals who are driven by complicated desires to find or repudiate an institutional home. Those often puerile drives are not necessarily unimportant or unproductive, and, as I have tried to show in the case of hard-boiled crime fiction, they can in certain situations come to seem extraordinarily provocative and illuminating. It is up to the students of pop culture to confront their situations with something like the dissatisfaction and honesty that the creators of hard-boiled fiction were sometimes able to bring to bear on their own lives.

In focusing on the importance of these mixed motives to the development of hard-boiled crime fiction, I have not

tried to render a comprehensive account of the genre. Hard-boiled narrative has a recognizable history. Its ancestry can be traced from dime novel thrillers, its definitive appearance and spread can be isolated in the pulp magazines of the twenties and thirties, and its maturity and senescence can be seen in a handful of appearances in hardback and in the paperback revolution of the postwar years. It has as well a small group of major figures -- Hammett, Chandler, and Cain, especially. I have concentrated on neither aspect of the genre, in part because they have both been discussed at length elsewhere. I have instead tried to defamiliarize some of the more influential accounts of the genre and attempted to provide a frame in which the fiction can be reinterpreted.

The first three chapters set out the general terms of this argument, and the latter two describe the way it illuminates particular aspects of the fiction. More specifically, chapter one argues that the narrative forms of hard-boiled fiction thematize the grotesque position of the genre and its authors. Chapter two attempts to situate the genre within a broad theoretical and historical account of the American literary marketplace in the inter- and immediately post-war years. Chapter three discusses the way this unusual situation leads the bohemian impudence of hard-boiled fiction to approximate contemporary vanguard aesthetics. Chapter four discusses hard-boiled fiction's

emphasis on violent action and its notions of literary labor, placing these related features in the context of the era's labor struggles and its expansion of an advertising culture. Finally, chapter five interprets hard-boiled fiction's notorious obsession with the city in light of its anxieties over public life and its dream of a truly popular culture.

* * *

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CHAPTER I

"This Grotesque Position": Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and American Literary Culture

[T]he purest heroism is bound to
become grotesque, the strongest faith
is bound to become madness, when the
ways leading . . . home have become
impassable.

-- Georg Lukacs

[P]roduction demands a form that can be
produced.

-- Raymond Chandler¹

1

In the second chapter of Dashiell Hammett's The Maltese Falcon, Sam Spade is summoned by the police to the site of his partner's murder. The brief but remarkable scene that follows captures in the space of a few short pages a whole range of the formal and thematic innovations that made Hammett's novel the most celebrated detective story ever published and that helped to transform hard-boiled crime fiction into a part of "the mythology of American culture" (Marcus vii). As Spade arrives at the scene of the crime, he advances to a parapet overlooking the alley where Miles Archer has been killed and watches a police detective search for the body.

A few yards from where Spade had dismissed the taxicab a small group of men stood looking up an alley. Two women stood with a man on the other side of Bush Street, looking at the alley. There were faces at windows.

Spade crossed the sidewalk between iron-railed hatchways that opened above bare ugly stairs, went to the parapet, and, resting his hands on the damp coping, looked down into Stockton Street.

An automobile popped out of the tunnel beneath him with a roaring swish, as if it had been blown out, and ran away. Not far from the tunnel's mouth a man was hunkered on his heels before a billboard that held advertisements of a moving picture and a gasoline across the front of a gap between two store-buildings. The hunkered man's head was bent almost to the sidewalk so he could look under the billboard. A hand flat on the paving, a hand clenched on the billboard's green frame, held him in this grotesque position (12-13).

Already this brief passage reveals several of the features that have made hard-boiled crime fiction so compelling. There is first of all the striking "objective" diction that may be the primary stylistic marker of the

genre -- the affectless narrative voice that seems to make the novelistic world a series of meaningless surfaces and cynical postures.² And in the hidden corpse, the sudden, incongruous passage of the automobile, and the unindividualized spectators there are echoes of the latent and often explicit violence and the unmediated contingency that appear frequently in the genre and that seem so consistent with the writing's relentlessly flat tone (Malin 108, Edenbaum 86, Hamilton 140). Then, too, there is the characteristic description -- detailed, but incomplete and evocative -- of the nightmarish urban milieu that is the genre's typical setting (Edenbaum 89, Porter 41-42, Jameson "Raymond Chandler," 125-128, Cawelti 61). Finally, the detective, looking down from the parapet, is caught in a moment that seems expressive of his entire paradoxical existence -- where his stance as a deliberately isolated individual yet also as a maintainer of public order confronted with death and violence demands that he look upon the scene beneath him with the twin gazes of the passive spectator and the agent of surveillance (Stephen Knight 138, 145, Porter 48, 63, 121).

These are the familiar elements of a "noir" vision of twentieth-century American life and culture, a potent mixture of macho, populist cynicism, burlesque humor, a grimly realist yet sensationally charged urban landscape, and the thriller's narrative drive.³ As The Maltese Falcon

progresses, though, this short passage comes to seem emblematic not just of the hard-boiled genre but of this particular novel's story (Malin 108). The anonymous, grotesquely twisted policeman becomes not just an object of Sam Spade's distant observation but, like Miles Archer himself, a figure of the detective in general, a pale echo of Sam Spade. His brief prominence forecasts in a momentary tableau the plot the hero will suffer. For just as the unnamed detective twists himself to locate Archer's corpse, Spade will be forced through a series of trials and contortions that will finally enable him to hand over Archer's murderer to the police. And, just as he has stood a spectator at the anonymous police detective's efforts, Spade himself will be on display while he attempts to solve the novel's crimes. From the moment that he is brought to the scene of Archer's murder until the novel's close, Spade himself will be the police department's prime suspect and continually subject to its surveillance.

It is perhaps in this sense that the American crime fiction genre for which Sam Spade is an eloquent spokesman differs most immediately from what we think of as "classic" detective literature.⁴ Unlike Auguste Dupin, Sherlock Holmes, Philo Vance, or Miss Marple, Sam Spade and his fellow hard-boiled detectives are not merely amateur adjuncts to an otherwise ineffective police force. They are its antagonists and victims (Binyon 32, Grella, "Hard-

Boiled" 111). Each hard-boiled detective story raises not only the possibility of crime in the community but the likelihood that the protagonist, tarred with that corruption, will be seized by the machinery of justice as a scapegoat. The Maltese Falcon is thus as much concerned with Sam Spade's need to prove himself innocent to the police and to escape their anxious grasp as it is with his desire to set his partner's murder right. In a feature common to the genre, the novel places Spade in a "grotesque position" between a vicious underworld that threatens to either kill him or swallow him in its corruption and a ruthless police force equally determined to do away with his independence. As Carrol John Daly's Race Williams, commonly held to be the first hard-boiled private eye, puts it on the opening page of the subtly titled novel The Snarl of the Beast: "My position is not exactly a healthy one. The police don't like me. The crooks don't like me. I'm just a halfway house between the law and crime; sort of working both ends against the middle."

In almost every story in the genre that features a detective, these hostile forces of law and crime are compounded by the hero's clients and by the women who would seduce him. Characters of the first group are often villainous, or at least venal and corrupt. The latter are notoriously passionate, ruthless, and deadly. In his position between his aristocratic clients and the police, on

the one hand, and the violence or lust of a bewildering underworld, on the other, the hard-boiled detective begins to take on the cast of an allegorical figure.⁵ As these forces of money, power, lust, and crime appear to merge or as the characters that seemed to represent them switch allegiance, they become more dangerous and confusing, yet their fundamental division is rarely in doubt for long. Whatever the nature of the evils that beset him, the hard-boiled protagonist nearly always occupies Race Williams' "halfway house." Whether he is tormented by women, by wealth, by cops or criminals, or, as in most cases, by all of the above, what is most consistently stressed about the hero's situation is that he is between forces that easily separate out into those which are in some way above and those which are in some way below him. Trapped between the ever-threatening realms of high and low, the protagonist stands as an imagined middle man. Indeed, he remains nearly the sole inhabitant of this fiction's besieged middle ground, and his animosity toward privilege and the systematic forces that manipulate him are matched only by his fear of falling to a lower world. Unlike "classic" detective fiction, then, the plot of the hard-boiled novel is motivated not so much by the desire to restore a community or reestablish order as it is by the protagonist's need to defend his embattled position.⁶

In essence, hard-boiled fiction marks the return to popular culture of the more bitter and conflicted dimensions of the picaresque.⁷ The corresponding emphasis on position, I will argue, marks a significant innovation in American crime fiction, one that delineates an important divergence from "classic" detective literature and that implicates a set of themes whose novelty and power have often been concealed by presuppositions about the nature of detective stories. Attending to the various ways this emphasis survives in the hard-boiled crime fiction prominent in American popular publishing from the mid-twenties through the late fifties offers us, I think, an opportunity to reassess the features that have made this fiction compelling. At the same time, it allows us to reconsider the place that hard-boiled fiction itself has occupied in American literature. For, seen from the perspective of the genre's own concern with position, the relation between hard-boiled fiction and the broader history of American literature is no longer a matter of the hackneyed association of the private eye and an American mythos or ideology.⁸ The consistent emphasis on position suggests the inverse of the familiar metaphors of currents, streams, shared ideas and traditions of thought that underwrite much conventional literary history and that motivate both "myth and symbol" and national-ideology constructions of an essentially American culture. While such a perspective may

find encouragement in high literary culture's deep involvement with the texts that comprise its own history and by its writers' struggles with tradition, the polemical flavor of hard-boiled fiction and its obsession with "grotesque position" prompts a different view of American literary culture itself.⁹ Implicated in its sensational tales of crime and deviance is a vision of literature not as an overarching tradition of themes, forms and ideals but as a social universe of contestatory positions and status relations. I am suggesting, in other words, that hard-boiled fiction and its creators ask us to view the institution of American literature in much the same manner that the genre portrays its novelistic world -- as a conflict-ridden field of hierarchical social relations crucially centered by the protagonists' embattled position.

From this perspective, the critical questions about hard-boiled fiction concern less its relation to quintessentially American forms and structures of belief than the more mundane issues of the sociology of culture and their bearing on the making of the unique hard-boiled aesthetic. The chapters that follow, then, will consider the texts of renowned hard-boiled writers like James M. Cain, Raymond Chandler, David Goodis, Hammett, Chester Himes, and Jim Thompson, as well as those of many less remembered writers, looking at the way their unusual

positions in the American literary field of the twenties through the fifties are registered in publishing forums, audiences, and the authors' biographical histories and concepts of writing. It will be the central contention of this essay that those positions are a vital context for interpreting the powerful "noir" vision of American life and culture developed in hard-boiled writing and that American literature, seen as simultaneously a domain of symbolic action and social relations, is the arena in which that vision has its original and most specific critical force. In essence, I will argue, hard-boiled crime fiction functions as something like an inverted avant-garde, a poor man's assault on the redoubt of Culture, and the familiar components of its aesthetic -- from the carnivalesque violence of its plots to the constricted diction relied on by its narrators -- need to be understood first of all as elements in an energetic but ambivalent attack on the very institution of literature. The heart of that attack, bespeaking both its violent force and its ultimate ambivalence, is the image of "grotesque position."¹⁰

What, then, is so distinctive about the hard-boiled emphasis on position? Like any melodramatic literature, hard-boiled crime fiction draws on a range of character types that are simultaneously stock figures and short-hand illustration of an aged, imaginary social universe: among

others, the aristocrat (noble or decadent) and the thug, the gangster and the petty thief, the heirs and their guardians, the vamp and the ingenue, good cop and bad cop, and, amidst them all, the heroic male protagonist. As the ease with which these figures separate out into complementary pairs suggests, such stock figures condense a familiar vision of relations among social types and positions (Brooks 13-15, 35-38, 205; Hadley; Williams, The Politics of Modernism 110-111). And, like any melodramatic writers, the creators of hard-boiled fiction draw in both imitative and creative ways on the associations of social relations that accompany them.¹¹ What is unusual about hard-boiled crime fiction, however, is the extent to which these positions are not just a kind of formal short-hand but part of the stories' thematic content. For the protagonist especially -- though the same holds true in some degree for nearly all characters in the genre -- the role he will play with relation to the other characters and, as a result, the ways he will be perceived, the privileges and responsibilities he will bear, and the status he will suffer or enjoy are anything but givens. Far more than the solution of a puzzle or the apprehension of a criminal, these matters motivate the plots of the most famous hard-boiled crime stories. Moreover, the obsession with "position" (the word itself is repeated often in the genre) filters through every aspect of the stories, so that, even on the level of individual scenes, the hard-

boiled world resembles a laboratory of Goffmanian social interaction defined by minute jockeyings for power and determinations of social place.¹² Indeed, one way to interpret the genre's infamous indulgence in excessive violence is as a hypertheatrical rendering of precisely this sort of "action," in which each "fistic duel" or bloody shootout dramatizes the characters' desperate and competitive attempts to establish their fragile identities.¹³

The result is a striking atmosphere of contingency, a gothic sense of unreality at the heart of the most concrete and realistic contexts that is apparent in the hallucinatory quality of the scene from The Maltese Falcon with which we began.¹⁴ Brief attention to the genealogy of that scene will give us a sense of just how important that atmosphere is to the delineation of a new, hard-boiled genre of crime fiction. Like a good deal of hard-boiled literature, Hammett's novel made various appearances in pulp magazines before it was published as a full-length hardcover novel. In its earliest form, the story seems to have masqueraded as a non-fiction drama published in 1924 in Bernarr Macfadden's True Detective under the title "Who Killed Bob Teal?" Though ostensibly the record of an actual criminal investigation, "Bob Teal" makes use of the anonymous, short and stout, middle-aged narrator who would become known as the Continental Op in Hammett's Black Mask stories as well

as of the Continental Detective Agency and its head, the Old Man, also featured prominently in Hammett's early fiction. More importantly, "Bob Teal" uses the same murder scene as The Maltese Falcon. Like the later novel, Hammett's story turns on the death of an associate of the protagonist who is lured by his own client to an alley behind billboards and shot. Like the novel, "Bob Teal" records the protagonist's gradual realization that his client is the murderer.

In most other respects, however, "Bob Teal" bears all the hallmarks of an early effort and lacks both the power and the deep paranoia that distinguishes The Maltese Falcon. Perhaps this insipid quality can be partly attributed to the formal demands of crafting a true crime story; for, while "Bob Teal" relates a shocking incident of deception and betrayal, that incident is safely ensconced in description of what seems to be deliberately ordinary activity, and the story is pervaded by the trite moralisms of middlebrow culture. (The narrator's search for the murderer, for example, is motivated by his "fatherly interest" in his colleague, "a slender, broad-shouldered lad ... with quick eye, cool nerve, balanced head, and whole-hearted interest in the work ..." {140}.) The Maltese Falcon, by contrast, is awash in the fictive and uncertain. As Sam Spade emphasizes in his famous rendition of the parable of Flitcraft --the story of a man who abandons his middle-class home and family when he is almost struck by a falling beam,

only to reestablish a nearly identical life a few hundred miles away -- the most ordinary existence rests on insubstantial yet persistent deception and the most apparently reliable character may be a teller of tales.¹⁵

In this aspect, the development of Hammett's material can be usefully contrasted with contemporaneous crime fiction. When Hammett was starting out, writers like Mary Roberts Rinehart, Carolyn Wells, Agatha Christie, S.S. Van Dine, and Dorothy Sayers were busy developing the "classic" detective story fashioned by Poe, Doyle, Chesterton and Orczy into the "golden age" detective novel. They made that transformation generally by encroaching on the territory of the realist novel: expanding on the life of the novel's community, introducing a greater range of melodramatically interrelated characters, elaborating their social connections and moving the locale out of the city to rural settings that manifested the characters' organic involvement.¹⁶ When, by contrast, Hammett expanded "Bob Teal" into The Maltese Falcon he introduced not nostalgic reverie but those modern and urban qualities of surveillance, discipline, official intimidation and, above all, disorder that are adumbrated in the passage where Sam Spade arrives at the scene of his partner's murder. As a result, the new material that makes up the bulk of The Maltese Falcon does not concern, as in golden-age novels, the life of the community and its largely reliable

caricatures but a whole series of theatrical and paranoid encounters, of multiple and multivalent deceptions, backstabblings and intrigues that surround the pursuit of the falcon. While these qualities make brief appearance in the central crime of "Bob Teal," they are vastly more important in Hammett's novel and color in fact every interaction. Thus, in "Bob Teal," the Op is friendly with his police counterpart, has a fatherly interest in his murdered associate, is never in danger from the law, is never deceived by his client, and is never tempted by criminal desires. In the Falcon, Spade is not only subject to police harassment and his client's deceptions, he appears to have despised and definitely cuckolded his partner, and may have wanted the falcon for himself. Moreover, the novel magnifies still further these paranoid relations by giving them a psychosexual and gendered dimension: in "Bob Teal" the villain is a man with whom the Op has little contact; in the Falcon the murderer is Spade's client and lover, Brigid O'Shaughnessy, and Spade's complex involvement with her is the real heart of the novel. It is literally by the expansion of the earlier story's brief moments of doubt and suspense into an encompassing narrative of uncertainty and suspicion that Hammett turns the slight true crime account into a complex and disturbing novel.

The creation of The Maltese Falcon, then, and by extension of hard-boiled crime fiction is the invention of a

thoroughly paranoid fiction in which manipulation and deception are not just present but pervasive. And if it often seems, as I suggested above, that it is the hard-boiled protagonist's antagonistic relations with the police that does most to capture the genre's generalized atmosphere of suspicion and unreality, that is because the police are uniquely suited to evoke the radical uncertainty of the protagonist's position. Such is the case not merely because the police represent the law or power or institutional authority, though all three of these things are crucial. Still more important is the fact that their mere presence in hard-boiled crime fiction serves as a reminder of the loss of that reassurance that in most crime fiction controls disorder, that surrounds the treachery in "Bob Teal" with ordinary life and middle-class morality and that brings golden-age detective fiction's moments of violence back within the orbit of the harmonious rural village. That is, most popular crime fiction of the past century or so is anchored by the eccentrically situated detective to whom the other characters reveal their conventional identities. And this circular or reciprocal relation -- whereby the externally situated observer reveals the characters of the members of a community, who in turn readily accept his revelations -- is mirrored by the detective's smooth recuperation of unexplained violence to common sense and his reestablishment of an organic social order. When Sam Spade

arrives at the scene of his partner's murder, however, he confronts not simply the eruption of violence in the community but the police, and they immediately begin not only to consult but to question him. In short, what we learn about Spade when he arrives at the scene of his partner's murder is that he has lost the "classic" detective's privileged "excentric" status. He is no longer a witness to characters and events but situated irretrievably and uncomfortably amidst them, bound to explain and justify himself to other characters as much as they reveal themselves to him (Zizek 62, 60-61).

Thus, while hard-boiled crime fiction would be memorable if for no other reason than its leading role in the novelistic appropriation of the everyday world of crime and law enforcement, the significance of the police for the genre involves a fact both simpler and more far-reaching in its effects.¹⁷ In The Maltese Falcon, the unfriendly institutional force of the police demands that Sam Spade offer justification for himself, and in so doing they automatically displace the fictional protagonist's typically autonomous status and cast him into the chaos that before he simply deciphered. In this sense, the shadowy but continual presence of the police interrupts the perfect circularity of detective and community that closes off "classic" detective lit. Interposed as a surplus, hostile audience, the police act as a final frame of reference for what occurs in the

novel. They mark a borderline between the underworld in which the story's action unfolds and a more legitimate or authoritative realm, and it is their status as ultimate auditor that finally lies back of the theatrical and paranoid qualities that pervade both this novel and the genre itself. In the hard-boiled world, life is in itself already a melodrama witnessed by an unsympathetic audience. Beneath its gaze every utterance is a performance, every step or gesture is not merely action but acting, and every declaration is marked by the likelihood of deceit and misinterpretation.

What the genre's recurrent emphasis on position signals, then, is the protagonist's threatening and nearly helpless suspension in this atmosphere of the contingent and unreal. The constant invocation and dramatization of its characters' places act as a reminder that in this genre there is only position -- each character's identity exists solely in relation to other characters and depends on an ability to convince or compel them to accept his or her definitions. Yet its very centrality amidst the genre's intrigues and battles robs the notion of substance. In a disadvantaged situation at one point in The Maltese Falcon, Brigid draws on the image of the woman in distress and tells Spade, "you know I'd never have placed myself in this position if I hadn't trusted you completely." His response is simply "No, I don't know it" (65). In the hard-boiled

world there is no certain status, and, while every role or situation carries traces of the significance it has had throughout the course of melodramatic literature, no position bears an unequivocal meaning any longer. All characters remain akin to the faceless witnesses glimpsed in the fog at the scene of Archer's murder.¹⁸ Above all the familiar "daemonic" heroism of the detective himself becomes less a matter of established attributes than, as Steven Marcus puts it, "the realization of an identity" (xxvi). That realization is "grotesque" partly because it is always unstable, haunted by other possibilities and entirely dependent on the detective's uncertain relation to other characters.¹⁹

The point is that in The Maltese Falcon, as in a vast number of the texts of hard-boiled crime fiction, the central issue is not detection per se, nor mainly justice, nor even order, but the uncertain positions in a ruthlessly hierarchical and antagonistic world that the protagonist may occupy and the actions that those positions allow or demand. In this light, detection may be merely a uniquely effective device for highlighting a recurrent feature in hard-boiled crime fiction, one that is also served by criminal heroes. Again and again hard-boiled crime stories place their protagonists in an endangered position and focus on the ambivalent thrill of violence that results. Indeed, James

M. Cain will offer something much along these lines as the definition of the "modern tragedy" that is at the heart of all his detective-less crime stories. Contrasting his ideas to the "academic" notion that the tragic involves forces "driving the protagonist to defeat, or frustration or death or ruin or something of the sort," Cain claims that "[t]ragedy is that force of circumstances driving the protagonist to the commission of a dreadful act!" (Hoopes 551, emphasis in original). Although there may be substantial differences between them otherwise, hard-boiled stories with and without detectives consistently feature such forces and acts. Moreover, though Cain does not mention it here, those forces usually appear as domains of high and low that squeeze the hero in a tragic sandwich.²⁰

Thus, in James M. Cain's own novel, Double Indemnity, Walter Huff is a "reputable [insurance] agent" who has managed for 15 years to avoid falling into the temptation of rigging a fraud. His honesty is not a matter of conviction, however, but a result of his work as a "croupier" for "them" -- the nameless authorities of the insurance business who keep a rigid control over this "biggest gambling wheel in the world" (6, 23-24). He knows that his chances of beating the game are slim, yet on meeting Phyllis Nirdlinger, he succumbs suddenly to an inexplicable sexual temptation and plots with her to kill her husband for his insurance money.

Briefly tempted, Huff drops, in his own words, off the "edge" of the "reputable" and into "the deep end" (14).

His encounter with Phyllis drags Huff into a surreal world of "unhealthy excitement," of operatic passion and death that will end with a further descent -- his suicidal dive into a shark infested sea. But, even after Huff has dropped into the "deep end" of lust and crime, he can still yearn for the "reputable" love that Phyllis' stepdaughter Lola offers. Her "sweet peace" promises a middle-class ordinariness and respectability explicitly contrasted to Phyllis' "unhealthy" passions (86, Oates 122). Moreover, Lola's decency is not just opposed to the passionate greed of her stepmother. It is associated as well with the decency of Huff's boss Keyes. Keyes -- a caricature of bourgeois propriety so exaggerated as to become a kind of neurotic superego for the insurance business -- is obsessed with catching the cheaters who try to "crook the wheel" (26). From the first, he is gruff and unpleasant, and Huff bristles at his authority. Then, too, once the murder has been committed, Huff must maneuver desperately to elude his vigilance. But at the same time, Keyes is fair and generous with Walter even after he discovers that Huff is the murderer. He is simultaneously Huff's only friend and, as the vigilant representative of the "them" who control the insurance game, Huff's deadly pursuer. And though the respectability that he and Lola signify is out of Huff's

reach as soon as Phyllis' husband is murdered, and although he and Lola, in their desires to get to the bottom of the murder, represent a positive danger to Huff, almost until the novel's end Huff will continue to see himself as torn between their elevating influence and the debasing "power" of Phyllis (54).

In a sense, Lola, Keyes and Phyllis are locked in a battle for possession of Huff's soul that can have no happy outcome for the protagonist. Victory by any of the combatants means for Huff loss of his autonomy or his life. And it is the wild conjunction of these contradictory forces, Huff's desperate attempts to escape his suspension amidst them, and the resulting drastic reversals of fortune that are at the heart of Cain's drama.²¹ The plotting of the murder itself and its execution occupy only the first half of the novel. The remainder and the greater part of the story's suspense depend on Huff's endangered position and his frantic attempts to negotiate his survival.

From one perspective, the history of hard-boiled fiction is little more than a search for countless ways to reinvent this narrative structure, and its survival in latter-day hard-boiled texts like the novels of Jim Thompson should be enough to demonstrate its resilience and basic importance to the genre. Although Thompson's novels are written ten, twenty and even thirty years after James M. Cain's crime stories, they likewise feature protagonists

suspended in a "grotesque position." The pathologically criminal heroes of novels like The Killer Inside Me and Pop. 1280 find themselves divided in complex and even paradoxical ways between high and low realms. They are torn between on the one hand the powerful rich and the helpless poor and on the other between decent, respectable behavior and criminal depravity. Under the combination of these intertwined forces, Sheriff Nick Corey of Pop. 1280 "mutates from a servile, bantering lout," whose half-wit good ol' boy mannerisms lead the people of his county to take him for a slow but fundamentally decent Texas sheriff, into "a demonic schizo" (Polito 5). Following Cain's prescription for tragedy almost to the letter and echoing the descent into the "deep end" of Cain's characters, Corey explains the utter depravity of his actions to one of his victims by saying:

By rights I should be rompin' on the high an' the mighty, the folks that really run this country. But I ain't allowed to touch them, so I've got to make up for it by being twice as hard on the white trash an' Negroes, and people like you that let their brains sink down to their butts because they couldn't find no place else to use them (206).²²

Like Walter Huff, Nick Corey is divided between two worlds. There is first of all a "reputable" and ordinary realm, a world that is significantly not identified by

normative or moral colorings. As Walter Huff emphasizes when he develops his extended image of the roulette wheel where the house bets are always hedged, there is little sense in hard-boiled fiction that what is, is just or fair. Although the ordinary world may be the place where decent behavior occurs, that decency is implicated in and far overshadowed by the constraint and manipulation that the hero feels from forces that are beyond his grasp and hierarchically superior to him -- Cain's "them" and Thompson's "high an' the mighty." Beneath this ordinary world waits always, though, a criminal or lust-ridden underworld of fantastic passions and actions where the safety, respectability and constraint of the everyday are momentarily suspended and all bets are off. Throughout hard-boiled crime fiction, its protagonists delineate the threshold between these two realms, and their "positions" are "grotesque" precisely for being liminal and divided.²³ The anonymous and painfully twisted detective who Sam Spade watches stands literally before a "gap" that, as in Double Indemnity and Pop. 1280, is an opening onto that other world of violence, lust, the bizarre, and the fantastic. Although the tone of the tale may have shifted a long way in its descent from Hammett to Thompson, and though the hero's ability to wreak his power in all directions may have been as significantly curtailed as his appeal to justice, the story of both Sam Spade and Nick Corey, as of Walter Huff

and Race Williams, is the story of the protagonist's "grotesque position" and of the violence that results. All of these characters inhabit the ambivalent region of Daly's "halfway house."

It is important to take account of the emphasis with which hard-boiled writers consistently stress this notion of fraught position because it provides at least prima facie evidence against some recent influential interpretations of crime fiction. These readings, which represent the most sophisticated and attentive criticism of the genre, work from presuppositions based on Western Marxism, the writings of Foucault, and the thought of structuralist and poststructuralist analysts of discourse. They typically focus on the role of the detective and see it as an embodiment of or an apology for the most repressive features of modernity. Thus, Franco Moretti argues that the detective story narrates and celebrates the twentieth century's destruction of both the individual and literature ("Clues," 130-156). D. A. Miller, on the other hand, takes detective fiction as paradigmatic of novelistic discourse in general and argues that it "systematically participate[s] in a general economy of policing power" that creates a carceral subjectivity through surveillance (2, vii-32). Stephen Knight and Dennis Porter, who of all these writers devote the most attention to hard-boiled literature, both suggest

that detective fiction is a kind of ideological inoculation -- a way that bourgeois societies represent to themselves their own dissolution and the subsequent restoration of their order. In this last view, detective fiction responds to hidden social contradictions without making them manifest. In a kind of facile ritual expulsion, the detective --who is said to embody an already ideological valorization of individual agency -- casts out a criminality which stands in for all social division and creates the illusion of a just and whole society.

Though there are significant differences among these arguments, they share two powerful orientations: a suspicion that there is an integral relation between the mass or popular culture of modern societies and their coercive mechanisms; and an emphasis on the agency of the detective, such that he or she becomes an embodiment of mass culture's repressive force.²⁴ In a sense, each of these critics merely expands Northrop Frye's claim that detective fiction represents "advance propaganda for the police state ..." without sharing Frye's sense that the claim is not entirely true (47). For these writers, the detective is either a mediating force through which the individual is made to pass from the world, the manifestation of disciplinary surveillance, or the very structure of class hegemony in the illusory form of an individual. In every case, he or she is seen primarily as an agent of social control.

In responding to these interpretations, then, we would do well to keep in mind Gareth Stedman Jones' warning that theories of social control usually explain too much and too little (170).²⁵ If we suspect at first that these critics are a bit overambitious in the disciplinary effectiveness they attribute to popular entertainment,²⁶ we might also add that their theories of detection explain too much by suggesting that all detective fiction fulfills the same earnest functions; the widespread conviction of important differences between the hard-boiled and "classic" varieties is largely dismissed as intuitive or trivial. Such theories explain too little, though, by failing to account for another intuition -- the strong sense that many writers and readers have had of the shared qualities of hard-boiled fiction with and without detective figures.²⁷ More importantly still, by virtue of their theoretical assumptions, these readings cannot explain hard-boiled writing's insistent picaresque emphasis on "grotesque position": they can only take the foregrounding of the hard-boiled protagonist's marginality as illusory; they must see the recurrent emphasis on the surveillance and coercion the hard-boiled hero suffers as meaningless pretext or deception; and hard-boiled writing's consistent reference to the ambivalence of the hero's position and actions can barely appear to them at all. In looking everywhere for evidence of detective fiction's complicity with social

control, such critics not only define a literary genre characterized by a suspicious homogeneity and a questionably certain definition of boundaries, they go a long way to reducing the complexity of what occurs in that very form.²⁸

If, however, we attend especially to hard-boiled writing's emphasis on ambivalent position, theories of detection as social repression slip in importance. Without denying all of the insights of the control-oriented critics, we can assert that their concerns do not seem to be the central ones of the fiction, at least not in the manner in which they have been described. As The Maltese Falcon reveals, surveillance, control, the uneven distribution and action of social power all appear frequently in hard-boiled writing not simply as effects of a detective's action, but as the very forces with which the protagonist must contend; they define the nature of a significant portion of the environments within which he must live and the acceptable and effective behavior he must employ to act within those worlds.

Moreover, seen from this perspective, hard-boiled crime writing develops a far more sophisticated sense of the relation between culture and these forces than the one that informs theories of mass entertainment as a technique of social control. For, if this fiction does indeed emphasize "grotesque position" to the degree I have been arguing, then

there is an important further significance to that concern. In their omnipresent references to hierarchical structure and to a constant, dangerous tension between high and low, hard-boiled crime writers speak not only of class, nor merely of institutional power. They consistently focus on cultural authority, on the social force of judgment and taste in a way that already foregrounds the implication of culture and power. For example, the first thing we discover about Phyllis Nirdlinger is not what she looks like, not her sensuality, nor her deviousness, but the poor and common taste with which she has decorated her living room. And, though at first this tackiness does not "mean anything" to Huff, by the end of the novel it accurately identifies Phyllis' home as a "House of Death" (4, 103). As another example, consider Race Williams' formulation of the populist vigilantism that will become so familiar to the genre. In The Snarl of the Beast, Williams claims that:

right and wrong are not written on the statutes for me, nor do I find my code of morals in the essays of long-winded professors. My ethics are my own. I'm not saying they're good and I'm not saying they're bad, and what's more I'm not interested in the opinions of others on the subject (Madden, "Black Mask" 56).

As claims in the actual realm of ethical, legal or moral action, we would surely find Williams' pronouncements

repellent and dangerous.²⁹ What's interesting in light of the genre's emphasis on position, though, is not merely that Race Williams echoes a familiar American distrust of codified, procedural justice, but that his hostility is also directed explicitly against a parodic version of institutional cultural authority -- the long-winded professors -- and that he refuses to deal with that authority on its own terms. As Philip Nolan points out in a deprecatory evaluation, Race Williams is a "swaggering illiterate" (Black Mask Boys 35). We should note that there is a close relation between the swagger and the illiteracy; for, as the passage from Snarl makes clear, Williams' aggression, though it will be directed against criminals, is aimed as much at the established definers of the literate and the ethical.³⁰

It is in this context that a similarity between Double Indemnity and The Snarl of the Beast begins to appear. It is precisely Race Williams "illiteracy," his refusal to read the statutes and professors and to argue ethics with them that grants him his precious freedom. In effect, Race Williams can swagger because he will not read or write the language of long-winded professors. Illiteracy, as a rebuke to constituted cultural authority, is literally the passage through which Race Williams enters that underworld of crime and violence where he can act with freedom and impunity. It is exactly the same structure used in Red Harvest by

Dashiell Hammett, a writer whose politics and literacy are often favorably (and justly) compared to Daly's. Hammett's novel begins:

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 manage their r's give it the same pronunciation. I still didn't see anything in it but the meaningless sort of humor that used to make richardsnary the thieves' word for dictionary (3).

Arriving in Personville, Hammett's narrator will discover a city exactly like the one inhabited by Race Williams -- a criminal and chaotic arena demanding ruthless and illegal violence. Entry to that world, as in Daly's novel, is through a kind of illiteracy; the mispronunciation and slang of the novel's first paragraph are the initial indications of the thieves' language that will be the general currency of Personville and Red Harvest. And, as in Daly's novel, when Hammett's protagonist deals in this currency he breaks procedure and does so in a deliberate rebuke to authority. In Hammett's novel the detective engages in a personal campaign of violence and defies the two paternal figures of his client, Elihu Willson, the patriarch of Personville, and the Old Man -- the detective's boss at the Continental

Detective Agency who bears more than a little resemblance to Keyes of Double Indemnity.

Thus, although the narrator's campaign is enacted against the extensive corruption of Personville's underworld, it is far more important to note, I think, that the campaign occurs entirely within that underworld. Distant from and antagonistic to any sense of normality as well as to all constituted authority, it develops, both metaphorically and actually, in the language of thieves. Every reader has noted that the actions of Red Harvest's narrator make little sense as part of a plan for justice or order. They can only be comprehended as a violent, momentary freedom that in the name of order and authority briefly and exuberantly eludes both. Thus, what Hammett's novel has that is missing from The Snarl of the Beast is the discomfiting return of the authority that has been temporarily denied. Red Harvest ends with the narrator's departure from Personville and its underworld. And despite a half-hearted attempt to conceal his outrageous irregularities from the Old Man, the protagonist likewise returns to procedural requirements, regimented work and a dependent status beneath hierarchical authority. All of these constraints, in a parallel to the way the opening lines of the novel use slang to signal freedom and deviance, appear significantly in the form of writing. The novel's final line reads: "I might just as well have saved the labor

and sweat I had put into trying to make my reports harmless. They didn't fool the Old Man. He gave me merry hell" (216).

Although the parallel is not quite so obvious, a similar structure is at work in Double Indemnity. In its sheer, banal tastelessness, Phyllis Nirdlinger's living room resembles Race William's illiteracy and Dashiell Hammett's thieves' language. "[D]eliver[ed] on one truck" out of a "department store," it is the antithesis of education and distinction, the product, to alter E. D. Hirsch, of a kind of cultural illiteracy (4). Though not deliberately aggressive or deviant as in the cases of Daly and Hammett, Phyllis' illiteracy is just as much a rebuke to taste and refinement. And, just as in Red Harvest and Snarl of the Beast, the subliterate provides entry to a lower world. The novel begins, and Walter Huff enters the "deep end" of non-respectable sex and death by literally passing through the portals of bad taste. Phyllis Nirdlinger's livingroom is the entrance Walter Huff takes to the subversion of his fifteen-year "reputable" career. Here, as well as in Daly and Hammett's novels, the underworlds so prevalent throughout hard-boiled crime fiction are associated not only with crime and passion, but with a kind of cultural illegitimacy.

This emphasis on the culturally illiterate and the power of cultural authority recurs so frequently in hard-

boiled writing that it draws attention to the genre's own legitimacy and authority, to its position in American literary fields contemporary to its creation. In many ways that status is analogous to the grotesque position the hard-boiled protagonist occupies. Just as the detective or criminal hero is almost always engaged in a ruthless struggle to maintain a precarious place, during its glory days the hard-boiled genre itself falls into an ambiguous position somewhere between the realms of high literary and mass culture. In the four decades that hard-boiled crime fiction is prominent in the United States, it occupies, like its protagonists, a liminal and ambivalent position. Writers like Cain, Chandler and Hammett are published in hardcover by Knopf and are regarded by some of their contemporaries as serious novelists. They rarely forget, though, that they are more frequently thought of as practitioners of a debased entertainment and that the real and enormous sales of their books occur in cheap paperback reprints. Moreover, figures like Chandler and Hammett are often reminded that they began writing at a cent per word for pulp magazines whose audience was sharply delimited from the heights of the cultural hierarchy to which they aspired. In short, hard-boiled crime writing evolves in the work of authors deeply insecure about their own status as figures of cultural value or authority (Chandler, Letters passim,

Hoopes passim, Johnson 48-50, McCauley passim, MacShane passim, O'Brien Hard-Boiled America 79).

So consistent and profound in the hard-boiled writers is this sense of cultural insecurity that we would be mistaken to regard it as solely a personal matter. As a result of the very genre within which they work and the audience to which they appeal, these writers know that they are constrained to occupy a particular yet uncertain position in the field of American literature. Writers like Cain, Chandler and Thompson quickly become aware that they are situated not simply by personal merit but by patterns of social distinction and institutional evaluation. Indeed, in their own minds and in the minds of their critics the writing itself comes to be regarded as something akin to the violent underworld it usually depicts -- a "fugitive genre," in Geoffrey O'Brien's happy phrase, that often views itself as subjected and subversive and that is sometimes seen by figures of cultural authority as tawdry or even dangerous (Hard-Boiled America 10). In fact, this sense is reinforced at several moments in the history of hard-boiled literature when attempts are made to control its circulation for fear of immoral effects (Denning 47-54, Hoopes 443-444, O'Brien 42-45, Robinson 64-65). Throughout its violent life, hard-boiled crime literature exists as something of a subculture in American literature; frequently reviled and even feared for its difference, it lives in intimate association with

institutional cultural authority and is always conscious both of its subliterary status and of the slim distance that separates it from literary culture.

Thus, in its evolution from Gilded Age dime novels through the pulp magazines of the twenties and thirties, in its brief forays into hardcover publishing and literary respectability, and in its survival in postwar paperbacks and academic memory, hard-boiled crime literature is uniquely suited to speak to the sociology of literature. Its history is bound up in those major developments of the American literary arena from the late-nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries that for the most part have defined the literary field as we still know it (Tebbel vol. 2, ix, 5-10): the making of a mass literature; the creation of literary professionalism and the establishment of institutional critical authority; and, most importantly, the development of a clearly segmented literary marketplace, defined by form, forum and audience. In its generic and material evolution, hard-boiled crime fiction provides, then, not just a literary subculture, but a kind of sub-history to the development of America's legitimate literary world. From the Gilded Age through the late 1950s (when TV becomes the ogre of mass culture), detective fiction and its siblings -- romance and western stories -- and the dime novels, pulp magazines, and paperbacks in which all three genres evolve are chief antagonists against which high

literary culture in the U.S. defines itself (Denning 47-54).³¹

It will be, however, the central contention of this dissertation that hard-boiled crime literature should be taken not simply as an example of developments in the sociology of literature, but as a genre that consistently addresses its own grotesque position and the issues bound up in its ambivalent status. Indeed, it will be the heart of my argument that hard-boiled writing's most common features cannot be fully understood unless we recognize their response to the division of culture. The omnipresent emphasis on cultural authority, on the high and low realms defined by that authority and on the protagonist's suspension between those realms, in this view, develop in part as powerful ways to address the hierarchical segmentation of the literary marketplace and of cultural values in the twentieth-century U.S. In this sense, hard-boiled crime fiction resembles a literary subculture not merely in its position in an American literary hierarchy, but in the fact that, like the youth subcultures Dick Hebdige describes, it responds symbolically and complexly to that status. It is just these issues of cultural status and power that hard-boiled crime fiction thematizes with its consistent emphasis on "grotesque position."

If at first this argument seems itself a shade on the counterintuitive side, we might begin to see evidence for it in the violent ambivalence toward established culture and literary authority that so many of the hard-boiled writers express in their letters, criticism and fiction. The killer in Dashiell Hammett's The Dain Curse, for example, turns out to be a writer who murders out of an "authorial degeneracy," a deathly need to create "a plot" that will grant him significance and amusement (220). Hammett's story, though, expresses only a mild distaste in comparison to the virulent animosity that frequently characterizes Raymond Chandler's letters and essays and that is evident throughout the biographies of James M. Cain and Jim Thompson. Chandler rails against "the social and emotional hypocrisy" and the "intellectual pretentiousness" of "book pages" and "discussion groups" in his essay "The Simple Art of Murder" (1), and he viciously attacks the likes of Edmund Wilson, Graham Greene, John Betjeman, James Agee and Dwight Macdonald in his letters. And for both he and Hammett, the very creation of hard-boiled crime literature is seen as something of an invention in literary democracy, an attack on the implications of class and status in "classic" detective fiction. As Chandler puts it in "The Simple Art of Murder":

Hammett took murder out of the Venetian vase and dropped it into the alley; ... it looked like a

good idea to get as far as possible from Emily Post's idea of how a well-bred debutante gnaws a chicken wing.... Hammett gave murder back to the kind of people that commit it for reasons ...

(14).³²

The accuracy of Chandler's reading of Hammett and of crime fiction in general is arguable, but his letters and criticism do give us a powerful sense of an antagonism to high culture that runs throughout hard-boiled crime fiction. Yet if Chandler does often express such an antagonism, neither he nor the other major hard-boiled crime writers are by any means consistently low-brow in their predilections, and we would misunderstand them if we referred their anger to a simple anti-intellectualism. Cain, Hammett, Thompson and especially Chandler are as likely to invoke and laud the monuments of high culture as they are to trash pretension. Indeed, what often makes hard-boiled fiction distinctive, imbues it with a characteristic energy alternately stifled and explosive, is precisely the many ways the writing registers and expresses the tension these writers experience between, on the one hand, art, authority, and legitimacy and, on the other, the anarchic force of an untrammelled, nihilistic populism. This is the crucial feature of the best hard-boiled writing passed over by critics who seek merely to arrange pop figures along scales of literacy and intelligent politics. What most effectively distinguishes

Hammett from Carroll John Daly, for example, is best summed up not simply in his superior prose style but in that sense, apparent in the final lines of Red Harvest, of frustration and compromise which is utterly foreign to Race Williams's unbounded confidence. The tension is likewise apparent in the novel's first lines where the narrator remarks his knowledge of criminal slang and simultaneously his distaste and distrust for its "meaningless sort of humor." In contrast to Race Williams' boastful disdain for long-winded professors, the Continental Op's claim seems already uncertain simply by virtue of the narrator's confident familiarity with the thieves' language he dismisses and his reliance on it to begin telling his story. The claim becomes even more ironic as the narrative unfolds and it becomes clear just how much the novel depends on the criminal slang and humor and behavior the Op denies.

A more striking example can be seen by turning from Hammett to Chandler. While critics have often been comfortable attributing a kind of populist distaste for effete aestheticism or a lumpen anti-intellectualism to hard-boiled writing in general, what often has seemed most striking about Chandler is the way that he combines the thriller's violence and tough-guy ethics with an air of cultured snobbery. Indeed, Chandler's education and deep involvement in questions of literature and art are so often evident that they are sometimes taken as signs of an elitist

bad faith or as marks of artistic inconsistency. Thus, it is frequently pointed out that Chandler's hero, Marlowe, has a name allusive to classic English literature and that Marlowe himself frequently makes sophisticated fillips and literary and artistic references that seem inconsistent with his marginal profession and lifestyle (Knight 141-143, 161, Macdonald, "The Writer as Detective Hero" 184-185, Porter 64, 68, 145).

What has gone unnoticed -- because critics have been more interested in proving either Chandler's literary sophistication or his questionable ideology -- is the way in which these cultured allusions are used in Chandler's novels. Never are they made by Marlowe to the upper-class characters who might be capable of appreciating them. In the company of the educated and wealthy, Marlowe always affects a crude demeanor. His literary education is revealed solely to the inhabitants of the violent underworld, characters who can only understand his obscure references as "double-talking." That is how a gangster's bodyguard puts it when Marlowe refers to Wuthering Heights in The High Window (26), but the same remark might have been made by the dull police sergeant in Farewell, My Lovely who constantly repeats simple comments and who cannot understand why Marlowe nicknames him "Hemingway" (96).

In both of these examples, Marlowe uses Culture in a way that is helpful for understanding much of hard-boiled

crime fiction. He employs literary allusion ironically and as a weapon in a practice that is surely different from the prominent use of allusion in modernism. Allusion in Chandler is neither an alignment with tradition nor an attempt to communicate through common knowledge or in a shared world.³³ But neither does Chandler simply dismiss the force of high literary culture. Rather, Marlowe uses Chandler's literary education precisely as a form of power. It acts for him as a means of positioning -- a way of setting himself off from both the decadent rich and the violent poor. His "double-talking" is thus a striking analogue to the detective's own double position -- his ambiguous and precarious place between the high and low worlds of the novel.

What Chandler's allusions indicate, then, is not simply an antagonism to high culture, but a conception or use of it nearly unique to hard-boiled literature. Throughout hard-boiled crime writing, culture is far from the best that is thought and said. Rather, it is consistently a way of exercising and establishing power and a means of ensuring or attacking status. And once we begin to recognize this fact its basic importance in the genre becomes apparent. Thus, we might note David Goodis' suggestively titled Down There, which Truffaut filmed as Shoot the Piano Player. In this novel, the protagonist Eddie is an entertainer in a trashy honky-tonk who, born to a rural poor, criminal family has risen to become an internationally successful classical

pianist but is destroyed after he discovers that his wife assured his success by sleeping with his agent. We might point out a similar pattern in James M. Cain's Serenade whose protagonist, John Howard Sharp, likewise rises from an impoverished childhood to become a successful opera singer. Like Goodis' Eddie, Sharp loses his ability and redescends to poverty after he is manipulated by a figure who is seen as dangerous because he is homosexual but more importantly because he wields a cultural authority and power vastly greater than Sharp's (Klein 117). Saved by a woman, an illiterate Mexican peasant, who murders and sacrifices herself to protect him, Cain's hero recovers his voice and becomes a Hollywood movie star and an internationally renowned singer and celebrity. A similar story is told as well in Charles Willeford's The Burnt Orange Heresy. In this novel, the protagonist is a young Hispanic art critic who also rises from adversity on the strength of his talent, but who only fully establishes his reputation after he engages in an outlandish fraud and murders the woman who loves him in order to conceal his deception. The story, told as a recollection, begins with the narrator's assertion of his achievement in a Malthusian vision of cultural status.

In my limited visionary world of art criticism, where there are fewer than twenty-five men -- and no women --earning their bread as full-time art

critics (art reviewers for newspapers don't count), my name as an authority in this definitive encyclopedia means Success with an uppercase S (3).

All three of these popular entertainments are obsessed with the notion of success, yet they do not calculate it by money, the measure we are commonly told dominates an American imagination. Rather, they focus on status and cultural authority, on a kind of symbolic power.³⁴ What all three of these stories share with Chandler's use of allusion is an obsession with the "limited visionary world" of culture and at the same time a deliberately base, unrefined sense of culture and cultural authority as sources of social power and markers of status. When John Howard Sharp sings, his matchless voice is an emblem not of beauty or refinement, but of a power that is confirmed by the positions he occupies in the social hierarchy during the course of the narrative.

Like Marlowe's allusions, however, Sharp's voice means not simply power, but that this power places him in more than one position. As with Goodis' Eddie and Willeford's James Figueras, Sharp's failure is always haunted by the memory of his success and his success is always marred by reminders of failure. Cultural power means for these characters, as it does for Marlowe, that they have multiple identities and occupy several distinct places, and various

narrative emphases on the ongoing force of the past make these positions always seem to be simultaneously present. (A character in another Goodis novel discovers "that yesterday could never really be discarded, it was always a part of now" (Street 57).) These protagonists are at once up and down. And it is precisely from this liminal and ambivalent status that their narratives are generated. Thus, Marlowe's "double-talking" might be taken as paradigmatic of the fate of culture in hard-boiled literature: it acts always as power, but as a power that leaves its protagonists suspended in a "grotesque position" between success and failure, status and ignominy, high and low. Taken to the extreme this "double-talking" gives us Jim Thompson's schizophrenic narrators, who, due to the force of their communities' conventional expectations about delivery men, boxers, salesmen, and rural sheriffs, conceal beneath bland exteriors both unusual intelligence and criminal malice. As in Chandler, Cain, Goodis, et al., we have in Thompson characters who seem small and powerless from one perspective or at one moment and who deliberately foster such an impression, but who are also capable of revealing sudden power in exactly the form in which they seemed most bereft. Thus, Marlowe is both crude and refined, Eddie of Down There is both a honky-tonk entertainer and a classical pianist, John Howard Sharp is both lowlife bum and grand opera singer, and Jim Thompson's

characters are both dull-witted bumpkins and criminally insane. What began as mere ambiguity in Chandler becomes in Thompson pathological division. In all cases, however, it is the power and ambivalence of culture and cultural authority itself that is at issue.

Hard-boiled fiction looks most like a "fugitive genre" in these moments where it levels its sights on the pieties of legitimate culture. It is at such moments as well that we can speak meaningfully of hard-boiled fiction as a subcultural practice in the terms proposed by Hebdige. Like the pop music scenes described in Hebdige's work, hard-boiled fiction looks to define in the realms of pulp and paperback publishing a world apart from cultural hierarchy. It uses that alternative space to simultaneously contest and affirm both its own "illiterate" image and the cultural authority that it recognizes as enforcing that identity. In every case, it stresses a basic antagonism between cultural authority and the culturally subservient (Hebdige 86, 88, 132 and passim).³⁵

The chaotic landscape that appears so dramatically in the moment when Sam Spade arrives at the scene of his partner's murder is this alternative space made manifest. In a novel that in one sense after all narrates little more than a contest over the inheritance of an ambivalent cultural legacy, the surreal territory in which that

struggle takes place is the impure and confusing arena of popular culture -- a blank space hemmed in by authority and illegitimacy. It is likewise the terrain scored by the trackless wanderings of Cain, Goodis, Willeford, and Thompson's characters, as well as those of numberless other hard-boiled writers. And by a different but homologous logic it is the same space mapped by Philip Marlowe's paradoxical invocations of literate authority. Far from that utopian other world that often characterizes legitimate culture's self-portraits, it is a landscape marked by contradiction and uncertainty, delineated by ruthless struggles for authority and self-definition, and determined by unresolved institutional conflict. In short, it is a snapshot of the literary field from below, in which the egalitarian and autonomous dreams of Culture are cast into relief and, like the ordinary pieties invoked in Spade's tale of Flitcraft, shown to be insubstantial but persistent deceptions. To apply the quote from Lukacs used as an epigraph to a slightly different matter than originally intended, what the hard-boiled writers discover is that the home of an authentic Culture -- so profound a theme of the contemporary literature and such a prominent feature of the social discourse of the day -- has a quite narrow entrance way.³⁶ In Chandler's terms, the ambivalent noir aesthetic is the result of an effort to find a "form that can be produced" in keeping with this knowledge. The hard-boiled

crime novel's desperate wars of position are in this sense the everyday life of cultural survival raised to a melodramatic pitch and subjected to a simultaneously unlikely and revealing medley of envy, aspiration, and retribution. Suspended grotesquely in this world, the hard-boiled character finds himself besieged by forces beyond his control, yet suddenly granted the freedom to respond ruthlessly and in kind.

* * *

NOTES

1. Lukacs, The Theory of the Novel 104; Chandler, The Simple Art of Murder 15.
2. For some representative critical discussions of "the distinctive 'thing-language' of the hard-boiled novel" -- "a cool, dry poetry ... invented to express the neutrality of the world, the blankness of its materiality, and the way what happens in it seems to happen in a void" (O'Brien 85, 70), see: Binyon 40, Durham, "The Black Mask School" 60, Hamilton 132-140, Polito 5-6, Porter, 55-56.
3. For two excellent discussions of this "noir" aesthetic as a specific vision of American life, see Mike Davis' chapter, "Sunshine or Noir," in his City of Quartz, 15-97, and Geoffrey O'Brien's Hard-Boiled America. For a similar perspective, see also Fredric Jameson's fine essay "On Raymond Chandler." Slapstick, carnivalesque humor and energy, though an important part of this aesthetic, is not noted by critics nearly as often as the genre's cynicism and violence. See, however, Chandler's letters on "the element of burlesque" in his work (97, 150); Diane Johnson on the comical form and farcical action of Hammett's fiction (xviii, 69); William Ruehlmann's attention to the "screwball" aspects of Jonathan Latimer and Hammett's stories (Introduction to The Lady in the Morgue) and O'Brien on the "rollicking merriment which came to be associated with detective novels" Hard-Boiled America (111 and passim).
4. The distinction between the hard-boiled or American detective story and the formal, "classic" or English version is a commonplace of the criticism. While the differences between these traditions was clearly powerful in the minds of Hammett and other early hard-boiled writers (see Johnson 43). It receives its first and most eloquent theorization in Raymond Chandler's letters (16-17, 99-100, 109-110) and in his essay "The Simple Art of Murder" (The Simple Art of Murder, especially 10-12). George Grella's essays "The Formal Detective Novel" and "The Hard-Boiled Detective Novel" are seminal for academic scholarship. Both Julian Symons and John Cawelti devote entire chapters to elucidating the distinction. Tzvetan Todorov in "The Typology of Detective Fiction" (The Poetics of Prose 42-52) makes a tentative structuralist attempt to define the difference. See also, William Ruehlman, Cynthia Hamilton, Stephen Knight and Dennis Porter. Both the formal distinction of types and the national associations given

them are a long way from watertight, but they have important heuristic uses.

5. For arguments about the allegorical nature of detective fiction, see Fletcher 3, Heissenbuttel 88, Most 350, and, especially, Edenbaum passim.
6. That the detective's primary role is to reestablish a momentarily threatened social order is another commonplace of crime fiction criticism. The seminal argument here is Auden's famous essay "The Guilty Vicarage." See also Frye (46-47). For influential arguments that take Auden's insight and give it a decidedly critical cast, seeing detective fiction's restoration of order as the restoration of an unjust and repressive state of affairs in which social contradictions are spuriously or ideologically solved, see Stephen Knight and Porter. For arguments that the theme and form of restoring order prevent an "open" structure and therefore represent a powerful aesthetic limitation, see Michael Holquist and Stefano Tani. For an interesting synthesis of these perspectives, see Franco Moretti, "Clues" (130-156).
7. See, especially, Claudio Guillén, "Toward a Definition of the Picaresque," Literature as System: Essays Toward the Theory of Literary History (72-106).
8. The association of hard-boiled crime fiction with inherently "American" myths, ideologies, or literary forms is the single most dominant aspect of criticism of the genre. The argument stretches in various forms from the earliest celebrations of Hammett through more recent indictments of the genre like those of Stephen Knight and Dennis Porter, and it praises or excoriates a wide range of features, including: an emphasis on individualism, lawlessness, or vigilantism; an obsession with death and violence; a democratic, populist appeal and an anti-aristocratic flavor; a capitalist ideology and fascination with the dream of financial success; an invocation of the myth of the hunter; and a reliance on romance forms of narration. See especially Hamilton, Knight, Grella, Marling, Ruehlman, Oates, Porter.
9. I am obviously echoing here Lionel Trilling's well-known dismissal of Parrington ("[a] culture is not a flow, nor even a confluence; the form of its existence is struggle, or at least debate -- it is nothing if not a dialectic" {7}) as well as Bruce Kucklick's famed devastation of American Studies humanists. (See also, Walter Benjamin's critique of conservative historicism in "Theses".) Although long-established, these arguments retain much of their validity and relevance, and the objects of their criticisms have

continued, if in some altered forms, to lead surprisingly healthy lives. This is especially true for Kucklick's criticism of the study of pop culture, an academic field that has sometimes seemed almost magically impervious to the demonstration of its limitations and contradictions. Trilling's argument has, I believe, a potential explanatory force that even he does not anticipate -- a fact apparent in his immediate recuperation of "dialectic" to the interior of the minds and texts of a handful of great artists. This essay will attempt to recognize cultural struggle on a broader terrain and more specifically explores the theoretical issues involved in that view in the second chapter.

10. I am relying here on Peter Burger's description of the "historical avant-garde" as a series of attacks on the institution of art and attempts to sublimate art and everyday life as well as on Burger's broader theories of the autonomization of art and the consequences of that development. See Theory of the Avant-Garde and The Decline of Modernism, especially, in the latter volume, the essay "Literary Institution and Modernization." See also Andreas Huyssen, After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Post-Modernism. A lively, if less theoretically rigorous and scholarly, polemic regarding some of the same issues, particularly as evidenced in American literary history, is Leslie Fiedler's What was Literature? Class Culture and Mass Society.

It should also be obvious that this essay has been deeply influenced by the tradition of Cultural Studies as it has been developed by the writers associated with the Birmingham School and especially by the work of Raymond Williams. Still more germane to this project, however, has been work done by Pierre Bourdieu on the institutions of artistic production. (Compared to the vast attention given to Distinction, Bourdieu's magisterial study of cultural reception in France, this allied but distinct work has been curiously neglected in Anglo-American literary studies.) See, for example, "The Field of Cultural Production, or the Economic World Reversed"; "The Historical Genesis of a Pure Aesthetics"; and "Flaubert's Point of View." In many ways, I think, this work more satisfactorily addresses various problems that bedevil, on the one hand, the Cultural Studies writers and, on the other, Burger and other inheritors of the Frankfurt School type of cultural criticism. This dissertation's second chapter makes a more detailed attempt to sort out the strengths and drawbacks of these several theoretical traditions, while the third chapter returns to hard-boiled crime fiction's analogous relation to avant-garde culture, arguing that this analogy does much to explain the forms of the genre's long popularity, the various ways it has been appropriated by later writers, and

its current resuscitation and appeal to certain "downtown" or "punk" type audiences.

11. For the argument, by its most self-consciously literary practitioner, that hard-boiled fiction is a form of melodrama, see Chandler's letters pp. 3, 43, 135, 150, 203. For genealogical accounts linking the development of American crime fiction to late-nineteenth and early twentieth century melodramatic fiction and screen melodrama, see Sampson and especially Panek passim.
12. A good example of the extension to every aspect of the fiction of the emphasis on position is the way that so many hard-boiled stories rely heavily on and often open with scenes of a protagonist calling on or being called on by a previously unknown character. These scenes often feature specifically the protagonist crossing the threshold into another character's territory or witnessing another character's imposition on his own territory. Such encounters always offer the possibility for jousting and the definition of relative social position. The most famous and perhaps most comic example is the opening of The Big Sleep, in which Philip Marlowe arrives at the door to the Sternwood mansion: "I was neat, clean, shaved and sober, and I didn't care who knew it. I was everything the well-dressed private detective ought to be. I was calling on four million dollars" (3).
13. In this sense, the hard-boiled character's violence resembles the "gestures" and "grandiloquence" that Barthes sees in "the spectacle" of wrestling ("The World of Wrestling"). The phrase "fistic duel" is from Michael Denning's description of similar kinds of violent conflict in dime novels, a literary form and publishing forum that, I argue in this dissertation's third chapter, is a direct ancestor to hard-boiled crime fiction and its pulp context. Denning connects the dime novel's emphasis on violent conflict to nineteenth century working-class culture's concern for manliness and control, seeing both as representative of struggles to achieve individual identity consistent with working-class mutualism and in resistance to capitalist hegemony (175, 167-184). While I doubt, for reasons discussed in the second chapter, that such clear connections among literary form, working-class culture and class struggle can be drawn in the case of hard-boiled crime fiction, the association of violence and self-definition seems evident. Thus, this dissertation's fourth chapter will extend the analogy of the crime story's "action" and "action" in the Goffmanian sense, attempting further to determine the importance to this analogy of the genre's parallel emphasis on labor. The text in Goffman's oeuvre

that makes the association with fictional violence seem most probable is the essay on gambling, "Where the Action Is." See also The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.

14. For an unusually lucid attempt to account for this sense of unreality in Lacanian terms, see Zizek 48-66. Zizek is a sensitive and insightful reader of pop culture generally and the detective story especially, and his broad discussion of hard-boiled and classic detective fiction is bound to be provocative even for those unsympathetic to Lacan. Although our descriptions and interpretations differ markedly, I am indebted to him for the distinction made below between the classic detective story and the golden-age detective novel. See Zizek 48.
15. On this aspect of Hammett's fiction generally, see Steven Marcus' introduction to The Continental Op and Peter Wolfe's Beams Falling: The Art of Dashiell Hammett.
16. See ch. 7, "The Rise of the Novel," in Julian Symons's Mortal Consequences.
17. Out of his own experience working as a Pinkerton, Hammett developed a distaste for the more elaborate fantasies of popular fiction and was concerned to confront them with satiric debunkings as well as more realistic accounts of crime and law enforcement (Johnson 87-89 and passim). James M. Cain shared his desire for a reportorial standard of accuracy in popular fiction (Hoopes 173). They thus became among the first of a long-line of popular writers who attacked the settled forms of crime fiction and developed new aesthetic directions in the name of realism. In their naturalistic interest in accurately portraying the mundane details of crime and law enforcement work, hard-boiled writers did much to bring these spheres of modern life within the reach of all kinds of narrative.
18. Bill Brown, referring to hard-boiled fiction's absence of the "classic" detective story's "physiognomical explication," calls the hard-boiled universe a "morass of likeness" (375, 376).
19. That it has seemed to many readers that Spade's apology is insufficient or spurious or shallow (see Edenbaum 81-89; Grella, "Hard-Boiled" 108; Ross Macdonald, "Writer" 182; Marcus xiv; Roberts 142) only emphasizes this point. We have no access to the detective's consciousness and no way of assessing for certain whether he believes himself what he claims, whether he uses it as an excuse to rid himself of Brigid, or whether he is influenced by police pressure to produce the murderer. What we can measure is the way that Spade's own subjection to surveillance produces a new

distortion in the role of the detective and his relation to his fictional community. It is Spade's "grotesque position" between the hostile audience of the police's legal authority and Brigid that allows us to believe that he is either submitting to pressure from the law or "working both ends against the middle" and taking advantage of the cops' need for a suspect in order to dispose of a woman he no longer wants.

Interestingly enough, when Spade turns Brigid over and presumably thus repairs his relations with the law, a role similar to that played by the police is assumed by Spade's secretary Effie Perrine, who remains even at the novel's close a partisan of Brigid and unsympathetic to Spade's heroics. She can also be taken as a reminder that while the police in the Falcon are the most effective sign of the protagonist's loss of the "classic" detective's excentric status and his implication in the novel's theatrical wars of position, hard-boiled novels will not always need the police per se to convey this sense of unreality and unstable identity. Other reminders of legitimate or conventional authority will suffice, though the police will remain an especially effective embodiment of legalistic, abusive or bureaucratic force.

20. Note the similarity in the aesthetic principle offered decades later by John D. MacDonald: "I want the people I read about to be in difficulties -- emotional, moral, spiritual, whatever, and I want to live with them while they're finding their way out of these difficulties." (quoted in Nevins, "Introduction." The Good Old Stuff xii).
21. In a classroom lecture (3/14/91), Morris Dickstein has pointed out some of the similarities to screwball comedy that this pattern generates. See also Ruehlman, Introduction to The Lady in the Morque.
22. Compare the remarks made by Lou Ford, the protagonist of The Killer Inside Me, to a young man who has trusted him and who he is about to murder: "You ask me why I stick around, knowing the score, and it's hard to explain. I guess I kind of got a foot on both fences, Johnnie. I planted 'em there early and now they've taken root, and I can't move either way and I can't jump. All I can do is wait until I split. Right down the middle" (94).
23. Stallybrass and White argue that "the grotesque" is produced by "the 'taboo-laden' overlap between high and low discourse ..." and, thus, see it appearing primarily at "borders, margins and edges ..." (26, 20).

24. Miller might seem to differ from the three other critics on the first point, since he argues for the continuity of detective fiction and all novelistic writing. He emphasizes, though, that he conceives of the novel as "the mass culture" of the Victorian era (x).
25. See also Levine, Highbrow/Lowbrow 206.
26. This suspicion that the repressive and monolithic qualities of pop culture have often been overstated is, of course, the centerpiece of those attacks on mass culture critics -- launched by the Birmingham School and Social Text intellectuals -- that became founding moments for the Cultural Studies movement. The seminal arguments are Stuart Hall's "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular" and Fredric Jameson's "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture." Chapter 2 of this dissertation discusses theorizations of popular culture and social relations in greater depth.
27. Knight and Porter both make much of a distinction between detective fiction and crime fiction (Knight 8-13, Porter 5, 8-25). For a similar point see Hilfer 1-13. For arguments that this distinction is far less certain than imagined, see Symons 13-16, O'Brien, Hard-Boiled America 9, 11, 88, 119-120 and Porter's own qualifications (4). While it was being produced, hard-boiled crime writing was considered a single field or genre and, though James M. Cain was one important exception, it was largely written in the same forums -- pulp magazines and cheap paperbacks. Important early figures like Paul Cain, Horace McCoy, Raoul Whitfield and Cornell Woolrich wrote crime stories with and without detectives, and the same could be said for a later writer like Patricia Highsmith. So powerful was the popular and professional conception of hard-boiled crime writing as a single, though varied field, that Chandler and James M. Cain, perhaps the two most stridently individualist of all these writers, each made strong protests against their association in publicity and in the minds of the public (Cain, "Preface to The Butterfly, Three by Cain 352, Chandler, Letters 23, 26). The third chapter of this dissertation gives more thought to definitions of genre, formula and tradition and their relation to hard-boiled crime fiction.
28. Often lost in the background, for example, is an aspect of hard-boiled detective fiction that throws doubt on that very ability of the detective to insure an ordered world that the critics of social control emphasize -- the genre's notorious problems with plot and closure. Novels like The Maltese Falcon have a difficult time wrapping things up in a tidy package and rarely end with that sense of triumph, or justice, or control that might accompany the finish of

"classic" detective novels (Edenbaum 89, Grella, "Hard-Boiled" 110, 115-116).

29. Indeed that is the way many readers of hard-boiled fiction have understood the genre. For critics like William Ruehlman, Cynthia Hamilton, Stephen Knight, and Dennis Porter, there is a clear continuity between the themes of crime fiction and patterns of illegality and injustice in American life. I want to suggest, though, that this connection between national ideology and artistic practice is itself more a matter of common assumption than persistent argument and that it deters us from attending seriously to the fiction. No serious research effort has been made to determine whether readers of crime fiction are in fact influenced by their reading, nor whether they take the ideas of crime story heroes as serious methods for pursuing justice. And, while there is plenty of evidence to suggest that there is great public sentiment in the U.S. for swift and extreme punishment, the extent to which that sentiment includes a belief in vigilantism and how much readers of crime fiction participate in, urge, or support vigilante action remain unknown quantities. Because readers of popular fiction are understood to be passive and noncritical receivers of information, the relation between their ideas and the fiction they read has seemed so obvious as to demand no empirical validation. Still less have the critics of national ideology attempted to explain the slightly less blatant vigilantism of Sherlock Holmes or that of the killer in Agatha Christie's And Then There Were None, nor have they sufficiently addressed the powerful appeal of hard-boiled crime fiction in seemingly non-vigilante cultures like those of France and England. For a powerful theoretical critique of the idea of national ideology, see John B. Thompson 85-97.
30. Lawrence Levine points out in a different context that the tendency to attribute to anti-intellectualism or philistinism the widespread ambivalence or hostility to high cultural categories and definitions often causes us to overlook the force and complexity of resistance to intellectual authority (Highbrow/Lowbrow 235-6, 240).
31. See also Trachtenberg 143-190, and Levine Highbrow/Lowbrow passim, but especially 167-242, on the development of segmented cultural markets in the U.S. For especially telling examples of definitions of detective fiction and mass culture bound up with the establishment of cultural legitimacy, see Edmund Wilson's essays on detective fiction and hard-boiled crime writing in Classics and Commercials and the essays in Rosenberg and White. For a theoretical account of the "volatile relationship between high art and mass culture" see Huyssen (vii, passim).

32. Diane Johnson points out that Hammett had the same class consciousness and populist sentiment about his writing that Chandler did. Like his author/killer, Hammett's motivations for writing hard-boiled crime fiction reveal an antagonism to leisure culture. "[O]ld-fashioned detective stories had always struck him as ridiculous: the brainy sleuth seldom leaving his rooms divines from esoteric clues the murderer.... [H]e knew detectives were not upper-class men of leisure with orchid hothouses and nice lives but low-priced drudges" (43). It is one of the peculiarities of crime fiction criticism that the anti-British bias of the hard-boiled detective story has received ample attention, while the articulation of that national bias with resentment against class and culture has received little discussion.
33. For a sensitive account of the way American literary modernism's relation to "tradition" is bound up with issues of status and class, see Marcus Klein's Foreigners. On the special antagonism between modernism and popular fiction, see Huyssen passim and Dickstein 65.
34. Interestingly enough, that power in the realm of "Culture" seems always to come at the expense of a "natural" woman who is characterized both by a loving subservience and a threatening desire for control.
35. Hebdige's description of the social and symbolic practices of recent British youth subcultures provides a helpful analogy, I will argue, for understanding the formal characteristics of hard-boiled crime fiction. For the purposes of this prospectus, the analogy should be taken only as suggestive and in no sense exact, since Hebdige focuses on activity different in kind from the literary work with which this dissertation will be concerned. From a more historical perspective, hard-boiled crime fiction should be seen as one of the several kinds of sub-cultural entertainment developed in the early part of the twentieth century that Lawrence Levine describes. For Levine, these "new forms of expressive culture that were barred from high culture by the very fact of their accessibility to the masses ..." come to be a forum for the expression of a "persistent opposition to the imposition and exercise of ... cultural authority ..." (Highbrow/Lowbrow 232, 239). Levine refers specifically to "the blues, jazz or jazz-derived music, musical comedy, photography, comic strips, movies, radio, [and] popular comedians ...," but I think my dissertation will show that hard-boiled crime fiction is clearly analogous to these forms (239).
36. On the prominence of Arnoldian visions of culture in the various levels of the social discourse of the twenties, thirties and forties see, for example, Joan Shelley Rubin,

The Making of Middle-Brow Culture and Warren Susman,
"Culture and Civilization: The Nineteen-Twenties"; "The
Culture of the Thirties"; and "Culture and Commitment" in
Culture as History: The Transformations of American Society
in the Twentieth Century.

CHAPTER II

"The Dim Borderland of Crime": Finding the Scene of
Hard-boiled Fiction; or "A Roughneck
Reaching for Higher Things"

"There are," writes Jean-Paul Sartre . . .
. , "qualities that we acquire uniquely
through the judgments of others." This
is especially so for the quality of a
writer, artist or scientist, which is so
difficult to define because it exists
only in, and through, the circular
relations of reciprocal recognition
among peers. Any act of cultural
production implies an affirmation of its
claim to cultural legitimacy

-- Pierre Bourdieu

Culture . . . that odious word

-- Raymond Chandler¹

1

In section xxi of Book I of Tender is the Night Dick
Diver, wandering in the "melancholy neighborhood" of Passy
and hoping to meet Rosemary Hoyt, encounters instead a
would-be newspaper vendor, "a thin-faced American, perhaps
thirty, with an air of being scarred and a slight but
sinister smile." This anonymous man is one of the few
characters clearly foreign to the wealthy expatriate world
of Fitzgerald's novel, and in a book much concerned with the
maintenance and dissolution of realms of gold, his
idiosyncratic, intrusive arrival immediately issues in a

rich string of associations:

As Dick gave him the light he requested, he placed him as one of a type of which he had been conscious since early youth -- a type that loafed about tobacco stores with one elbow on the counter and watched, through heaven knew what small chink of mind, the people who came in and out. Intimate to garages, where he had vague business conducted in undertones, to barber shops, to the lobbies of theatres -- in such places, at any rate, Dick placed him. Sometimes the face bobbed up in one of Tad's more savage cartoons -- in boyhood Dick had often thrown an uneasy glance at the dim borderland of crime on which he stood (91, 92).

As with a handful of crucial moments in Fitzgerald's novel, it is this anonymous figure's presence on the raveling edge of the Divers' dream world that grants him an importance all out of keeping with his brief time in the narrative. His appearance accompanies Dick's own sense of "intrusion" on the poor suburbs of Paris and Dick's awareness that this visit means "a turning point in his life," a departure from the "model of correctness" that Rosemary and other characters admire (91). More strikingly, he returns like a grim reminder of the repressed in the

final pages of the novel. At the very moment when Nicole and Tommy Barban are giving Dick the news that his marriage is over -- banishing Dick in effect to his downward wanderings in upstate New York -- the "sinister aspect" of the nameless American surfaces "vending copies of the Herald and of the Times fresh from New York" (306). As with the episodes of Peterson and the carabinieri, his appearances call forth a "grotesquerie" (107, 227) -- a hallucinatory and violent clash between the magic world of the expatriate's boom years and its exterior. He speaks appropriately like a character from another genre of fiction, addressing Dick, Nicole and Tommy as "Buddies" and talking of "get[ting] part of the American millions arriving in Paris (306, 307). And he is provocatively clad in the shadowy iconography of crime stories, speaking in "undertones" in the semi-public spaces of lobbies, garages, barber and tobacco shops -- those "neglected places of collective living," as Fredric Jameson puts it, "that fill up the interstices between the privileged compartments of middle-class living" and form the environs of an alternate, hard-boiled universe ("Chandler" 125).

Wanting to mark his "borderland," then, Fitzgerald reached significantly for a character who in appearance, setting and diction might easily have walked from the pages of Black Mask magazine. It is a borrowing that reminds us of the enduring and symbolically powerful association, in

Louis Chevalier's famous formulation, of laboring classes and dangerous classes. But as much as he may speak of bourgeois assumptions about the relations between class and criminality, Fitzgerald's news vendor can tell us still more, I think, about the relations between classes or kinds of literature -- between the legitimate, celebrated, serious fiction that Fitzgerald wrote and the sensational crime stories from which he briefly borrowed. We might approach this issue by briefly comparing Fitzgerald's passage to an analogous moment in a novel contemporary to Tender is the Night and written by one of the more celebrated Black Mask writers, Raoul Whitfield's The Virgin Kills (1937).

Whitfield's novel concerns several murders that occur on and near a yacht that, on a pleasure cruise up the Hudson, has anchored at Poughkeepsie so that its occupants can watch a major college regatta. Like the English country-house mysteries that it parodies, the novel is populated by characters who in status and social standing might be acceptable in Dick Diver's world. "[I]ntelligent, sophisticated people," they serve as a representative cross-section of thirties glamor society; among others, there is an aviator who has flown the Atlantic, a writer, an heiress, a starlet, a well-known ex-collegiate athlete who works on Wall Street, and a wealthy gambler (196). The narrator, Al Connors, is a newspaper columnist and sportswriter, and he has brought with him on the journey a gangster and ex-boxer

named Mick O'Rourke to serve as bodyguard for the gambler. The source of much of the novel's suspense and comic energy, however, is that, while O'Rourke is clearly far out of place on the yacht, none of the other characters but the gambler and Connors know of his role as bodyguard. He thus becomes the first and most prominent murder suspect, and from the novel's earliest moments Whitfield sets up a comic series of recognitions and misrecognitions. Here, for example, is the aviator, Torry Jones, witnessing O'Rourke's arrival on the yacht:

Torry stared over the side and widened his eyes as the big fellow gripped the rope ladder. He said:

'My god, is he coming aboard?'

O'Rourke tilted his face and said in a tone that was so changed it was startling:

'It's the Proteus episode of Ulysses, you see. Joyce has me puzzled, there, confused. The color symbols perhaps.'

Torry lowered the megaphone and stopped acting. His mouth hung open. I said to O'Rourke as he started up the ladder:

'But not too much reading, Mick. You must save your eyes for the Greek translation.'

Torry said with awe in his voice:

'Mother of God!' (11, emphasis in original).

The leveling reversal of diction in this passage -- where Mick speaks as an intellectual and Torry answers, in his final phrase, in the language that Mick should speak -- is one of the felicities of the best hard-boiled writing.² Here again, hard-boiled fiction demonstrates its constant, polemical obsession with Culture. And as with those literary allusions made by Philip Marlowe that were noted in chapter I, it is a vision of learning curiously burlesqued and objectified. Culture, here, is a source of humor and a figure of fun, but it is also ruthlessly reduced to those functions it can only have from an outsider's perspective -- that is, from Mick O'Rourke's point of view. What seems especially important in both Chandler and Whitfield is learned culture's ability to indicate and grant social power, its capacity to act as marker and weapon. And a good deal of The Virgin Kills' humor comes from Whitfield's refusal to play fair with one of the crucial myths about the appreciation of high art -- that it refines, elevates, and educates its audience. When the gambler, Eric Vennel, asks Connors why he has given O'Rourke "lines" about Ulysses, contract bridge, ancient Greece and Rabelais, Connors responds:

It alibies him I'm going to spread the word that he's my find. A big bruiser, a roughneck reaching for higher things (18).

In Mick O'Rourke and in the anonymous news vendor, then, we see the same basic figure -- the gatecrasher from the lower depths, an uncultured intruder on the elite preserves of intelligence and sophistication. But in Fitzgerald and Whitfield's divergent characterizations we might discern two powerful yet somewhat inconsistent ideologies that high culture has developed about itself. Tender is the Night's sinister newsman threatens a timeless yet fragile preserve from the violent and chaotic events of mundane existence, a world properly belonging to the well-bred and existing mainly in its distinction from the everyday. As a paper vendor, Fitzgerald's figure represents the tragic bearer of bad tidings, the uncultured underclass and the banality of mundanity and mass media all rolled into one. Mick O'Rourke is, of course, a virile working-class hero. But his aping of the "roughneck reaching for higher things" also draws on and mocks Arnoldian ideals of improvement and the democratic presumption that desire and training opens the moral power of great works to all comers.³ Thus, against the ascetic and sectarian dispositions associated with high culture and so evident in Tender is the Night, Whitfield's joke poses that culture's claim to be free, universal, and cosmopolitan -- the "republic of the spirit" that Lawrence Selden, for example, proclaims in Edith Wharton's The House of Mirth (55). What is raised in both cases is the status of Culture as an

autonomous realm, and the critical problem -- the source of fear, distaste, or humor -- is the possibility of granting access to that realm to those who have not already inherited, along with money or status, a natural right to enter the sacred preserves. Phrased differently, these scenes from Tender is the Night and The Virgin Kills pose the problem of Culture and its Other. The signal example of exteriority and difference, the marker of "the dim borderland" in both texts is the criminal, hard-boiled character and by extension hard-boiled crime fiction itself.

2

In pointing to the problem of the "borderland" and in thus painting culture as a realm defined most basically by those vital acts of recognition that situate things and people inside or outside that world, these passages from Fitzgerald and Whitfield raise an important issue for the understanding of popular or mass culture in general and hard-boiled crime fiction specifically. A quick summary of intellectual attempts to comprehend the phenomena alternately labeled "popular expression," "masscult," "the culture industry," "the immediate experience," and "the rude arts" reveals the persistence of both the basic problem and the handful of methods devised to approach it. Indeed, as Morag Shiach indicates in her sweeping yet economic overview

of the "Discourse on Popular Culture" in the British Isles from "1730 to the Present" (a book of only 238 pages), it is the very familiarity of the concepts, the manner in which fundamental assumptions recur in new dress and predictable tactics are mobilized for fresh conflicts, that makes it a relatively simple matter to construct a brief history of intellectuals and popular culture (6). What such impasses should indicate to us is a problem at the level of abstraction, a fundamental antinomy in the relation of intellectual activity to matters it considers foreign.

Although, as Shiach points out, the "popular" is a vexatious political and moral category from at least the early eighteenth century, it is with nineteenth century industrialization, urbanization, and the growth and extension of cultural markets and culture industries that popular or mass culture becomes an especially significant topic and problem for intellectuals (Shiach 11, 31)⁴. Ordinarily, we assume that such is the case because the significant issue has always been the commodification of culture (Denning, "Mass Culture," 9). Less often recognized, however, is the fact that this same commodification and the creation of national cultural markets is basic not just to the forms of mass culture but to the establishment of that autonomous sphere of intellectual activity from which most of our judgments about popular culture proceed. The development of universities,

museums, institutes, journals, reviews, small presses and little magazines is inseparably intertwined with and dependent upon a national market for cultural goods and the activity that such a market brings with it (DiMaggio 135, 139-141, Bourdieu "Field of Cultural Production" 335). Indeed, without the very existence of the autonomous field of intellectual activity that such institutions comprise, neither the fear of ever encroaching banality nor nostalgia for rude and vigorous pleasure could have any meaning. Mass cult and the modern intellectual arise together, and thus, far from commodification, the crucial issue in the study of pop culture has always been the relation of intellectuals to it and their relative status and position. Both the authority and marginality of intellectuals are inextricably bound up in their collective isolation (in the proverbial ivory tower) from a mundane world mired in the commonsensical, the anti-intellectual or the unenlightened. As a result what has mattered most about mass culture to intellectuals is its role as a representative to us of a hypothetical populace in both its unattractive (vulgar) and attractive (popular) aspects and its implicit representation of the intellectuals' corresponding privileged or imprisoning distance. The problem is immediately evident in a fundamental paradox noted by Shiach:

Those who write about popular culture
generally place themselves clearly outside

its sphere.... [And the result is a] constant slippage between speaking about, and speaking for. In order to legitimate their production of discourse on popular culture, theorists place themselves, culturally and linguistically, within the dominant sphere. At the same time, however, they frequently claim to represent the perceptions, nature and aspirations of 'the people' (10).⁵

In short, the engine of popular culture studies and the nexus of its great anxiety has been something much like the figure of the dim borderland represented in the anonymous news vendor and Mick O'Rourke. And the "slippage" or indeterminacy in the relation between the intellectual and the popular has established for scholarly understanding two extreme and recurrent paradigms that bear an uncomfortable similarity to the attitudes expressed in Fitzgerald and Whitfield's creations. On the one hand, there is the mandarin disdain of the culture critic who, writing from left or right, recognizes the frightful "corrupting" power of the "manipulative industrial product" that is masscult (Shiach 7-8, Denning, "Mass Culture," 5). Examples abound, from Adorno and Horkheimer's Culture Industry to the essays on Mass Culture edited by Rosenberg and White to the sorrows of Richard Hoggart in The Uses of Literacy. On the other hand, there is the praise of the celebrant who discovers an

authentic culture of the people, one that shares elite culture's genuine artistic spirit and most important methods while in its brash immaturity remaining free from the crippling effects of high art's tortured inwardness. One could mention Frank Luther Mott's Golden Multitudes, Russell Nye's The Unembarassed Muse or Robert Warshow's The Immediate Experience, but perhaps no better example exists than the populist spirit that guides the massive research activity of the American Popular Culture Association and the Popular Culture Press.⁶

That each of these positions has been employed by critics from the extremes of the political spectrum and that they have even seen simultaneous use by the same critics who, in Michael Denning's phrase, engage in "the proverbial separation of sheep from goats, of the progressive popular culture from the reactionary mass culture" (5), only emphasizes how fundamentally these paradigms indicate intellectual difficulties in the most abstract and alienated sense of that phrase. That is, they concern conceptual problems for intellectuals about being intellectual far more than they are occupied with commodification or popular expression and pleasure. Indeed, from our relative distance, it seems obvious that at least in all the examples listed above what is crucially at issue is the place of intellectuals generally and the specific role and status of the particular authors in question in the intellectual

world. As Mike Davis points out, it seems unlikely that Adorno and Horkheimer would have formulated as despairing a vision of the Culture Industry if it were not in large part "a reaction to the landscape" of their miserable exile in the "anti-city" of Southern California.⁷ Likewise, the fearsome disdain of the New York intellectuals evident in the Rosenberg and White collection is inseparable from these writers' repudiation of the popular front, their attempts to distance themselves from Stalinism, and their postwar accession to intellectual authority and political accommodation (Denning 8; Dickstein, Gates of Eden 25-29, 40-45; Ross 15-64). For sheer crabbed complexity, though, little surpasses the multiple Oedipal dramas inscribed in The Immediate Experience. As Lionel Trilling rightly recognizes in his introduction, Warshow's invocation of the immediacy of the movies is partly a way of contesting the arid, ultra-literate authority of Trilling and his generation, a psychodrama ironically complemented by Warshow's narration of his own battles with his son over the bad immediacy of comic books.⁸ Finally, nothing makes the issue clearer than the title, Against Academia, given with no apparent irony to a recent history of the Popular Culture Association, an academic society with its own journal and an allied academic press.⁹

Doubtless, similar complexities lie back of the most recent evolutions in the debate. As with previous attempts

to understand mass culture, the arrival of new groups of intellectuals (the Birmingham school, the writers associated with Social Text, their prodigious offspring "Cultural Studies") brings along intricate new complications of the desire to give voice to the people, the desire to speak for them, and the need to establish new places from which to speak as intellectuals in the academic arena. What representatives of these new schools like Stuart Hall and Fredric Jameson share is a left politics unanchored by a sense of authentic agents or evident, over-arching historical truth; a desire "to transcend the antinomies of social control and class expression, containment and resistance, incorporation and autonomy, manipulation and subversion" (Denning 5); and the need to establish for young intellectuals new spaces on the academic map that will grant significant authority and importance to marginal positions and studies.¹⁰ The solution to all three problems has been a theory of social relations best exemplified by Tony Bennett's phrase "The Turn to Gramsci."

Although it would be wrong to suggest that every intellectual currently caught up in the Cultural Studies movement is indebted to the Italian Marxist philosopher, Gramsci has been most integral to and has best represented the two axioms (by now commonplace and untied to any particular thinker) that have become central to the new discipline: that "popular culture is neither simply a form

of social control nor a form of class expression, but a contested terrain"; and that this terrain is a vital "site of . . . political engagement" between the forces seeking "consent" or "opposition" to "the prevailing social order" (Denning "Mass Culture" 4, Bennett "Turn" xii).¹¹ In this view, pop culture is not simply a body of texts or forms or products of industry. And it is emphatically neither a type of elite manipulation nor an authentic popular voice. It is rather a force field "structured by the attempt of the ruling class to win hegemony and by the forms of opposition to this endeavor." Pop culture, from this perspective, becomes a "key terrain" where various factions struggle over the political meanings that will be given to "the people" and "the popular" (Bennett "Turn" xv, "Politics" 8).

The virtues of this perspective in dealing with the crucial dilemmas of the Cultural Studies movement are obvious. The problem of authenticity and of authentic agents of history is revealed to be a false one. As Stuart Hall puts it in a seminal essay, "[t]here is no separate, autonomous, 'authentic' layer of working-class culture to be found" ("Deconstructing the Popular" 229). Fredric Jameson likewise warns that "[i]f we want to go on believing in categories like social class, then we are going to have to dig for them in the insubstantial bottomless realm of cultural and collective fantasy" ("Mass Culture," 139). Similarly, the need to distinguish between the sheep and

goats of culture and the accompanying urge to identify the central, limited meaning of pop texts is dissolved. In Tony Bennett's phrase, the meaning of a cultural practice or form is "not written upon its brow forever and a day."

Significance is "movable," and depends on the ways that popular texts are contextualized, connected with other practices and meanings, and received by their various audiences ("Turn" xvi, "Politics" 3, 18-19). Put another way, "the false problem of value (which fatally programs every binary opposition into its good and bad, positive and negative, essential and inessential terms)" is dissolved when we realize that the logic of commodification inheres in both modernism and mass cult. Though they may respond to this condition differently, both high art and pop culture are as a result ultimately ambivalent, shot through with strains of both ideology and utopian "content." In order to fully comprehend mass culture, then, we must:

think repression and wish-fulfillment
together within the unity of a single
mechanism, which gives and takes alike in a
kind of psychic compromise or horse-trading,
which strategically arouses fantasy content
within careful symbolic containment
structures which defuse it, gratifying
intolerable, unrealizable, properly
imperishable desires only to the degree to

which they can again be laid to rest
(Jameson, "Mass Culture," 135, 141).¹²

It is this emphasis on the ultimate ambivalence of cultural forms in general and of mass culture in particular and the corresponding sense that popular texts can only be understood when we recognize the variable ways that they are inscribed in social relations that has been the signal achievement of Cultural Studies. And the recent explosion of work in the field must be traced in large part to the energy released when impasses in the mass culture debate were overcome and old problems were posed in new ways. Then, too, there can be little question that Cultural Studies has offered fresh insights into "the importance of popular cultural texts and practices in the construction of individual and group identity," and that, in particular, it has been responsible for some of the most compelling critiques of right wing, antidemocratic appropriations of populist imagery and sentiment (Lipsitz, "Listening to Learn" 625). But it is the way that the "turn to Gramsci" has solved that less prominently stated dilemma of Cultural Studies -- the problem of gaining authority and importance for marginal studies and positions -- that is, paradoxically, often most apparent and that has raised the most persistent and troubling questions about Cultural Studies as a new, alternative discipline or anti-discipline, as it is sometimes put.

The way that the Gramscian emphasis on the political ambivalence of popular culture addresses this issue is evident. Making mass cult a "site" of vital political engagement -- a "key terrain" where crucial political meanings and values are fought over and assent to the social order is both contested and obtained -- makes pop culture and its scholars enormously important. And this stature is only magnified by Cultural Studies' emphasis on the variability of meaning and the importance of contextualization, articulation and interpretation in determining it. In this light, students of pop culture are practitioners of "interventionist cultural studies . . . , aiming to foster more widespread cultural resistance" (Radway, "Maps" 22, 26). They are not just academics or intellectuals but participants in a battle over the heart of "the people" and combatants in a fight for the future, in Gramscian terms, of "the State."¹³

The result for the Cultural Studies paradigm, perhaps predictably, has not been simply increased stature but an accompanying series of exaggerations that have sometimes approached the ludicrous and that have occasioned a number of withering, well-aimed criticisms of "banality," "idiocy" and "mythification."¹⁴ What is most interesting about these weak moments in a flourishing discipline is that they continually point to unresolved questions about the role of intellectuals in a way that has a profound impact on our

understanding of pop culture. Thus, where these exaggerations have not fallen back on the familiar form of emphasizing the manipulative power of mass cult and the concomitant critical autonomy of the intellectual, they have taken one of two routes.¹⁵ Conceding the apparently monolithic and banal quality of mass cult, some Cultural Studies writers have been most concerned to note the real polysemy of pop texts and the evasive, critical ways that consumers can read into and reverse their surface meanings.¹⁶ Other critics, recognizing the tendency of hegemonic forces to monopolize the mass media and to manufacture stultifying, reactionary messages, have focused on exemplary figures who subtly combine popularity with subversive criticism of the most cherished bourgeois institutions and values -- what one might call the Madonna syndrome.

Each of these views, however, risks repeating familiar models of the intellectual relation to pop culture. In the latter instance, a fresh political gloss is simply added to a familiar rehabilitative populism in which a sharp-eyed critic recognizes the unnoticed charms of previously despised texts. The former method, though more subtle, follows a similar logic. In this case, the classic intellectual virtues so often contrasted to the mystifications of mass cult -- critical understanding, irony, playfulness, autonomy -- are merely shifted in some

degree to a version of "the people," that is, a real or hypothetical audience. In turn, the intellectual who discovers these virtues elsewhere receives as a kind of compensation an ability to draw on a measure of the anti-academicism and anti-elitism that traditionally belongs to "the people." (At the same time she or he is assured of -- indeed must have in order to be an intellectual -- a fuller understanding of the issues than the real or hypothetical audience.)¹⁷ Though it is subject to many qualifications and codicils, the opposition that guaranteed so many critiques of the culture industry remains implicitly intact in both cases: on the one hand there is the relatively hostile and monolithic world of commodified mass culture, on the other, the freedom and critical autonomy of independent, subversive agents.¹⁸ And, in both cases, that autonomy appears, as it has in the most traditional criticism, through involvement with subtle, complex, polysemous texts that escape ideology only in their refusal of simplicity. Ironically, a movement that has often argued against the politics of a shallow inclusiveness, claiming that it wants more than to merely open up the canon to a few new voices, seems often to be indebted to exactly that sort of practice -- distributing, as cultural populism has always done, elite virtues to a handful of previously unappreciated texts or agents.

If much of Cultural Studies often seems to depend on a

reallocation of the classic virtues of intellectualism and high culture and their endowment with new political legitimation, that is in all likelihood due to the fact that the objective relations between intellectuals and "the people" -- between, simply, the few and the many -- has not only been the engine of pop culture studies but something like its structural unconscious. It is a matter that intellectuals who study mass media have been almost compulsively unable to address or acknowledge in meaningful terms and that as a result continues to crop up in unexpected forms. And if, as I am arguing, this dilemma is important insofar as it systematically mars our attempts to understand pop culture, that is because we are speaking about two dimensions of the same problem: the difficulty of accounting for a society with fairly autonomous fields of action that follow to some degree their own internal logics while remaining in definite and often polemical relation to each other. From either direction, that is, the basic question facing Cultural Studies and all attempts to study mass cult is the nature of the "borderland" that mutually defines pop culture and intellectual life. And the problems that multiply around this question tend to be symmetrical expressions of the division between intellectuals and the people, thought and feeling, consciousness and immediacy, enlightenment and enjoyment.

Thus it is that Cultural Studies' desire to transcend

the isolation and self-involvement of the intellectual world and to become, after Gramsci, "organic intellectuals" is homologous with its discovery of the freedom and indeterminacy of mass culture. The denial of the underlying structure of modern intellectual activity -- of the social relations whereby abstracted problems exist in a conversation of specialists -- in an attempt to speak directly to "the people" is consistent with the freedom from determination (the transcendence of antinomies, as Michael Denning put it) that Cultural Studies often discovers in pop texts.¹⁹ The "movable" quality of popular culture and its capacity to alter and "disrupt" in unpredictable ways is an exact parallel to Cultural Studies' desire to be in the academy but not of it and of its adherents' fondness for describing themselves as intellectual guerrillas. In both cases, there is a flat negation of the immediate social environment of the action in question for a heady rush of radical freedom and the grand space of political conflict in society as a whole.

If, then, as Ian Hunter claims, Cultural Studies sees its project in "the need to transcend the limited conception of culture handed down by nineteenth-century aesthetics," the logical extension of that desire tends, in its most extreme and unguarded expression, toward a simple dissolution of the aesthetic into the political in the broadest sense possible (347).²⁰ Thus, in the same essay

where she calls for an "interventionist cultural studies," Janice Radway responds to Michael Denning's suggestion that it is no longer feasible to discuss "mass culture," by saying:

Perhaps it is not only mass culture that has come to an end but 'the cultural' itself as a distinct, identifiable region separate from the rest of daily existence conceived as somehow more political and more real. A larger cultural studies should be defined not by its integration of culture into a larger social picture but by its understanding that the cultural has now so infused the social fabric that it is extremely difficult, if not firmly inadvisable, to try to specify the boundaries between self-contained cultural habits and practices (Radway, "Maps" 26).

I want to argue that this conviction is wrong or at the least seriously misleading; for it suggests the elision of at least two meanings of the word "culture" implicit in the passage that exist in historically various degrees of tension and opposition. There is first of all that meaning usually associated with an "identifiable region separate from the rest of daily existence" -- that is with the social institutions of legitimate art. This is "culture" as Mick O'Rourke views it, and, for all the transformations wrought

by mass media and higher education, "the cultural" in his sense remains a profoundly segregated realm, as any attention to its participants immediately reveals. We should be wary of mistaking confusion or contests over its boundaries, or the fact that those boundaries are often tacit and amazingly flexible, for the possibility that such boundaries do not exist at all.²¹ On the other hand, there is that meaning of culture ordinarily associated with "the social fabric." This is culture as "the way of life as a whole," in Raymond Williams' phrase, and it is a use of the word that has admirably energized the entire endeavor of Cultural Studies. To refuse to recognize, however, the extraordinary tension, in social as well as semantic terms, that divides even as it conjoins these two senses of culture is to risk the aesthetic vanguardist's symbolic sublimation of art and everyday life. It is a rhetorical "move," to use Cultural Studies' terminology, that denies the "boundaries between self-contained cultural habits and practices" while leaving the institutional determinants of their separation unremarked and untouched.²²

Paradoxically, then, the radical intellectuals' project to politicize aesthetics risks an inverse outcome, and their attempt to reformulate "the cultural" tends to banish social conflict to a textual heaven where subversive thinkers and wily pop figures symbolically disrupt the monotony of bourgeois life.²³ The sign that this aesthetic radicalism

is caught in the meshes of the familiar problematic relation of intellectuals to "the people" is the fact that ultimately it tends to reverse the old errors of popular culture studies in a complementary fashion. Where previous critics, in either the castigating or celebratory mode, underwrote their intellectual independence by attempting to banish popular culture to "an autonomous sphere . . . , untouched by changing social and cultural relations," Radway's "larger cultural studies" denies any such differentiation altogether to either "the cultural" or the intellectual "interventionist" (Shiach 10). If before the distinction between the intellectual and the popular appeared as an untrammelled no-man's land, Cultural Studies at its weakest moments tends to solve the problem of the borderland by denying that it exists.

In the series of problems that face pop culture studies, then, twin dangers stand out as particularly perilous: the tendency to see mass culture and intellectual life as worlds that collide only when the latter deigns to glance at the former or when corruption threatens to creep across in the opposite direction; and the tendency to dissolve both activities into politics pursued in various disguise. In fact, it could be said that this is merely an especially egregious and apparent example of the dilemma that confronts any attempt to think about cultural products

in social terms. Literary study always faces the tension between the purely internal study of texts (in its enemies' view, the fetishization of the aesthetic) and the purely external analysis (from its opponent's perspective, the reduction of works of art to the economic conditions of their production and the ideological demands of their audience). Indeed, we tend to divide these approaches institutionally, creating "the mutually tolerable division of labor that is often proposed for the relations between criticism and the sociology of literature" (Bennett Literature 4). What is missing is a third term that can bring together the aesthetic factors that we intuitively recognize are of immediate concern to both cultural producers and audiences and the structured social relations within which these aesthetic matters exist.

Only attention to the literary or cultural world as an autonomous field of aesthetic and social life can help us approach this dilemma.²⁴ From such a perspective art works cannot be understood solely as ideological manifestations or subversive political interventions. Nor, however, can it depend on "the (erroneous) idea that the work of art is totally independent of society" (Burger Theory 46). Indeed, the underlying question becomes the extent to which we can see aesthetic work not just as text in relation to society as a whole (the basic form of nearly all sociological approaches to art) but as in itself a form of social

activity involving actors whose primary frame of reference is a cultural sphere. Their disputes and battles for authority are compelling not merely for what they say about grander political questions, but for the conflicts they illuminate over how aesthetic life itself should be organized, over what principles and people it should legitimate, and over what form its relations with other areas of social life should take.

In this light, Cultural Studies' emphasis on popular culture as a field of conflict rather than a body of texts and its corresponding use of military metaphors (terrain, site, struggle) to represent that field is a significant advance over earlier perceptions of mass culture. Rather than class struggle or the hard work of establishing the hegemony of the state, that conflict needs to be seen, though, as occurring on the grounds and concerning possession of "the cultural" as such. It is a conflict that academics of all stripes, as cultural agents par excellence, are deeply involved in -- not primarily as friends of "the people" or as agents of change but as participants whose own authority and general well-being depend almost entirely on the struggle's outcomes. From this perspective, what may count most about mass cult is not its role in disenchantment or reification or struggles for political control but the way that it constantly raises the problem of Culture itself. Its battles, though they are marked by signs of class

antagonism and fierce disputes over power and legitimacy, are not simply the displacement of broader political conflict; they occur because the very establishment of cultural fields ushers in a dream of autonomy and egalitarianism while ceaselessly proposing and refining social demarcations that seem to take place along purely cultural lines. This is the problem raised by Mick O'Rourke and by conflicts over the "borderland" in general. Hybrid characters like Whitfield's and the dim regions Fitzgerald points to mark the place where the autonomous meets the heteronomous and where the peaceful dream of culture encounters its agonistic reality. This "dim borderland," where the cultural itself is at issue amid a welter of conflicts and contestants, is also preeminently the grotesque territory of the hard-boiled crime story.

3

The problems that confront intellectuals determined to study popular culture are in many ways reminiscent of the complexities that faced the creators of the hard-boiled aesthetic. The period between the wars, and the Thirties, especially, see such an explosion of cultural activity and so dramatic an expansion of the mass media that Culture becomes a matter whose importance is universally agreed upon, but whose meaning and attributes are topics of

confusion and intense conflict (Marquis, Pells, Rubin). More directly, the experience working in the pulp magazine industry that is shared by most hard-boiled writers forces upon them an intimate sense of some of the era's most pressing concerns. The unusual role pulp publishing plays at this time inevitably illuminates the question of what becomes of Culture when it is subject to mass distribution. It foregrounds as well the period's pitched conflict between populism and cultural authority. But, most importantly, it brings to the surface a latent conflict within the world of commercial entertainment over the qualities a truly popular culture might have. The result is a unique perspective on the social formation of cultural life.

Dashiell Hammett's 1924 story "The House in Turk Street" demonstrates some of the creative appearances these issues can make in hard-boiled crime fiction. In the tale, Hammett's hero, the anonymous Continental Op, accidentally stumbles on the hideout of a band of ruthless thieves while searching for a teenage runaway. Lured in to the house by the Quarres, a pair of killers posing as doddering and gentle septuagenarians, the Op is captured and held prisoner. Through a typically Hammettian series of coincidences and subtleties, however, the Op escapes and recovers the crooks' stolen bonds. He does so, as he characteristically puts it, by "stir[ring] things up" -- turning against the thieves their own attempts to use him as

a weapon in their internecine battles and exacerbating the tensions in their organization (Continental Op 112). As in Whitfield's The Virgin Kills those tensions are located at the dark, bloody crossroads of class and culture, and the Op, situated uncomfortably among them, is a potent reminder of the hard-boiled hero's "grotesque position." Tied to a chair, Hammett's protagonist listens desperately to an argument in another room between the brains and muscle of the gang about whether he should be killed. The gang leader, Tai, speaking in "a drawling baritone voice whose accent was unmistakably British; cultured British," argues that the Op should not be killed and should never have been taken prisoner (though he is motivated by anything but altruistic reasons) (97). The muscle, Hook, responds:

'What's the diff? Chances is he knows us all anyway. But supposing he didn't, what diff does it make?'

The drawling British voice: 'It may make a deal of difference. It was stupid.'

Hook, blustering: 'Stupid, huh? You're always bellyaching about other people being stupid. To hell with you, I say! Who does all the work? Who's the guy that swings all the jobs? Huh?' (98)

As the fight goes on, the Op gains "confidence in the drawling British voice; it was the voice of a man who

habitually carries his point" (99). And, indeed, the gang leader wins the fight, claiming: "There's no use reasoning with you, Hook, you've the instincts and the intellect of a troglodyte. There is only one sort of language that you understand; and I'm going to talk that language to you, my son" (100). In the end, a foreign and truly mandarin culture (Tai is Chinese and offers a new twist on pulp fiction's nativist Fu Manchu fantasies), with a critical bit of physical force, weighs in on the side of criminal management and vanquishes this momentary worker's rebellion.

As in the passage from Whitfield's The Virgin Kills quoted above, though, as well as the opening lines of Red Harvest noted in Chapter One, the pleasure of this scene has much less to do with the outcome of the struggle (the Op dislikes both contestants equally), than with a feature prominent in hard-boiled writing -- the skillful juxtaposition of several "languages" and the subtle manipulation of the stereotypes of intellect, education, and authority that accompany them. And, with its hero bound like a modern Odysseus, forced to listen as the disembodied and menacing voices of refined authority and subliterate violence decide his fate, the story demonstrates again the dramatic appeal for hard-boiled fiction of grotesque position. The conflict between Tai and Hook is a reminder, moreover, of how basic the role of cultural power is to that narrative schema. In an era that sees the dramatic

expansion of higher education, steadily increasing literacy, the creation of an entire industry of middlebrow culture, and a feverish spate of literary activity and fandom, such an emphasis on the force of learning seems appropriate.²⁵

That is even more the case when we consider that the typical readers of Black Mask most likely bore some resemblance in this context to Hammett's intermediate hero; they were probably skilled workers, lower-level white collar employees, members of the indeterminate class fractions comprising the upper reaches of the working class and the petit-bourgeoisie -- the "working people and artisans" from whom Hammett himself descended.²⁶ Most of these people probably would have had rudimentary formal educations much like the one Hammett obtained; for, although the post-World War I era witnesses an unprecedented expansion of mass education and astounding growth in college attendance, and although that increase is naturally accompanied by a spreading sense of culture as an egalitarian means of advancement and distinction, education remains a curiously stratified affair in this period.²⁷

This is an important inconsistency, I think. Much as in the case of the contemporaneous fashioning of a consumer economy, public education in this period presents an unresolved conflict between the theoretical possibility of a transformation of the ways of life of ordinary Americans and the actual reality of poor distribution (Fox and Lears;

McElvaine 25-50; Susman 211-229). Thus, on the one hand, the period between the wars sees many Deweyan appeals to the democratic potential of education and mass culture and the apparently ever-growing possibility of their technical realization.²⁸ On the other hand, even as those appeals are finding concrete form in the middlebrow trumpeting of "self-culture," the avenues to advancement remain gallingly limited.²⁹ For the United States economy, the classic account holds, the delay between the anticipation and the realization of a mass consumer society led to extensive overproduction and directly into the stagnation of the Great Depression. The tension between the ideological valuation of universal education and its hesitant dispersal, by comparison, created a huge audience for the publishing anomaly of the pulp magazine. Carl Kaestle et al. discover that "[t]he United States, like many other industrial countries sixty-five years ago, had widespread basic literacy training in elementary schools and a much more exclusive group trained in higher literacy skills in high schools and colleges" (205). The result, in a society where "opportunities were increasingly circumscribed by a person's ability to display the learning and credentials that would impress other people," was an often antagonistically segregated literary market (Rubin 25). Here, for example, is Kaestle et al.'s description of magazine reading in the Twenties:

Our evidence about the reading public and the available reading materials suggest that a rather small proportion of the population were advanced readers who enjoyed access to a broad range of materials, whereas other readers were limited to more popular publications. . . . [P]erhaps it does not matter that most people could not read the Atlantic Monthly. But the fact remains that the educational system equipped only a limited number of people with sophisticated reading skills, reading skills that also acted as an entry qualification and a necessary prerequisite to participation in many commanding institutions of society (221).³⁰

It is this situation, I think, that gives import to hard-boiled crime fiction, that links up the specific frustrations of its creators with broader conflicts over culture and education, and that consequently lends the writing an energy and critical force that disperses when this juncture has passed. It is perhaps not entirely coincidental that hard-boiled crime fiction flourishes in the three decades or so between the time when advocacy of mass higher education makes a significant entrance into public discourse and the post-War era when it becomes an

unremarkable fact of social life. Innovative hard-boiled writing begins to die out and becomes a matter of routine or nostalgic recreation in the late fifties and early sixties when the continued growth of college education brings the tension between basic literacy and higher skills to an historical ebb. In the meantime, pulp magazines and early paperbacks provide an avenue for thousands of uneducated writers to pursue a potentially lucrative and comparatively cultured career and, at their height, offer some 10,000,000 readers an environment sharply distinguished from other forms of literary activity and aesthetic diversion (Tebbell and Zuckerman 340). The hard-boiled genre similarly offers -- as the complex interaction among the Op, Hook, and Tai suggests -- a means for thematizing the conflicts that follow from an ever-growing emphasis on the display of learning in a world where education and culture remain deeply divided.

Nearly everything about the pulp magazines where hard-boiled fiction was invented reflects those divisions. The word pulp itself has evolved into a handy means of aesthetic distinction, but its original sense refers to the material conditions in which those distinctions were grounded. In its technical use the term initially indicated the inexpensive, fragile paper stock made from wood pulp that was employed exclusively for the cheap fractions of mass-

market publishing from the 1870s through the 1940s. Its survival as a term of literary description suggests the strict segmentation of American cultural life and the socially charged meaning of its categories across the era. Precisely because publishing activity was so intensely stratified, the word for a type of paper comes to refer almost immediately to a whole range of economic, social, and aesthetic differences within literary publishing. In the period of the twenties and thirties, when hard-boiled fiction developed as a distinct and popular variety of literary entertainment, those differences may have been near their most intense.

It is in this context that we can speak of pulp magazines as a publishing anomaly. One of the habits of mass-culture criticism has been the mournful perception of its monotonous tidal spread over every domain and feature of modern life. The very designation pulp, with its reference to a forgotten material of popular publishing, should remind us, however, of an important aspect of mass culture: it readily harbors conflicting realms and forces, develops at various levels, and moves in fits and starts along paths that peter out as well as expand. The cheap paper on which hard-boiled stories were first printed is the most concrete representation of a series of ways in which pulp magazines, though very much part of a commercial entertainment industry, flourish for several decades in a region that

maintains an awkward and uneasy relation to the mainstream of American popular culture.

Most basically, the commercial foundations of the pulp industry distinguish it from other publishing media. The development of pulp publishing is almost exactly contemporaneous with the triumphant stages of what has come to be known as the "magazine revolution," the dramatic expansion of the market for periodicals that begins in the 1890s and reaches astonishing proportions in the years following World War I (Theodore Peterson 2-14, 21-29, 223-24, Tebbell and Zuckerman 66-68). The pulp boom is itself part and parcel of the twentieth century's unprecedented growth in periodical readership. Yet the marketing innovations that undergird the development of magazines able to reach a broad national audience never apply to pulp publishing. As Theodore Peterson explains it, prior to 1893, the magazine market was divided between "class" or "quality monthly magazines" like Scribner's and Harper's that "addressed an audience well above average in income and intellectual curiosity" and, at the other end of the scale, "the cheap weeklies, the sentimental story papers, the miscellanies. Between there were few magazines of popular price and general appeal." (2) Innovative editors and publishers like Frank Munsey, S. S. McClure, John Brisben Walker, George Horace Lorimer, Cyrus Curtis, and Edward Bok transformed the American magazine by aiming between these

extremes at the "tremendously large and ever growing audience for low cost magazines suited to less esoteric tastes" (4).

That effort depended in small part on technical developments, but much more extensively on Frank Munsey's revolutionary discovery of 1893: that large circulations could be encouraged by selling magazines for less than production cost while profits could be generated from the high-volume advertising that an expanded readership attracted. In essence, the magazine revolution was powered by the growing middle class, an energized consumer economy, and the advent of advertising's momentous economic force (Theodore Peterson 7, 14, Tebbell and Zuckerman 140-146).³¹ Because of the laminated paper developed in order to feature the new, dramatically visual forms of advertising that these magazines relied upon, and perhaps because of the glossy consumer lifestyles they promoted, such publications came to be known as "slicks."

The pulp magazine that springs so dramatically to prominence in the twenties, however, has no part in this development. Rather, it descends directly from what Peterson identifies as the bottom fractions of the nineteenth-century periodical market. Indeed, when the first pulp magazine, Frank Munsey's Argosy, was created in 1896, it assumed a direction opposite to the one pioneered by its stablemate Munsey's. The two could easily stand as

totems for the divergent paths that popular publishing in the U.S. would follow for the next 40 or 50 years. As the latter was charting a course for the twentieth century's mass-circulation magazine -- aiming both at advertisers and middle-class readers by emphasizing a varied editorial mix and luxurious production values -- Argosy sought to define a limited market niche by printing only popular fiction and aimed to control production costs by using inexpensive pulp paper. Munsey's looked forward to slick magazines like The Saturday Evening Post, Ladies Home Journal, and Life whose every issue would reach millions of readers, in good part by championing the development of consumer lifestyles and a world of middle-class achievement and satisfaction. Argosy, on the other hand, aimed to capitalize on the success that late-nineteenth century publishers had found in making literature available cheaply to a ravenous and expanding public (Schick 51-59; Tebbell, v.1, 240-51, v.2, 481-511).³² Where the "class" magazines had sought to act as spiritual and intellectual stewards for the nation, and where the slicks aim to fully educate their readers to the possibilities of the consumer age, the basic and intentionally limited direction of Argosy and its successors is to serve as almost passive conduits of fiction. In their most revealing moments, pulp publishers and editors imagine themselves to be essentially low-cost distributors of reading material.

The huge publishing enterprises like Beadle & Adams and Street & Smith, that had achieved success in the decades following the Civil War by exploiting the market for cheap fiction in story papers and dime novels, follow the route set out by Argosy. Seeking to protect their business from the restriction of second-class postal privileges, these publishers refit their products as pulp magazines, since, unlike the dime novels, the pulps have few problems passing as periodicals eligible for the cheap second-class mailing rates. As a result, between 1900 and the first World War, while the rulings of the postmaster general remain confusing, dime novels and pulp magazines serve the same market (Cook xxi; Goodstone ix-xi, Panek 109).³³ As the superior economic viability of the pulps grows evident, dime publishers simply switch formats, and the saturation of the field by capital and talent combines with the expanding demand for fiction and improved methods of distribution to inspire a sudden burst of growth after the war. In one telling case in 1915, a detective serial begun in the dime novel library Nick Carter Stories continues on when the library transforms itself into the pulp magazine Detective Story Magazine. Part one is in the dime novel, parts two through four in the pulp magazine that will itself run through the 1950s (Sampson v. 1 78, 91). As this serial illustrates in small, the pulp era, usually said to reach from the twenties through the forties, is in fact part of an

unbroken tradition of cheap publishing set off from the mainstream of the American mass-market media.³⁴ In its dime novels and story papers develops a variety of violent, anti-ratiocinative detective fiction that was always at odds with the intellectual emphasis of Poe or Doyle's type of stories and that will come to fruition with the success of hard-boiled fiction between the Wars.³⁵

The economic basis for this tradition of publishing could hardly be more distinct from that which powered the growth of the slicks. Slicks rely on advertising for revenue and, because of the need to attract both readers and advertisers, are forced to invest heavily in production -- both in payments to writers, editors, and other workers and in the technical costs of making the magazines themselves attractive consumer goods. To choose an immediate example, slicks might pay between \$1,000 and \$5,000 for a short story (Theodore Peterson 124-127). By the twenties and thirties comparable expenditures are necessary in the fierce battle to attract the best artists, photographers, and editors, not to mention the anonymous armies of researchers, production executives, and advertising and promotion specialists the business also demands (Marquis 10). Pulp magazines, on the other hand, make their money almost entirely from circulation, and a whole range of basic features follows from this simple difference (Hersey 11-28, Theodore Peterson 69, Tebbell and Zuckerman 341). Most importantly, in order

for any profit to accrue, all production costs must be kept to an absolute minimum, demanding the distinctive use of pulp-wood paper. Payments to writers are necessarily as slim as the market will bear -- the base rate typically the famous cent per word. Pitifully small amounts of money can be spent on make-up, and typically a single editor, on occasion aided by an assistant, is responsible for every aspect of production -- from purchasing fiction and art work, through layout and the supervision of printing and distribution.³⁶

Moreover, where the slicks' huge expenditures and aggressive marketing encourage an overwhelming drive toward market concentration, the pulps, in their very existence and in their shoestring struggles for survival, push in the opposite direction. Although the pulps depend on circulation for income, the features inherent in their mode of publication -- specialization, small budgets and a personal scale of operation, alienation from advertising and promotion -- mean that at very best a single pulp can hope for a circulation somewhere in the tens of thousands. And, given their narrow profit margins, pulp publishers are forced to maintain a wide variety of titles and the willingness to kill off a magazine the moment it slips into the red (Goodstone xiv, Hersey 30, Theodore Peterson 79).³⁷

While a handful of slick magazines, with circulations well over a million each, dominate the periodical market

from the twenties through the fifties, then, the pulp world that fills the lower racks of the newsstands is populated by an endless variety of proliferating and disappearing magazines that command relatively tiny audiences.³⁸ Pulp publication demands little initial investment, and it presents minuscule barriers to entry, allowing for a heady expansion of opportunity and encouraging a nearly frontier atmosphere of all-out entrepreneurial competition (Steeger v). Yet, while publishers can grow by multiplying titles, the basic structures of the industry make it all but impossible for individual magazines to achieve anything but paltry circulations compared to the massive numbers of the slicks. Pulp magazines of necessity remain low-budget, small-scale operations.

Thus, while pulp magazines and their predecessors, the dime novels and story papers of the Gilded Age, undoubtedly play an important part in the making of a national commercial pop culture, they are anything but the step in the advance of the Culture Industry for which they are often taken.³⁹ In fact, it is the slick magazines that display so many of the culture critics' most lamented side effects of commodification -- from pure mass appeal and shallow lifestyle mongering through homogeneity, market surveys, and strictly planned issue. Pulp magazines, by contrast, remain small-scale, under-capitalized, nearly preindustrial "dealers in reading matter" (Theodore Peterson 69). Indeed,

by a strange irony, these features cause pulp magazines to resemble their nearest market competitors, the slicks, far less than they mirror the similarly tiny fractions of literary and elite publishing -- the "quality" and "little" magazines and "patronage" publishers that are crucial to the post-World War I efflorescence of literary experimentation. In an inverse parallel to the pulps, these forms of publication descend from forbears outside the mainstream of the magazine revolution -- the "class" magazines of the nineteenth century. And, as with the pulps, the sheer expansion of readership and publishing in the twenties allows them to explore new forms and achieve unprecedented success. Yet, in a limited but striking resemblance to the pulps, their small-scale, anti-commercial operations distinguish them in nearly every respect from the industrial features of mass-market publishing. Though from opposite ends of the spectrum, the pulps and the little magazines share a basic antagonism to the world of the slick magazines.

These parallels are in a sense realized in the fact that H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan found Black Mask magazine, the original home of hard-boiled fiction, to support their quality magazine Smart Set, filling Black Mask's pages with manuscripts from the other journal's slush pile. They are more directly memorialized when the premier patronage publisher of the first decades of the twentieth

century, Alfred Knopf, prints the work of Black Mask writers like Hammett and Chandler. But the very appearance of pulp magazines makes the same case. Like the little magazines, everything about the physical commodity of the pulps marks them as anomalous to the twentieth-century magazine revolution and makes them resemble a throwback to an earlier era. At the height of the age of the fat and glossy slick magazines, plumped up with volumes of visually stimulating advertising and wild abundance of material, the pulps typically contain some 130 pages of double-columned, close-set print, rarely interrupted by an occasional black and white line drawing and sandwiched by a few measly pages of low-budget advertising.

From the perspective of history, then, pulp magazines take on an aspect that they could hardly have had for the people who read and created them. Cut off from the forces of advertising and a mass audience that underwrite the success of much of the twentieth century's popular culture, and lacking the legitimation that supports elite publishing, pulp magazines seem doomed to failure. During the period of their unlikely success, some 125 pulps print one and a half million dollars worth of manuscripts a year and compete for 10,000,000 readers.⁴⁰ But looking backward, the pulp era seems like a bubble in the history of publishing, tenuously supported by cheap methods of production and distribution and a readership whose limited formal education may have

made them a natural audience. In a development that now seems almost inevitable, the imposition of paper quotas during World War II and the skyrocketing of production costs during and immediately after the War -- added to the competition of TV and, more pointedly, of the burgeoning paperback industry -- send the pulps into a slow but relentless decline (Goodstone xv, Theodore Peterson 309, Tebbell and Zuckerman 343). By 1953, the industry has almost entirely disappeared.

A number of pulp publishers and writers move readily into the new paperback market that in good measure displaces the pulps in the late forties and fifties. Here, in a continuation of their earlier status, they inevitably occupy the cheapest, most reviled fractions of the field, passing on the "pulp" designation when the original, technical meaning no longer applies (Kenneth Davis 93-96, 134-141, 171, 185, Schick 155-176 and passim, Tebbel, v. 4, 386-395). Like their magazine predecessors, these low-budget paperback houses become the institutional home of the still developing line of hard-boiled fiction. Yet, even in the paperback world, the cottage-industry features that distinguish the pulp market from the mainstream mass media face a limited lifespan. By the early sixties, the small fly-by-night paperback houses and lines (e.g., Fawcett Gold Medal, Lion, Dell) that print a large variety of "paperback originals," and consequently do much to support experiments in thriller

fiction, are being displaced by large, corporate-managed firms and a concomitant emphasis on "blockbuster" publishing (Kenneth Davis 265, 276). The decline of hard-boiled fiction in the late fifties thus coincides not just with the vast success of higher education, but with the gradual disappearance of the tawdry subculture of pulp publishing.⁴¹ The hard-boiled emphasis on the solitary, pettily entrepreneurial, almost lumpen protagonist, who prowls the neglected territories of the city, is likewise superseded by a more suitable thriller hero. In the person of the glamorous, globe-trotting James Bond, the consolidating paperback industry finds a corporate man better fitted to its spiffed-up image.⁴²

In the decades when it thrives, however, pulp publishing does more than provide a literature apparently targeted to a working-class audience. The pulp market's voracious appetite for material offers opportunities to authors unlikely to break into more prestigious venues, opportunities that are crucial to the success of renowned hard-boiled figures like Hammett and Chandler, but that also create literary careers for thousands of forgotten writers. Recollections and memoirs suggest that few pulpsters anticipated just how short-lived those opportunities would be, but all seem to have cherished the possibilities that the pulp market held out and to have realized how

distinctive those possibilities were.⁴³ In fact, that may be a crucial point for apprehending the context of hard-boiled writing. While pulp figures seem not to be aware that they are engaged in a losing battle for the future of popular entertainment, they do have a sharp sense that they are involved in an uneven dispute -- that of necessity the values and practices encouraged by pulp publishing come into conflict with the dominance of the slicks and the awesome success of middlebrow culture. The fact that the pulpsters are unaware how badly they would lose this conflict may, ironically, only serve to make the disagreement sharper. At times it seems that pulpsters believe they exemplify a serious alternative for American popular culture.

This point may help in turn to clarify an assertion made above: the suggestion that divisions in literary publishing are near their most intense during the period between the wars. In fact, the prodigious expansion of the magazine revolution means that American periodical publishing in the twenties and thirties, while still deeply divided, is far less stratified, segmented, and immobile than it was during the nineteenth century, and the same is true, of course, for nearly every area of literary activity in the U.S. Paradoxically, it is this development that excites the most serious conflicts. Struggles over distinction and the demarcation of literary realms become more intense precisely because cultural production and

education have grown so dramatically that aesthetic life seems potentially uniform and undivided, open equally to all. Just as the arrival of mass-media, middlebrow cultural phenomena like the Book-of-the-Month Club and Toscanini radio concerts provoke intense conflicts over the meaning of culture and a general atmosphere of confusion in the Twenties and Thirties, in this particular instance matters become only more unstable and vituperative as old boundaries melt away. More specifically, the constantly expanding success of the slick magazines and their ability to create a vision of an American culture that has an apparently universal appeal, forces pulp magazines into a direct conflict with the main currents of mass-market publishing.

Thus, although both pulp magazines and their story paper and dime novel predecessors claim strenuously to be interested in little besides entertainment and scorn any attempt at seriousness, the pulps face a conflict unknown to their forebears. While the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era launch many an elite attack on the vulgarity of dime novels and foment fears of the corrupting power of mass culture that are carried forward well into the twentieth century, cheap fiction publishers, writers, and readers of the day take little notice. Beyond censorship -- a very real but limited danger -- they have few reasons to fear their critics. In the twenties and thirties, however, pulps and slicks compete for overlapping audiences, and, against

the constantly encroaching success of mainstream media, the pulps struggle for their very survival. More importantly, the pulps and slicks, unlike the dime novels and their "class" magazine critics, occupy the same rhetorical space: each wants to be the opposite of those elite journals, to assume the voice of the ordinary people. They compete, therefore, over the ability to define the meaning and the characteristics of a truly popular culture. At its most basic, that contest devolves into a struggle between the most potent forces of twentieth century mass media and the vestigial features of nineteenth-century popular publishing.

What distinguishes pulp writers, editors, and publishers from their predecessors, therefore, is that they avidly pursue recognition of a kind of cultural legitimacy. That pursuit is largely cast as a war between the pulps and the slicks, where the practices of pulp publishing are elevated to the status of moral values to be held against the habits of slick culture. Against the slicks' comparative prestige and authority, their massive size and extensive organization, their wealth and their visions of a comfortable world, pulp figures tend to emphasize a lack of pomp and pretence, independence, daring and skill, free and unmediated contact with an audience, and above all a crude honesty and authenticity. Thus, Harold Hersey, in his memoir Pulpwood Editor, makes any number of resentful complaints against "the smooth-paper gentry [who] seem to

forget that just as much hack-writing goes into shiny-paper sheets as it does into any other branch of the publishing industry" (136). Attempting to prove that he and his colleagues are capable of producing magazines that will "improve upon . . . The Saturday Evening Post, Collier's, Cosmopolitan, or Redbook," he argues for the idiosyncratic character of the pulp magazines and their unique relations to both literature and the people (127):

The pulpwood editor, having greater freedom of action [than the slick editor], has also a greater responsibility. He works alone and in Stygian darkness. His magazine is not printed on expensive, shiny paper. Its sales are not boosted by elaborate promotion schemes. He has only one sure thing to depend upon: his professional writers -- those who have already been tested in the fire of fiction popularity and have not been found wanting. They know what the public wants even better than he does (105).

That unique sensitivity to the popular will is implicitly and sometimes explicitly contrasted to the manipulation, dishonesty, and cowardice that pulp figures intuitively associate with the slicks' advertising and promotion. Thus, Hersey suggests that while "the pulpwood editor must guard himself only against publishing spineless stories," it is

the slicks who "fear . . . offending the advertising department" and "hew to the line of compromise" (6). The result is an apocalyptic vision of a decadent consumer society contrasted to the pulp's imaginary rugged independence:

The lush growth of space-buying in smooth-paper pages is nothing less than an orgy of spending by a class that might as well be publicly announcing from the housetops, 'After us, the deluge.' . . . [The pulp magazine] does not seek to emulate the smooth-paper in appearance and context; nor is it a rival of radio. It will continue on its merry, prosperous way, supplementing all the other entertainment industries, supplying the demand of those who insist upon infallible heroes and yearning feminine arms (11).

Though to some extent its methods will continue in cheap paperback publishing and its values will be enshrined in literary forms that survive the industry, that merry, prosperous way will be all but extinguished within 10 years. A measure of the long-term influence that this war between the pulps and slicks nevertheless has on the fashioning of the hard-boiled aesthetic can be seen in Raymond Chandler's many vicious denunciations of the slick magazines and the

similarity of those attacks to Hersey's complaints. Chandler bridles at the "fundamental dishonesty" of smooth-paper magazines and denounces "all slick fiction" for being "artificial, untrue, and emotionally dishonest" (Letters 7, 11).⁴⁴ Against the slicks, Chandler adds the telling claim that "a writer should create his own public," echoing Hersey's sense -- and, indeed, that of intellectual critics of consumerism and mass culture -- that the enormous appeal and the popular voice of slick magazines is manufactured and unauthentic (461). The suggestion is clear that it is the "honest and forthright" pulp magazines that allow Chandler a true public and the opportunity, as he puts it, to speak the vernacular (86, 200, 238).

The comments of Joseph Shaw, the famed editor of Black Mask who is often credited with a crucial role in fostering the creation of hard-boiled fiction, can be seen in a similar light. Recalling his role in encouraging the work of Hammett, Chandler, and their peers, Shaw -- who is clearly sensitive about his magazine's pulp status -- speaks of the importance of "skill and craftsmanship," talks of emphasizing "simplicity for the sake of clarity, plausibility, and belief," and refers to hard-boiled fiction as a literature with "a new kind of compulsion and authenticity" (Introduction ix, vi).⁴⁵ Placed in the context of the war between the slicks and the pulps, these comments take on some resonance. So, too, does the fact

that in The Maltese Falcon (originally a Black Mask serial), the character who sits in moral judgment of Sam Spade at the novel's close, his secretary Effie Perrine, is a reader of Time magazine (41). And, given the distaste for the spectacle of consumerism that is at the heart of pulp complaints against slick culture, it is perhaps not surprising that Spade's partner's corpse is concealed at the novel's beginning by "advertisements of a moving picture and a gasoline" (13). It may not be too much to say that the greatest of hard-boiled novels is framed by the slick values that pulp figures so often claim to resist.

The point is not that the economic structure of the pulp industry determines the nature of the literature it publishes, nor that the pulps' competition with the slick magazines explains every aspect of hard-boiled fiction. Rather, in the context of the far more momentous social transformations that come to a head in the period between the wars -- the expansion of white collar work and the middle classes, the geometric growth of education and literacy, the dramatic success of advertising and consumer culture -- this local conflict assumes added significance and is subject to a kind of ideological overelaboration. The structures of pulp publishing, it is true, do encourage a whole way of life: types of literary labor; forms of audience; a network of writers, publishers, and agents whose

hand-to-mouth existence both mirrors the seedy urban territory of hard-boiled fiction and distinguishes the pulp world from the corporate organization of mainstream pop culture. (These matters will be discussed more specifically in chapters 4 and 5). But what may be more important is the manner in which the marginal status of the pulp magazine is transformed into a form of literary capital. For pulp figures, the titanic success of slick culture offers a new way of asserting their own legitimacy.

In the pages of Black Mask magazine in the twenties and thirties, that assertion and the pulps' conflict with the culture of the slick magazines will be played out in part as a contest over the genre of detective fiction. Indeed, detective fiction generally, with its emphasis on law and legal expertise as forms of social power, is a literature given to concern with cultural capital.⁴⁶ This is a matter that slick magazines like Collier's, McClure's, Cosmopolitan, and The Saturday Evening Post seem to have understood intuitively. In their pages, in the first two decades of the twentieth century, "classic" detective fiction achieves its initial popular success in the U.S. Most importantly, between 1903 and 1905, Collier's reprints a run of Sherlock Holmes stories that cause a popular sensation and inspire a host of imitations in the middle-class magazines. As Leroy Panek puts it, with its entry into the slick magazines "detective fiction move[s] out of

the ghetto of cheap fiction into the legitimate world of middle-class readership." Doing so, it becomes, for the first time in the U.S., "a respectable genre" (90). Shorn of the associations with sensation and vice that dominated elite perception of popular crime fiction through the latter part of the nineteenth century, detective stories about "scientific" detectives, doctor detectives, professor, psychoanalyst, lawyer, and college boy detectives, along with a slew of Holmes imitations, appear in huge numbers in the pages of the mass-market magazines. And even in the dime novels and pulp magazines that in this period struggle to keep up with their more successful competitors, the crude habits of sensational detective stories, with their emphases on pursuit and violence, are almost entirely abandoned.⁴⁷

The affinity between a "respectable" detective fiction that places its emphasis on intellect and pseudo-science and the culture of slick publishing is not difficult to discern. In a parallel to the tactics of slick marketing, the Holmesian variety of detective story, as critics from Auden on have noted, typically concerns itself with the formation of an inclusive and homogenous public, purged of the disturbing aspects of human dealing and the incongruous features of ordinary life.⁴⁸ Perhaps more importantly, though, the intertwined emphases that slick magazines place on consumerism and education, their constantly reiterated sense of refinement and middlebrow culture as means to

advancement, receive a kind of fictional encouragement in the plots of the "classic" detective story. In the U.S. especially, the "scientific" detectives who flourish in the teens and twenties speak not just for deductive genius but for the middle-class values that magazines like the Post enshrine: verve and energy, professionalism, and, above all education (Panek 59, 93).

Against these values, hard-boiled fiction reasserts the ghettoized, unrespectable and nearly forgotten features of the sensational detective stories that descend from dime novels and story papers. The inheritance is made explicit in "The House in Turk Street," when Tai briefly recaptures the Op and, holding him at gunpoint, crows: "I have you completely in my power, as the shilling shockers used to have it" (113). The English shilling shockers were closely associated with American dime novels and pulp magazines (the terms may even have been used interchangeably),⁴⁹ and it is one of Hammett's typical felicities to have his villain assert his power by referring ironically to the limitations of his own publishing context. The Op will eventually defeat Tai, of course, by embracing some of the traditional virtues of the dime novel detective, vanquishing his opponent's daunting intelligence and refinement through a canny knowledge of human failing and a skillful sense of gunplay. In effect, Tai is dragged physically and mortally back into the orbit of the shilling shocker. An even bolder

example, though, occurs in "The Tenth Clew," published by Hammett in Black Mask in the same year as "Turk Street." There Hammett's Op parodies the "classic" detective by assembling nine random clues to a murder, only to decide that the tenth clue is that the initial nine are meaningless. The remainder of the story resembles a condensed version of a dime-novel detective serial jammed with fistfights, gun battles, and high-action pursuit.

With their antagonistic mixtures of refinement and physicality, intellect and action, these stories illustrate the gradual processes of recombination and separation that would eventually produce a recognizable and successful hard-boiled aesthetic. They suggest as well the way pulp magazines in the Twenties were themselves an uncertain territory. The distinctions between the pulp world and slick magazines in those years may have seemed less unbridgeable than they became after the Depression emphasized the distance between poverty and wealth.⁵⁰ And the huge influence of the slicks' emphasis on middlebrow refinement held an undoubted sway in pulp fiction. Indeed, the letters columns of Black Mask indicate that the conflict Hammett's stories illustrate was a matter of conscious debate about the directions the magazine would take. Thus, one reader in 1924, the same year "Turk Street" and "The Tenth Clew" were published, compliments the editor on a story "not filled with the tiresome deduction bunk of the

average detective story published nowadays. If there is anything that gives me a tired feeling, it is these yarns where the college boy detective finds clues, dead bodies, etc., in plain view after the police had walked all over them. . . . [The dime novel detectives] King Brady and Nick Carter were truer to real detective work than anything Conan Doyle ever wrote."⁵¹

Like later champions of the hard-boiled, this reader places an unlikely emphasis on the realism of thriller fiction, but his distaste for college boy detectives points to the way generic distinctions could serve potentially as meditations on broader problems of education and cultural authority. The connection is more explicit in a contrary letter published in Black Mask the previous year. Defending the magazine against the accusation that detective fiction is "a 'lowbrow' taste," this reader asks the editors to do more to prevent the charge:

I do not care for the rather too lurid covers; a plain cover similar to that of the 'Bookman' or 'North American Review' with a simple list of titles and authors would do much to dispel the idea that a mystery or detective magazine must be along the lines of the 'Nick Carter' school of shilling shocker.⁵²

Although this reader's models of taste are not slick but

"quality" magazines, his and the previous letter make the underlying issue clear. The crucible of the hard-boiled aesthetic is the question of the pulp magazines' relation to other forms of literary publishing: whether the pulps will align themselves with their sensational ancestry or attempt to emulate what Hersey referred to as the periodical "gentry." That question quickly focuses on the authority and value of the consumerist refinement, the self-improvement through shopping, that is the slick magazine's fundamental topos.

Looking backward, it is tempting to speak of the realization of tendencies and to say that the Depression, while it led to the pulps' greatest success, also made the differences between these magazines and other forms of publishing more emphatic, forcing pulp figures like Hersey to recognize their own marginality. By the early Thirties, in any case, hard-boiled fiction has won handily its dispute over the direction of the pulp magazines by advocating a wilfully lowbrow stance, a conscious refusal of gentility that exacerbates the pulps' subcultural status and mimics Hersey's sputtering resentment. For the remainder of the genre's life, hard-boiled writers will exploit this stance, emphasizing the conflicts between authenticity and false sophistication. In the liveliest cases, as both Whitfield's Virgin Kills and Hammett's "The House in Turk Street" suggest, that conflict has already become reflexive and

entered the fiction as a typically comic encounter between "languages." Manipulating those languages to ensure his survival, the hard-boiled protagonist mocks and objectifies both the tradition of the shilling shocker and the voice of cultural authority. Here, for example, is the opening paragraph of one of Carroll John Daly's earliest stories, "Three Gun Terry," preceded by the editorial comment that warned readers about how to receive it:

Pay no attention to the spelling or grammatical errors in this tale. It's in Terry's own language, and he can handle an automatic better than he can the mother tongue.

My life is my own and the opinions's of others don't interest me; so don't form any, or if you do, keep them to yourself. If you want to sneer at my tactics, why go ahead; but do it behind the pages -- you'll find that healthier (5).

Only a thorough reading of the early issues of Black Mask can convey a concrete sense of how striking and incongruous Daly's diction must have seemed.⁵³ Although the editorial comment is obviously tongue-in-cheek, Daly's first-person assault on literary diction is so out of keeping with the magazine's typical fare at this point that, combined with

the second letter quoted above, that language makes it easy to imagine why such a warning might have seemed necessary. The juxtaposition of this editorial comment and Daly's story in any case illuminates an aspect of Daly's fiction that is often underappreciated. In the voice of three-gun Terry, the dime-novel tradition of sensational crime literature reenters pulp fiction as a burlesque force, offering a mocking and disruptive and essentially comic response to the pulp magazine's efforts to emulate slick culture. As "Turk Street" and The Maltese Falcon both suggest, writers like Hammett will overlay this voice's attack on refinement with the detective story's conflict between law and disorder to create more complex accounts of cultural authority.

It should be emphasized, finally, that I have been talking here about a conflict within what has come to be called the Culture Industry. The defensive comments of Hersey or Shaw and Daly's burlesque in no way suggest a critique mobilized from the precincts of authentic art; nor are they remnants of some folk culture. Like most pulp figures, these editors and writers want nothing more than to offer successful, commercial literary entertainment. The conflict with the world of the slicks that they see over the ways that this entertainment will be created, packaged, and distributed, becomes, however, a snag in the current of popular culture around which all sorts of other values and

beliefs can collect. Ultimately, that disagreement becomes the heroic battle described by Hersey between authenticity and dishonesty, between consumer manipulation and a true popular voice. In the hands of writers like Hammett, Whitfield, and Chandler, this conflict becomes the opportunity for a far more complex and inclusive account of literary culture and public life.

* * *

NOTES

1. Pierre Bourdieu, "The Market of Symbolic Goods," p. 19; Raymond Chandler, Selected Letters, p. 2.
2. This is one of "the values of tone and texture" that as Thomas Roberts points out are ignored by structuralist, psychoanalytic and sociological critics of pop texts but "that are so plainly evident to the people who read these stories and that play no small part in the stories' selection of readers" (118).
3. On the contemporary prominence of such ideals, their complex involvement in consumer culture, and the hostility they occasion as representatives of the middlebrow and the genteel, see Paul Boyer, Purity in Print, Joan Shelley Rubin, The Making of Middle-Brow Culture, 26-33 and passim, and Janice Radway, "The Book-of-the-Month Club and the General Reader: On the Uses of 'Serious Fiction'" and "Mail-Order Culture and Its Critics: The Book-of-the-Month Club, Commodification and Consumption, and the Problem of Cultural Authority."
4. See also, Michel de Certeau, "The Beauty of the Dead: Nisard."
5. See also Pierre Bourdieu, "The Uses of the 'People.'" In Other Words: Essays Toward a Reflexive Sociology and An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology 82-84, and DeCerteau, ibid.
6. On these two paradigms generally, see: Stuart Hall, "Two Paradigms," Media, Culture, and Society; Tony Bennett, "Popular Culture and the Turn to Gramsci" and "The Politics of the 'Popular' and Popular Culture," Popular Culture and Social Relations; Michael Denning, "The End of Mass Culture; Schiach 1-8; Andreas Huyssen, After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism, 20.
7. The exiled Frankfurters "complained bitterly about the absence of a European (or even Manhattan) civitas of public places, sophisticated crowds, historical auras and critical intellectuals [in southern California] The Frankfurt critique of the 'Culture Industry' became the primary theoretical representation of this encounter.... They described the Culture Industry not merely as political economy, but as a specific spatiality that vitiated the classical proportions of European urbanity, expelling from the stage both the 'masses' (in their heroic, history-

changing incarnation) and the critical intelligentsia" (Davis 47, 48). Similar arguments are often made about Adorno and Horkheimer's reactions to the apparent utter helplessness of critical intellectuals before the advance of Nazism and their feelings of interior exile in post-war West Germany.

8. In his introduction to Warshow's book, Trilling claims that between him and Warshow there existed "one of those undefined but powerful antagonisms between members of different literary and cultural generations, ... an unvoiced generational dispute," between members of "the cultural family," also noting that Warshow approached his intellectual life with "something of the temperament of the provinces ..." (13, 15, 12). The most evident scene of this conflict is Warshow's brutal review of Trilling's novel The Middle of the Journey, in which Warshow lamented Trilling's inability "to create what seems ... an adequate emotional and moral response to experience" and his unfortunate need as a result "to translate experience into ideas ..." (47, 48). (Warshow levels a similar complaint against the genteel "taste" and "intelligence" of The New Yorker in an essay on the magazine.) Against these weaknesses, Warshow implicitly poses "the absorbing immediacy of the screen" and the movies' "'pure'" absence of overt intellectualism and "discipline of art" (28). On the other hand, he is concerned about the "indiscriminate anarchy" and "undisciplined imaginativeness" in the comic books his son reads, complaining that "in their utter lack of modulation [they] yield too readily to the child's desire to receive his satisfactions immediately, thus tending to subvert one of the chief elements in the process of growing up, which is learning to wait; a child's developing appreciation of the complexity of good literature is surely one of the things that contributes to his eventual acceptance of the complexity of life" (84, 85, 86).
9. See Ray B. Browne. Against Academia: The History of the Popular Culture Association/ American Culture Association and the Popular Culture Movement, 1967-1988.
10. George Lipsitz implicitly affirms the crucial importance of this last factor in his essay "Listening to Learn, Learning to Listen: Culture, Theory, and American Studies," when he notes that "it has become clear that most academics are tied to a declining social formation Despite lavish salaries paid to a few scholars with international reputations and despite increasing total budgets for higher education, the social power of most scholars involved in cultural studies has declined drastically over the past twenty years" (631).

11. Gramsci receives some 21 references in the massive Cultural Studies tome, enough to indicate his basic importance to the movement but not enough to distinguish him from other patriarchs like Pierre Bourdieu, Foucault, Stuart Hall, Lacan and Raymond Williams. This dispersion should indicate the diffuse theoretical inspirations for the movement and the way in which it has been able to accommodate an apparently irreconcilable variety of intellectual directions. More importantly, I think, it is evidence for a case I have been trying to argue implicitly -- that here as elsewhere the inspirations and rigors of theory have been far less important than extratextual social relations. Michael Denning makes this point nicely in his superb history of recent developments of the field when he mentions the Reagan revolution, the "crisis" in feminist politics, and the arrival of "post-modernism" as important influences on the development of a "Gramscian" perspective (Denning, "Mass Culture," 6-7). Curiously enough, even in this most "materialist" of intellectual movements, few writers make this kind of argument, relying instead on the most familiar forms of idealist intellectual history. Rarely if ever are the crucial questions of the role of the intellectual and his or her place in the world of academics considered.
12. I am following here Michael Denning's assimilation of Jameson's emphasis on commodification and Hall and the Birmingham school's concern for hegemony and class relations. (See Denning's "Mass Culture.") In their full theoretical elaboration these perspectives may be far from perfectly consistent. I think, though, that Denning is right to stress their shared dismissal of the old division between manipulation and authenticity in the study of mass culture and their concomitant emphasis on the ambivalence of texts and practices. This latter feature, far more than any rigorous or global theoretical vision, has been the most significant legacy of both schools to the rapidly expanding field of Cultural Studies.
13. See Stuart Hall, "Popular Culture and the State."
14. See Charles Molesworth, "From Out of the Darkness: Popular Culture and the Uses of Knowledge"; Meghan Morris, "Banality in Cultural Studies"; Steven Watts, "The Idiocy of American Studies: Post-structuralism, Language and Politics in the Age of Self-Fulfillment"; T.J. Jackson Lears, "Power, Culture, and Memory"; Shiach 194.
15. On the persistence of the manipulation model of pop culture, see, for example, Stuart Hall's summary of and complaint about "a great deal of work in cultural studies": "The bourgeoisie produces bourgeois culture which exercises bourgeois hegemony. Hooray!" ("Theoretical Legacies" 289).

16. The locus classicus of this method is Janice Radway's Reading the Romance, a study that demonstrated through careful ethnographic work as well as sociological, historical and literary critical methods, the real yet limited ways readers are able to draw powerful and somewhat feminist meanings from the unlikely pages of Harlequin romances. Other texts, far less grounded in social scientific type research than Radway's, have taken far greater liberties in finding hypothetical, subversive meanings hidden in seemingly reactionary texts. As Lears puts it, "There is too strong a tendency to elevate what is often a univocal, closed system of imagery into an elegant Bakhtinian conversation, where every neofascist utterance by Clint Eastwood implies a counterfascist critique of 'late capitalism'" (139). The most consistent and convincing advocate of this approach is probably John Fiske. See his, Understanding Popular Culture.
17. Thus, for example, Constance Penley concludes her essay on Star Trek "slash" fandom by saying: "My final question, then, is to contemporary feminism and its work on popular culture: are we ready, like the slash fans, 'to explore strange new worlds . . . to boldly go where no one has gone before?" (492) Later, during a question and answer period, she affirms that she has learned much from her subjects but adds "at least as much of my knowledge comes from the understanding of my distance from the fans, from seeing where I don't fit in at all" (496). As in Radway's account of romance readers, this distance involves the audiences' apparent refusal to avowedly embrace feminism and their anti-intellectualism. See also Simon Frith's remarks about the work of Dick Hebdige and Iain Chambers: "the cultural study of popular music has been, in effect, an anxiety-driven search by radical intellectuals and rootless academics for a model of consumption -- for the perfect consumer, the subcultural idol, the mod, the punk, the cool commodity fetishist, the organic intellectual of the high street who can stand in for them" (180, emphasis in original).
18. A characteristic statement of Cultural Studies' rescue of pop texts is John Fiske's argument that "[p]opular culture is made by the people at the interface between the products of the culture industries and everyday life" (Understanding Popular Culture 25). See also Constance Penley's reference to "the popular will to transform the products of mass-produced culture . . ." (496).

A significant corollary of this view is the fact that Simon Frith points out when he notes "an area and issue systematically (and remarkably) neglected by cultural studies: the rationale of cultural production itself, the place and thought of cultural producers" (178). The reasons

for this neglect are clear. Much of Cultural Studies remains unknowingly and deeply indebted to the distinction between the autonomous agents of high culture and the debased handlers of commodified lit. While cultural critics can transfer some of their own prestige and independence to audiences with whom they align themselves politically and who, like them, are primarily readers, it has been far more difficult to free cultural producers -- writers, publishers, agents, etc. -- from old ideas of the Culture Industry. They presumably retain the desire to manipulate and mystify and are just less successful than we used to think. (For example, both Radway and Christine Bold condemn popular publishers for attempting to survey their audiences.) As much as this attitude may reflect the anti-capitalist politics of Cultural Studies, I think it points far more powerfully to the old, cultured distaste for filthy lucre and the intellectual's discomfort with explicit appeals to a mass audience.

19. Speaking of the development of the influential Centre for Cultural Studies at Birmingham, Stuart Hall says, "there is no doubt in my mind that we were trying to find an institutional practice in cultural studies that might produce an organic intellectual. . . . The problem about the concept of an organic intellectual is that it appears to align intellectuals with an emerging historic movement and we couldn't tell then, and can hardly tell now, where that emerging historical movement was to be found. We were organic intellectuals without any organic point of reference; organic intellectuals with a nostalgia or will or hope . . . that at some point we would be prepared in intellectual work for that kind of relationship, if such a conjuncture ever appeared" ("Theoretical Legacies" 281).
20. Hunter's essay, "Aesthetics and Cultural Studies," is an unusual and fascinating dissection of Cultural Studies' project to "politicize aesthetics."
21. In speaking of the way "the cultural has . . . infused the social fabric," Radway is undoubtedly contesting the habit of confining "culture" to limited aspects of aesthetic activity. By a similar token, she may also be relying on legitimate and important observations of what Peter Burger calls the "false sublation" of art and everyday life in "commodity aesthetics" -- that is, the way consumer culture lends an aesthetic sheen to every aspect of existence (54; see also, Mike Featherstone, "Postmodernism and the Aestheticization of Everyday Life"). She may be referring as well to recent attempts by reactionaries and fundamentalists to bring aesthetic activity under political control. None of these matters, however, undoes the uncertain, but nevertheless substantial autonomy of the

worlds of art, literature, etc.; nor do they affect the way those realms are institutionally demarcated. Indeed the latter example -- by dramatizing the always latent conflict between politicians and professional artists, critics, scholars, and administrators -- may even confirm the autonomy of artistic fields as a social (as opposed to theoretical or ideological) fact.

22. On the avant-gardist sublimation of art and everyday life, see Peter Burger's Theory of the Avant-Garde. I should note here that many would undoubtedly contest my suggestion that Cultural Studies' adherents have not come adequately to terms with the problems of being intellectuals and, more specifically, members of the academic world. In fact, Cultural Studies is undoubtedly one of the most hyper-self-conscious of intellectual movements and participants seem constantly involved in upbraiding one another about their need, and failure to date, to reconfigure the academic map and breach the walls of the ivory tower. But while these complaints show the Cultural Studies academics' obsession with the problem of being intellectual, their approaches to the dilemma are almost always in this moralistic vein and usually involve some version of breastbeating, political exhortation or seizure of the moral highground. In short, this self-consciousness remains almost entirely personal and therapeutic and rarely addresses the social arrangements that endow intellectuals with the privileges of theorizing and self-criticism.
23. See, for example, George Lipsitz's comments on the need -- in Cultural Studies, American Studies and attention to pop culture in general -- "to create a language capable of interrupting and opposing the dominant ideologies of the past" ("Learning to Listen" 621).
24. The best intellectual model for this project is Bourdieu's concept of the intellectual field and the fields of cultural production. See "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed"; "Flaubert's Point of View"; "The Historical Genesis of a Pure Aesthetic." For a differing but in some ways complementary attempt to take account of the "nonsynchronism" of the world of art in relation to modern society, see Burger, Theory 23-4 and passim.
25. Education levels rose steadily from the late 19th century through the first half of the 20th century. Among those in their late 50s in 1920, about 2.5% had graduated from high school; for those in their late 30s, 6% had, among 17 year olds, 16% had; but only 2.6 percent of 23 year olds had received bachelor's degrees. At this moment, school enrollment, though strong through junior high, was restricted at higher levels. The estimated median school

years completed for those 25 and older in 1920 was 8.2 years (Kaestle et al. 205). From the 1920s through the 1950s, however, education levels continued to rise dramatically. In 1920 only 32 percent of 14-17 year olds were in school, by 1950 more than 77 percent were (283). Between 1920 and 1930, college enrollments increased by over 100%, from 341,000 to 754,000, and the number of college graduates grew from a half-million to more than one million. Ph.D.s expanded from 532 in 1920 to 2,024 in 1930; attendance at public secondary schools went from 2.2 million in 1920 to 4.4 million in 1930. At the same time higher education moved away from purely humanistic scholarship toward more professional and vocational training. Charles Judd, writing in Recent Social Trends in 1931 concluded that "a college education is no longer thought of as a rare opportunity open only to students of distinctly intellectual tastes For a very large fragment of the population a college education is regarded as a natural sequel to secondary education." (Quoted in Marquis 103, 109; Rubin 31). See also Bledstein, passim.

On the expansion of literacy generally, see Kaestle et al. xviii, 25, 27, 182, 205, and passim; Tebbell, vol. III, 4. On the making of a middlebrow culture featuring appeals to commercially accessible self-improvement and genteel expression and of widespread interest in aesthetic forms previously limited to elite audiences, see Marquis 1-13, Rubin 1-33 and passim, Susman 105-121, 150-183, 184-210. On the dramatic expansion of magazine reading and publication from the Civil War through World War II, and especially after WWI, see Marquis 92; Tebbell and Zuckerman 66-68 and passim; Peterson 44, 59, 223-24, 260-61 and passim. On expansion of book publishing, see Tebbell generally; on "a great tidal wave of fiction" in book publishing that rolls from the Civil War through the '30s, see Tebbell, vol. II, pp. 30, 170-174; on the post-WWI era as an especially explosive moment in book publishing and literary activity, see Boyer 40, 72; Bradbury 73-157; Tebbell, vol. III, passim; Cowley, Cleaton, Churchill, Hoffman, Munson, and Wagner-Martin passim.

26. The quote describing Hammett's ancestry is from Johnson (13). Data on readership for pulp magazines is basically impressionistic and by no means should be taken as conclusive, but there is evidence at least to point generally in the direction of these claims. In part, they are supported by the very absence of information. Pulp magazines flourish at the moment when precise marketing and readership surveys are first being fashioned to determine the exact circulation and audiences for mass-market magazines (Marquis 94-97, 124, 126-27, 136-38; Karetzky xv-xxi; Theodore Peterson 115). Because advertisers regarded pulp readers in advance as working-class and lacking

disposable income and interest in consumer goods, however, those techniques were simply not applied to pulp magazines (Bold 7; Hersey 105; Karetzky 19, 44; Theodore Peterson 73). The limited advertising pulp magazines did feature complied with this belief and appeared to aim at a working-class audience without formal education (Bold 34; Hersey 18, 70, 77-83; Tebbell and Zuckerman 341). One survey that was conducted by a pulp publisher, Popular Publications, found that "their typical reader was a young, married man in a manual job who had limited resources and lived in an industrial town . . ." (Bold 7-8). During the Depression, Douglas Waples found that pulp magazines were the predominant reading material in working-class neighborhoods; that unemployed and unskilled labor favored pulps over all other reading material; and that pulps were read in good numbers by skilled laborers, shopkeepers, salesmen, clerks, and students who also read other material such as "technical, local, fraternal, or 'high-brow'" publications and slick magazines (Research Memorandum 152-54, 143, 150-51, 210; Karetzky 104).

Attempting to extrapolate a sense of audience from a career of editing pulp magazines and from what he describes as a lifetime of frantic efforts to understand reader characteristics via letters and sales, Harold Hersey argues against a typical class of readers (66, 2-3). He nevertheless intuitively describes a working-class audience lacking higher education and claims that college students and graduates "'would not be caught dead' with anything so lowbrow as a fiction sheet." Instead, he attributes pulp readership to the class of working people who just made it through "public school." His description of the pulp audience is an amusing fantasy on this theme (8, 9)

27. Hammett began high school in 1908 when he was 14 but was almost immediately forced to drop out because of family financial difficulties (Johnson 16). The vast majority of pulp writers would have similarly limited educational experiences (see Hersey, Gruber, Goulart, and Nolan's Black Mask Boys for typical pulp bios). Figures like Cain or Woolrich who had been to college or those, who like Chandler had good educations, were extremely rare. Hammett shared with these writers, however, a strong educational ambition. That may turn out to be an important factor in creating a small group of writers whose intense dissatisfaction was basic to the hard-boiled aesthetic. Signs that this sort of educational ambition were especially widespread during the inter-War period can be seen in the growth of middlebrow culture that Marquis, Susman, and, especially, Rubin describe. A more immediate example may occur, though, in Ruth Monroe's survey of the use of the Cleveland Public Library in the late '20s. Monroe found that the major reasons people offered for attending the library were, in

descending order: personal interest, to acquire culture, and to aid vocational pursuits. This finding was qualified in a way that lends credence to the idea that conflicting feelings about culture were created by the unequal distribution of education and of its benefits (Kaestle et al. point out that "education paid off better for those in the middle reaches of society than it did for laborers" {30}). Monroe found that appeals to advancement and prestige were much more effective in bringing white-collar workers than blue-collar ones into the library (Karetzky 40).

28. As in Dewey's The Public and Its Problems which placed the hope of democracy in the capacity of the popular press to create a unified people (Kaestle et al. 274, 199-200). See also, Karetzky 40-44, 106-119; Garrison passim. This belief easily shifted from celebration of mass media to grounds for attacks on popular culture and pulp magazines especially (Karetzky 119, Boyer 58, 155-161). That tension between the celebration of mass culture as supportive of public education and fear of its potential ability to debase and vulgarize remains a basic conflict through the paperback revolution (Davis 146-147, 178-243; Schick 50-112).
29. The phrase "self-culture" is Rubin's. She explicitly links the growing middle-class belief in the possibility for cultural self-improvement and advancement to the (often shallow) promises of consumer culture (1-33).
30. See also, p. 182 and passim. For less evaluative accounts of reader segregation that point mainly toward publishing marketing and do not refer to education, see Karetzky p. 18, Marquis p. 124, and Peterson pp. 56, 70-72. Kaestle et al.'s remarks occur specifically in the context of an attempt to account for the oft-remarked stratification among magazines during this period. The distribution is typically described as: little magazine, genteel or intellectual periodicals like The Atlantic, mass market slicks such as The Saturday Evening Post, and, finally, pulp magazines like Black Mask or Argosy (Bloomfield, Richard Peterson, Kaestle et al. 204-06). In this respect, Kaestle et al. recapitulate a fascination of the period they study. It was part of the Deweyan orientation of non-marketing reading research to be obsessed with why people read materials that apparently led neither to their own advancement or to the enrichment of public life. The career of Douglas Waples offers an especially good example.
31. See also, Christopher Wilson, "The Rhetoric of Consumption" and The Labor of Words, 1-16, 40-62. The latter especially makes evident how much the changes in magazine publishing are part of the realization of a "marketplace of words" with

"a fully national reach and modern structure" that also involves newspaper and book publishing (2).

32. On the reliance on advertising for consumer goods and on the editorial appeal to the rising "professional-managerial classes" in Munsey's specifically, see Ohmann, "Where Did Mass Culture Come From?" and []. On the establishment of Argosy as a pulp magazine and its targeting to a working-class audience, see Goulart, p. 3, Panek, pp. 109-110.
33. The ability to categorize second-class postage materials was a fairly arbitrary power of the Postmaster General and was wielded in a distinctly censorial fashion to control popular publishing. The slow death of Frank Tousey's major dime novel business from 1883 through 1913, spurred by outrage at the deliberately amoral and transgressive westerns he printed, offers the best example of this power in abuse and suggests one compelling reason for the success of the pulp magazine (Bold 6-7, Denning 160, Tebbell and Zuckerman 340).
34. For details of the publishing history of dime novels, story papers, pulp magazines, and (continuing the case) paperbacks, and for the argument as well as ample evidence that they can be construed as one "continuing phenomenon" of cheap publishing in American letters characterized by continuity in publishers, writers, literary forms and audiences (Tebbell, v.1, 240), see: Bold 2-10; Bonn, Undercover 1-77; Cook; Davis, Two-Bit Culture, 34-35, 50, 91-96, 134-135, 169-171, and passim; Denning; Hoppenstand 200; Theodore Peterson, 293-317; Quentin Reynolds; Sampson, v.1, 10-18; Schick; John Tebbell, A History of Book Publishing in the United States, vol. I, 240-251, vol. 2, 481-511, vol. 4, 347-409; Tebbell and Mary Ellen Zuckerman, The Magazine in America 196-198, 340-343.
35. Many of the most familiar aspects of hard-boiled fiction are neither the invention of Hammett and his contemporaries nor, as is usually imagined, simply the products of their realistic appraisal of a new urban environment, but an inheritance from a devalued literary past. An infatuation with "action" and distaste for "pure" thought; a focus on bodily strength and physical violence; obsession with criminal organizations and a murky underworld; affection for slang and crooks' jargon; the use of an urban environment and the less than respectable settings of bars, night clubs, and opium dens; the juxtaposition of poverty and naturalistic squalor with wealth and privilege; and the detective's recognizably lower- or working-class status -- all of these elements now so recognizable as part of the hard-boiled universe were in either prominent or regular use in American crime fiction from the last quarter of the nineteenth century. They can be traced as far back as the

cheap publishers' appropriation of French crime fiction of the Vidocq and Gaboriau variety and to the sensation novels of Sue, Reynolds and Lippard. See especially, Sampson, Yesterday's Faces, volumes one and four; and Leroy Panek, Probable Cause: Crime Fiction in America. See also, Robert Clurman, Nick Carter, Detective Fiction's Most Celebrated Detective; Michael L. Cook, Mystery, Detective, and Espionage Magazines, pp. xvii-xxiv and passim; Randolph J. Cox, "The Detective-Hero in the American Dime Novel"; Michael Denning, Mechanic Accents, pp. 118-148, 204-05; Ron Goulart, The Dime Detectives; Gary Hoppenstand, The Dime Novel Detectives; Mary Noel, Villains Galore: The Heyday of the Popular Story Weekly; Edmund Pearson, Dime Novels; or, Following an Old Trail in Popular Literature; Quentin Reynolds, The Fiction Factory or from Pulp Row to Quality Street, 65-77, 176-178.

36. Hersey gives a concrete and compelling account of the pulp editors' workdays, of their typical budgets, and of their constant struggles to maintain very slim profit margins (14-41).
37. During the Depression, pulp magazines often survived on profit margins as low as \$50 dollars per issue (Cook xxii).
38. In 1920 the Curtis and Crowell publishing houses, whose magazines included the Journal, the Post, Collier's, and Woman's Home Companion, shared 51% of the dollar volume of national advertising. During the '30s, although the Post was steadily slipping from market dominance, Curtis alone accounted for from one-fifth to one-third the amount. By 1947, 47% of all money spent on advertising in magazines went to 5 titles belonging to three publishers -- Curtis, Crowell, and Time Inc. Circulation was likewise concentrated. In 1927, the 25 circulation leaders sold 24% of all magazines. By the 1960s, the top 12 magazines held about 27% of all circulation (Theodore Peterson 84-85). By contrast, at the height of the pulp era in 1934, Black Mask and the 9 other magazines associated with it, among the most successful of the pulps, had a combined average circulation of 590,598 per month (Publisher's Statement of Circulation, Black Mask 18.4 {June 1935}: 105). Black Mask's individual circulation was 66,000 in 1925 and reached its peak in 1930 at 103,000. By 1935, it had slumped to 63,000 (Nolan 29).
39. For this argument, see Denning, pp 2-3, Bold xi-xvii, Garyn G. Roberts 1.
40. The figures are from 1935 and are drawn from a survey by A.A. Wyn, a pulp publisher (Theodore Peterson 309). See also, Sampson, v. 1, pp. 2-18. The figure of 125 magazines is meant to indicate a specific moment and doesn't reflect

the hundreds of magazines that start up and fail during the era.

41. In fact, as Kenneth Davis's history of the paperback industry makes clear, these phenomenon are in some ways closely linked. The corporate direction of the industry was made dramatically evident in 1960 when Pocket's stock was publicly offered and New American Library was taken over by the Times Mirror Company (276). That was also the year when the dollar sales for paperbacks surpassed those for hardbacks for the first time, symbolizing the success that made corporate investment in the industry lucrative. In good part that success depended on the acceptance of paperbacks in bookstores, which was largely the result of the growth of the trade publishers who aimed at a sophisticated and educated audience. (The pulp paperbacks, of course, were strictly newsstand and drugstore phenomenon.) Still more important to both the industry's legitimacy and economic fortunes may have been the growing use of trade paperbacks as college textbooks (265-69). As in the case of the slick magazines, the mass-market and upscale paperbacks are phenomena intimately linked to consumerism and mass education.
42. The importance of this transition can be seen in the style of the Bond novels themselves, which in early numbers like Casino Royale share much of the pulp world's hard-boiled attraction to grit. As Fleming's success grows and as the movie versions take off, the Bond stories and the Bond character gain in suavity and pretension.
43. See Bosworth; Chandler, Letters 278 and passim; Gardner, "Getting Away with Murder" and "Speed Dash"; Gruber; Hersey; John D. Macdonald, Intro., The Good Old Stuff.
44. See also, for example, Letters, pp. 5, 45, 77, 87.
45. According to William Nolan, Shaw hated the term pulp, feeling "it smacked of cheapness and vulgarity." And, indeed, Shaw's Introduction to the Hard-Boiled Omnibus suggests some of his unease and ambivalence. Speaking of beginning work, Shaw says, "We had not even a bowing acquaintance with the 'pulp.' Yet we always held that a good story is where you find it regardless of author-fame or medium of publication. It has been said that with proper materials available, a good mouse trap can be built anywhere" (v). By all accounts, Shaw's role as impresario of the hard-boiled movement had much to do with this discomfort, since he was determined to prove his magazine's quality and to do so by emphasizing the honesty and authenticity of its writing. For some telling remarks in this context that explicitly take issue with the slicks, see

Shaw's editorial in the December 1933 issue of Black Mask (16.10), p. 7.

46. An interesting recent article by Terence Whalen on Poe makes a similar point about the invention of the modern, ratiocinative detective tale. Placing Poe in the context both of "the commercial importance of information" and of a mass audience for literature, each of which expands significantly in the mid-part of the 19th century, Whalen stresses the detective's status as a holder of intellectual capital and says "Dupin is a polymath who has turned his back on the public and who harbors no desire to disseminate his knowledge" (387, 405).
47. See Panek pp. 49-57, 61, 75, 82, 90-93; Sampson, v. 2, 4-68, v.4, 34-122 and passim. Michael Denning cites an apposite commentary from the turn of the century: "Arthur Bartlett Maurice, writing in The Bookman in 1902, contrasted the detectives in fiction by 'social scale': 'Old Rafferty, Old Sleuth, Butts, and all of that ilk may be designated as the canaille, the proletarians; Poe's Dupin, Gaboriau's Lecoq and Pere Tiraclair, and Dr Doyle's Sherlock Holmes are the patricians; . . . between these extremes are the detectives who belong to the bourgeoisie of detection. . . . An excellent type of this middle class is the Mr. Gryce of the stories of Anna Katherine Green'" (Mechanic Accents 148).
48. The best argument along these lines -- which, it should be noted, indicts hard-boiled fiction along with the "classic" varieties -- is Franco Moretti's essay "Clues" in Signs Taken for Wonders.
49. Edmund Pearson argues that the English shilling shockers were inspired by and, in effect, descendants of American story papers and dime novels, borrowing their format, intended audience and narrative forms (72). Whether or not this genealogy is correct, there is no doubt that much cross-fertilization existed between the cheapest segment of American and British publishing in the latter part of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth centuries. See especially, Sampson, volumes one and four.
50. Although pulp mags from the Twenties look nothing like slicks like the Post, Collier's, or Ladies Home Journal, they do show a closer resemblance to slicks than the pulps of the Thirties in one crucial sense. Because advertisers assumed pulp readers had little disposable income, advertisements in pulp magazines in the Thirties are very scarce and almost solely for low-budget self-improvement schemes, job scams, and home remedies. In the Twenties, while total advertising is still paltry, it exceeds Thirties amounts, and pulp magazines do seem to have many more

advertisements for the brand-name goods and beauty products that, along with ads for more expensive consumer items, powered the slicks. Thus, it is possible that one of the effects of Depression cutbacks was to emphasize the commercial and social differences between the pulp and slick worlds.

51. Black Mask 6.20 (January 1, 1924), p.127. Introducing a Daly story in the same issue, the editor George Sutton notes that it exemplifies "the new fast-moving action we are trying to get" (49).
52. Black Mask, 6.4 (March 15, 1923), p. 127.
53. Some sense of it can be gained, however, through this not at all unrepresentative opening of an early Black Mask story: "When Mr. George Mitchell propped the News against the sugar bowl and dug into his matutinal grapefruit, he was unused to interruptions by persons answering classified advertisements; but on this particular morning, the maid casually remarked that there was someone at the door inquiring for a position as a chauffeur" (Goulart 25).

Chapter III

"A Screaming Disruption of Civil Life": Hard-boiled Fiction as Vanguard Genre?

[A]nyone who has perceived that the writings of this circle are not literature but something else -- demonstrations, watchwords, documents, bluffs, forgeries if you will, but at any rate not literature -- will also know, for the same reason, that the writings are concerned literally with experiences, not with theories and still less with phantasms.

-- Walter Benjamin, "Surrealism"

[B]etween my thought, such as it appears in what material people have been able to read that has my signature affixed to it, and me, which the true nature of my thought involves in something but precisely what I do not yet know, there is a world, an imperceptible world of phantasms, of hypothetical realizations, of wagers lost, and of lies

Forget about your genius, your talents, and the talents of everyone else. Keep reminding yourself that literature is one of the saddest roads that leads to everything.

-- André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism"

If I wrote a non-fiction book, it would probably turn out to be the autobiography of a split personality.

-- Raymond Chandler¹

At the nadir of his journey through Kenneth Millar's 1953 novel Meet Me at The Morgue, protagonist Howard Cross advances

upon the Neptune Hotel, a cheesy flophouse "in the limbo of side streets between the neons of the business section and the dark waterfront" (117). In search for a kidnapped child, Cross finds himself "at the center of the evil maze" and "for a nightmare instant . . . [he feels] infinitely tiny, a detached cell threading the veins of a giant, tormented body" (122, 119). This early novel, coming as it does before Millar assumed the more renowned nom de plume Ross Macdonald and before he had developed the post-noir aesthetic associated with that pseudonym, clearly works the Hammett-Chandler vein of hard-boiled fiction. The transposition of the gothic castle to scenes of urban poverty, for example, and the tracing of the hero's path to wisdom through abject immersion in the novel's lowest depths were features of hard-boiled writing from at least the mid-twenties. In its melancholic diction, however, and in the corresponding vision of the protagonist as world-weary canvasser of a hopelessly begrimed enchanted forest, Meet Me at the Morgue already shows Millar abstracting the late Chandler's often treacly romanticism into a simple distaste. In the process, the contradictory mixture of attraction and repulsion, of conflict and complicity that energizes the best hard-boiled writing begins to seep out of Millar's fiction. Even in a late Chandler novel like The Little Sister, for example -- with its cynical soliloquies on Hollywood and its splenetic ire at postwar consumerist vulgarity -- dives similar to the Neptune prompt in Philip

Marlowe a more complex response than Cross's anomie. Offering encounters with various colorful underworld denizens, those locations likewise provide opportunities for the questioning, confrontation and deal-making, the verbal and physical sparring that make up a kind of criminal sociality vital to the hard-boiled universe.² At the Neptune Hotel, by contrast, Howard Cross finds only the remnants of life. Entering the abandoned room of Art Lemp, a suspect in the kidnapping, Cross discovers the few pathetic remains of a subterranean existence, including Lemp's birth certificate and, inscribed upon it, the kidnapping plan:

He had been born Arthur George Lempke in Pittsburgh, Pa., on June 14, 1892, to Arthur Lempke, laborer, and his wife Trinity, housewife. As if to bracket his life in a single document, Lemp had written in pencil on the dog-eared official envelope containing his birth certificate:

Timetable -- post letter Valley Vista Ranch, Ridgecrest Fri. p.m. not too late -- Miner take boy to desert before mail (Sat.) delivered 9-9:30 a.m. -- train pulls out station 11 a.m. -- plane leaves Int. Airport 2:20 p.m. (121).

What Howard Cross discovers, in other words, is a clue, perhaps the most distinctive feature shared by all detective fiction. Like all such signs, this "document" is a vestige of

lost significance, what Geoffrey Hartman calls "a perverse kind of epiphany," and of necessity it bears with it some striking aesthetic effects: an intense compression and distortion of narrative time and a corresponding impression of shock that conflates the arbitrary with the overwhelmingly meaningful (Hartman 212, 215-16). Like the modernist metaphor, Lemp's birth certificate yokes together disparate images, disjunctive orders of time, different levels of reality: a birth to members of the nineteenth-century eastern, urban working class versus a kidnapping from the leisured wealth of the mid-twentieth-century California suburbs; names like Arthur and Trinity Lempke that juxtapose memory of immigration and ethnic and religious identity to the lumpen anonymity of Art Lemp; the "official" paper against the barely literate criminal scheming; above all, the unfinished narrative progress of the novel's protagonist interrupted by the hidden history of the crime that opens out when Cross discovers the envelope.

Hartman's bold critical phrase is an apt reminder of just how striking and unusual this aesthetic can seem and of the rare and extreme comparisons that come to mind when we seek to explain it. But if few analogues offer themselves readily, the argument sketched by the first two chapters of this dissertation suggests one revealing, if in itself extreme, juxtaposition. If, as I have suggested above, hard-boiled crime fiction can be usefully imagined as a kind of avant-

garde, than Art Lemp's inscribed birth certificate looks for all the world like a pop culture version of one of the vanguardist's favorite gestures, the papier collé. Not merely the clue itself, but the "bracket[ing]" effect of the clue's apparently arbitrary combination of texts echoes the "graft and citation," the "structure of juxtaposition" basic to collage (Perloff 76, 47, 44-79).³ And while the nature of fictional narrative and the habits of pop fiction make the comparison imprecise at best, the efforts Millar makes through syntax, abbreviation, and punctuation to emphasize both the strangeness and documentary quality of Lemp's itinerary by contrast makes the analogy seem less extreme. In Meet Me at the Morgue, the double clue Howard Cross discovers answers almost to the letter Picasso's description of collage: "This displaced object has entered a universe for which it was not made and where it retains, in a measure, its strangeness."⁴

In effect, Howard Cross's discovery emphasizes a basic and simple fact about the clue -- it is always a found object. But it is the way Art Lemp's birth certificate retains its strangeness and speaks not merely to a local mystery but to the collision of universes, the manner in which it forces history into the shallow landscape of southern California, that the "document" recalls the quality of "rupture" central to avant-garde aesthetics (Perloff 38 and passim). In this sense, Meet Me at the Morgue seems representative not only of detective stories in general but especially of the tradition

of hard-boiled fiction from which it emerges. Put simply, the foreignness of clues in most detective fiction is quickly made answerable to the mystery at hand; the clues are reintegrated into the narrative of a particular crime towards which they are eventually seen to point unequivocally. As in collage, however, Art Lemp's birth certificate drags with it pieces of a foreign context. In this way, it resembles the billboard advertisements for a gasoline and a motion picture that conceal Miles Archer's body in The Maltese Falcon, or the abandoned oil sump that is the murder scene in The Big Sleep, or, more broadly, the labor struggle that forms the background to Hammett's Red Harvest, the webs of urban corruption that are bound up in Chandler's family mysteries, and the extensive patterns of racism that structure the freewheeling local conflicts in Chester Himes's Harlem domestic novels. Hard-boiled fiction often distances itself from "classic" detective literature by invoking "mysteries" of intractable historical complexity that are anything but simply erased by the stories' unstable conclusions.

From this perspective, Art Lemp's birth certificate looks less like a clue in the limited, "classic" sense and more like a trouvaille in the sense championed by Surrealism, perhaps the last of the true avant-garde movements and the one almost exactly contemporaneous to the development of hard-boiled fiction. As a remnant of life, it resembles the most evocative of Surrealist images -- the empty quarters and

forgotten rooms of Paris, the discarded photographs and outdated machinery found in its flea markets, the marginalia and detritus of urban living that limns an imperfectly glimpsed, "immense rebus of desire" (Jameson, Form 99).⁵ Nor do the similarities stop here. Consider some of the central habits of Surrealism: its emphasis on the surprising, sometimes violent appearance of the marvelous to a receptive observer who travels the streets of a city by turns banal and charged with mystery. Like the claim by Breton to which these habits can be seen to correspond -- "the objective, more or less deliberate manifestations of my existence are merely the premises, within the limits of this existence, of an activity whose true extent is quite unknown to me" -- this list might as easily describe a hard-boiled crime story as any Surrealist text (Nadja 12).

Indeed, there are evident and deep resonances between the specular qualities that characterize most mass-marketed detective fiction and the oracular peripetia celebrated in Surrealist pronouncements like Breton's Nadja or Aragon's Le Paysan de Paris. The parallel is one drawn on by Breton himself when he refers Surrealism to the "system" of Chesterton and when he invokes the receptivity of "blasé detectives" to "the beautiful luminous signs . . . making their appearance" throughout the city.⁶ And the motives for such sympathy are obvious. Not only does crime fiction, in its deep involvement with criminal transgression, echo the

avant-gardes' populist, antiliterary imitations of plebianism and hooliganism.⁷ Detective stories are perhaps particularly attractive to Surrealism for their combination of action and mystery, for their combative accounts of the meeting between reason and unreason and for their reliance on those undecorous effusions Breton had already sought out in the Gothic novels of Matthew Lewis -- the dreamlike disruptions and melodramatic excesses, perhaps even the "bad taste" Breton claims to pursue assiduously (Manifestoes 16).

More striking still for our purposes is the fact that when Breton takes pains to point out that the analogy goes only so far, pausing in the "Second Manifesto" to "spit on Edgar Poe" for the invention of an "intellectually attractive police method," hard-boiled fiction seems in a sense to have anticipated him (127). For, as Chapter One argued, hard-boiled stories work in good measure by casting detective fiction's presuppositions about rationality and its relation to social order into doubt. In the process (and in anticipation of much post-War experimental fiction), they highlight the arbitrary, comically irrational aesthetic that, like Mallarmé's demon of analogy, inhabits the apparently rigorous formulas of "classic" detective literature. In a parallel to the "black humor" of Surrealist provocation, hard-boiled fiction thus liberates the absurdist core of the detective story while simultaneously casting into relief the truly mysterious character of its appeal to a lost fullness of

meaning.⁸ Hammett's 1924 story "The Tenth Clew," for example, mocks the intellectual pretensions of "classic" detective literature, and it does so in a way that echoes the methods and the humor of the Surrealists. In this story Hammett's Continental Op assembles, like any "classic" detective, a series of nine random, isolated clues to a disappearance. He decides, however, that the tenth clue is that the initial nine are meaningless, adding, as if in reference to the deposition of "classic" detective fiction itself: "Right or wrong, that's what we did. We stowed all those lovely clews away in a drawer, locked the drawer, and forgot them" (The Continental Op 25). The satiric list of clues that the Op compiles looks almost as much a parodic version of the Surrealist image as of the "classic" detective story. Its juxtapositions are as deliberately arbitrary and bizarre as any umbrella and sewing machine on a dissection table:

Number four: those two bullets with the crosses in their snoots.

Number five: the jewel case.

Number six: that bunch of yellow hair.

Number seven: the fact that the dead man's shoe and collar buttons were carried away (23).

The remainder of Hammett's story is dominated by the slug-fest and chase elements that are so prominent in hard-boiled fiction ("I threw my right fist at his face -- threw it

with every ounce of my 180 pounds behind it, re-enforced by the memory of every second I had spent in the water, and every throb of my battered head" {38}). And it is here finally that we can see just how distant pulp fiction remains from the early twentieth-century artistic vanguards and, paradoxically, the original force of the comparison. For while there can be little doubt that the thrillers' violent fantasies of self-definition express the most banal aspects of pulp desire, it is also true that in the hard-boiled world this apocalyptic quality often reaches an anarchic pitch reminiscent of Surrealism's own affection for violent transcendence. Indeed, it is in good measure precisely this violence that identifies Surrealism as a vanguard movement and that distinguishes from nineteenth-century romanticism Breton's very romantic determination to trace out the obscure patterns of meaning that vein the metropolis. That violence indicates the Surrealists' conflicted sense that, while mundane life is the true home of the marvelous, the divisions between the ordinary and the poetic typically are so entrenched and so implacably linked to the unjust order of the world that liberation demands extremity. It is a sensibility shared in some revealing ways by hard-boiled crime fiction. In a reversal of the template of "classic" detective fiction -- whose retrospective moments of violence exist so that the temporarily threatened patterns of everyday life can be restored with greater authority -- hard-boiled violence often

suggests something much like the famed sentiment that closes the first "Manifesto of Surrealism." "Existence is elsewhere," breached only by the sudden disruption of the ordinary (47).

That contrast between the torpid, repressive patterns of mundane life and the vitality encountered in their violent confusion is one message of Hammett's Flitcraft parable mentioned in Chapter One. It underlies as well the transition from painfully stilted rationality to breakneck pursuit in "The Tenth Clew" and is reinforced by the curious dualism shared by most hard-boiled protagonists -- the alternation between frenetic action and stoic immobility.⁹ The same sensibility is apparent in a dramatically magnified fashion in the recently published novel from which the title of this chapter has been drawn. Carl Hiassen's Native Tongue, written self-consciously in the hard-boiled genre, features the struggle of an unemployed newspaperman and a cohort of revolutionary environmentalists against the feudal power of an unscrupulous Florida real-estate developer. In the novel's concluding chapters, the protagonist, stymied on every other front, vanquishes the developer by terrorizing his Disney-like vacation park, exploding a series of fire bombs that cast the fantasy world and the media-benumbed tourists into anarchic confusion. The resulting gleeful nihilism -- the pleasure taken in a "screaming rupture of the civil order, a culture in terminal moral hemorrhage" -- fulfills a long-established

hard-boiled tradition (Hiassen 350).¹⁰ It is one perhaps not too distant from Breton's infamous claim that the simplest Surrealist act would be to fire a pistol blindly into a crowd (Manifestoes 125). What these visions of excess share is an intimation that such terror is the precipitate of an underlying violence, a concentrated expression of an aesthetic that glories in action and that is sedimented by antagonism.¹¹

To note such similarities, of course, is not necessarily to say much at all, and if they are to amount to something more than a facile and unilluminating comparison, we will need to consider some deeper reason for the parallels. One obvious and compelling answer already exists. That is to say that hard-boiled fiction fulfills the familiar pop role of omnivorous bottom feeder, that what vanguard movements initiate in moments of transgressive experiment, mass culture routinizes in commercial formula. Along the same lines, we might even say that in their attack on the institutions of legitimate art, the avant-garde movements detourn elements of popular aesthetics and mass culture so as to put them to antithetical ends. In Renato Poggioli's words, "[t]he psychological concept of adventure relates even the most extreme aesthetic of avant-gardism to manifestations and tendencies more traditional and moderate" (28). Or, in the strongest form of this argument, we could claim, as Peter Burger would suggest, that hard-boiled fiction's anarcho-

populism is an example of a tragic and ironic fact about the relation between mass culture and the avant-garde: that the former completes, without the original radical intention, the latter's foredoomed attempt to transform life by breaching the walls of nineteenth-century aesthetic culture. I doubt, though, that any of these arguments -- compelling and largely correct as they may be -- fully capture what is going on with hard-boiled fiction's own apparently antagonistic and vanguard sentiments. That is because, I think, these arguments rest on limited and partially inaccurate senses of the avant-garde and pop culture. More importantly, perhaps, like some of the grand concepts that motivate the sociological critiques of detective fiction discussed in Chapter One, such notions don't always make for good criticism. Since they implicitly address only the blithe falsity of mass culture, they fail to speak to the sense of anarchic rebellion that energizes stories like "The Tenth Claw" and Native Tongue or the feelings of conflict, frustration, and abjection that motivate the scene from Meet Me at the Morgue with which we began. Far more than a handful of formal parallels, it is in these sentiments that hard-boiled fiction comes closest to replicating the avant-garde's spirits of revolt.

All of these perspectives do share, though, one feature that seems entirely consistent with the history of hard-boiled crime fiction. For both Poggioli and Burger, as for critics like Andreas Huyssen, the crucial matter for understanding

avant-garde aesthetics, perhaps even the whole sweep of twentieth-century western art, is the constellation formed by the tense relations among mainstream bourgeois culture, vanguard art, and mass entertainment. Beyond any other considerations, what hard-boiled crime fiction shares certainly with avant-garde movements like Surrealism is that they both emerge at a moment when those relations may have approached near to their most intense and unstable. We need only recall Breton's accounts of picnicking in a movie theater or the profound affect on him of Parisian melodrama in order to get a sense of how important these matters were for Surrealism. Hard-boiled writing, too, I'd like to suggest, was deeply occupied both with the emergence of the cheap popular publishing that was essential to its creation and the making of the vast industry of middlebrow culture that accompanied its development. As with Surrealism, it was most successful when it could negotiate the fraught relations among these cultural domains in a manner that would guarantee it a unique and provocative, though unstable, position.

Consider as a further example, then, one of the most famous passages in Raymond Chandler's justly renowned letters. Like many of the collection, this letter features a complex mixture of resentment, self-aggrandizement, and tour-de-force critical speculation on popular aesthetics. It centers on Chandler's alleged basic motivations for writing pulp fiction and argues, in effect, against the idea implicit in some of

the arguments listed above: that popular writing relies on an ideology of adventure turned to challenging ends by the avant-garde. Speaking of the readers of pulp fiction, Chandler says: "[m]y theory was they just thought they cared nothing about anything but the action; that really, although they didn't know it, they cared very little about the action" [original emphasis]. Chandler goes on to suggest that his readers are truly interested in "the creation of emotion through dialogue and description," but what is most compelling about the letter is not so much this aim as the example Chandler uses to illustrate the principle:

[T]he things they remembered, that haunted them, were not for example that a man got killed, but that in the moment of his death he was trying to pick a paper clip up off the polished surface of a desk, and it kept slipping away from him, so that there was a look of strain on his face and his mouth was half open in a tormented grin, and the last thing in the world he thought about was death. He didn't even hear death knock on the door. That damn little paper clip kept slipping away from his fingers and he just wouldn't push it to the edge of the desk and catch it as it fell (115).

The striking feature of this passage, I think, is less the creation of emotion than, as with Millar's passage or Hammett's story of Flitcraft, the shock of juxtaposition -- the sense that the sudden access of extreme, theatrical violence is important mainly insofar as it reveals and heightens the trivial intractability of the everyday world. The implication is not merely that this material only appears in such a guise -- that the features of ordinary life appear to us with force solely under the shadow of violence -- but that Chandler himself ventures boldly in his attempt at combination. Moreover, in so removing thriller action from heroic contexts to the precincts of the everyday, Chandler emphasizes above all the tension involved in the juxtaposition, an uneasiness of fit that is paralleled in the awkward, antagonistic paths Philip Marlowe follows through Los Angeles. It is a matter that Chandler is perhaps more explicit about in another letter, one in which he addresses the problem that "the better you write a mystery, the more clearly you demonstrate that the mystery is not really worth writing." The result for his own work, Chandler suggests, is a structure of division, conflict and discomfiting juxtaposition reminiscent of the meeting between murder and the paper clip. "If a man writes as well as I do (let's face it honestly) he creates a schism between the melodramatic exaggeration of his story and the way he writes about it" (194).

Like the picaresque narrative of "grotesque position" itself, this schism is merely one example of a trope of division that runs powerfully throughout Chandler's letters and novels and whose culmination may be the avowal in the epigraph above of an authorial split personality. The important feature of the examples given here is that they each trace that sense of division to the ambition and quality of Chandler's writing itself. Such artistic virtues, superadded to the formulas of pulp fiction, leave the hard-boiled thriller itself divided between melodrama and serious fiction and, Chandler's examples suggest, extend the quality of division and conflict in a capillary fashion down through the most basic aspects of his novels.

Nowhere is this claim more clearly borne out than in the remarkable style Chandler seeks to defend in these letters and in the distinctive rhetorical features that lend it identity. As Chandler often remarked, "style" was the heart of his work. Both a clear derivation of Hammett's laconic diction and an idiosyncratic departure that in its turn would be much imitated, that style's melding of an austere first-person narration with flights of outlandishly poetic language was the most substantial achievement of the Marlowe stories. (As in the remarks on action above, Chandler frequently degraded mere plot by comparison.) It was also the aspect of his fiction that more than any other singled out Chandler as a literary

writer. It is important, then, that what remains striking about the garish similes that are the most characteristic feature of Chandler's writing -- the feature that by popular reckoning has come to seem the essence of the hard-boiled voice -- is not so much that they are literary but their uncomfortable negotiations with legitimate literary culture.¹² Here, for example, is the famed opening of Farewell, My Lovely in which Philip Marlowe watches Moose Malloy, a small-time gangster just released from jail, begin his search for an old flame. Malloy has been in prison for eight years and is unaware that his lover has begun a new life and that the neighborhood where he expects to find her has been changed by urban migration. His presence and hopes are utterly anomalous:

I stood outside the barber shop looking up at the jutting sign of a second floor dine and dice emporium called Florian's. A man was looking up at the sign too. He was looking up at the dusky windows with a sort of ecstatic fixity of expression, like a hunky immigrant catching his first sight of the Statue of Liberty. He was a big man but not more than six feet five inches tall and not wider than a beer truck. . . .

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 gray sports coat with white golf balls on it for buttons, a brown shirt, a yellow tie, pleated gray flannel slacks and alligator shoes with white explosions on the toes. From his outer breast pocket cascaded a show handkerchief of the same brilliant yellow as his tie. There were a couple of colored feathers tucked into the band of his hat, but he didn't really need them. Even on Central Avenue, not the quietest street in the world, he looked about as inconspicuous as a tarantula on a slice of angel food (3).

As any number of critics have pointed out, the simile that closes this passage is Chandler's characteristic rhetorical gesture. But whether as here the trope involves comparing a character to a "hunky immigrant," a beer truck, and a tarantula on angel food cake or -- as in The Big Sleep -- the comparison of the texture and odor of orchids to "the flesh of men . . . [and] the rotten sweetness of a prostitute," the crucial feature of these figures is the extremity of juxtaposition, their ultra-catachresis (7). Just as with the anecdote of the paper clip, these similes draw their force and humor from the impression of a thing or phrase drastically misplaced. At a rhetorical level, they enact the comedy that

Moose Malloy performs through his ridiculous clothes, his absurd size, and his search for a lost lover in a "mixed" part of town where it is highly unlikely she will be found. Like the Quarres in Hammett's "House in Turk Street," everything about Moose Malloy is inappropriate, and everything that follows in the course of the novel is set in motion by the trouble begun through his displacement. Thus, he arrives in the narrative as if he himself were a trouvaille. (Interestingly, this story begins much like Hammett's: the detective-protagonist stumbles upon the problematic character while looking for an unrelated missing person.) He comes like Art Lemp in pursuit of a lost past, dragging an unsuitable history into the present, and releasing by his very incongruous presence the violence and energy that mobilizes all of the other characters. That same energy is basic to Chandler's similes. Like Moose Malloy they work through exaggeration and displacement. Rather than literature per se, they seem a flamboyant sham of the "literary," and they invoke art through a strategy of campy overemphasis. As if simultaneously to draw attention to and compensate for the schism Chandler places at the very heart of his work, they suggest both "melodramatic exaggeration" and a wry attachment to a knowing perspective at odds with melodrama.¹³

If, then, figures like the tarantula on the angel food and orchids with the flesh of men pull us again toward a comparison with Surrealism, that is because in their extremity

they seem to pass beyond the provocative aestheticism of much modernist metaphor and towards the "convulsive . . . , forcible and arbitrary interconnection of two realities" that is the goal of the Surrealist image (Jameson, Form 96-97).¹⁴ And, as with the Surrealist image, they are accompanied therefore by an implicit transgressive intent that mobilizes the literary dimensions of poetic language against the habits of Literature. In their embarrassingly florid poetry, Chandler's figures invoke an aestheticized anti-aestheticism, an attack on the appropriateness of literary discourse and its most potent Romantic values: the organic unity of form and content, the redemption and beautification of the world, the intensification of perception. (That determination is only emphasized by Chandler's dependence on simile as opposed to metaphor. The decision -- in opposition to Mallarmé and many of his modernist and Surrealist successors -- not to cancel the word "like" from the dictionary but to rely heavily on explicit comparison stresses the poeticizing activity, or poetasting, of the narrating observer.) Thus, in Franco Moretti's description, these figures involve "the ostentatious deployment of prefabricated and superfluous 'literary effects'" (296, n. 26). It is no doubt for much that reason that hard-boiled diction has been so open to appropriation by postmodernist writers. With his similes Chandler is, like Breton, already a champion of bad taste, a determined littérateur.

Decrying these kitschy effects, Moretti perceptively links the superfluous quality of Chandler's similes to a baldly allegorical anecdote related toward the tail end of Farewell, My Lovely. Visiting Lieutenant Randall of the L.A. police in chapter 31, Philip Marlowe notices a "shiny black bug with a pink head and pink spots on it crawl[ing] slowly along the polished top of Randall's desk . . ." (127). Completing the interview some pages later, Marlowe mystifies Randall with the observation that the bug had crawled "eighteen floors above ground" to no apparent purpose.¹⁵ He then carefully wraps the bug in his handkerchief and carries it back to ground level.

I rode the express elevator down to the Spring Street entrance and walked out on the front porch of City Hall and down some steps and over to the flower beds. I put the pink bug down carefully behind a bush.

I wondered, in the taxi going home, how long it would take him to make the Homicide Bureau again (130-131).

The anecdote is confusing -- and not just to Lieutenant Randall -- because it is deliberately held out as meaningful and significant, and it is clearly informed by the over-arching sentimental import that suffuses Chandler's novels. Yet, at the same time, the specific purpose and presumably revealing moral of the story are left wilfully obscure. As a

result, the tale of the pink bug, like Chandler's similes themselves, seems both important and gratuitously tacked on, central to the story and merely decorative. The example is useful, I think, because it illustrates how basic this kitschy aesthetic is to Chandler's novels and the way it may move beyond the garish similes to appear in various aspects of the writing. The parallel anecdote of the Rembrandt calendar in Farewell is another good example, and the story of murder and the paper clip partakes of the same logic, or anti-logic.¹⁶ For, as Chandler only half-plausibly claims, the tale of the paper clip is the kind of material his pulp editors would strike out as unessential, divisible from the "action" of the story (Letters 115). While his claim that such material wouldn't make it past the editors seems overstated, the sense of a hyperbolic, misplaced quality that the grumbling is meant to convey is dead accurate. Chandler's similes and little allegorical tales themselves rest like tarantulas on the angels food edifice of the mystery story. In the very same move with which they suggest the hegemony of a hyper-stylized, kitschy aesthetic in all areas of Chandler's writing, they demonstrate resoundingly the ever-superfluous character of the "aesthetic" itself in hard-boiled fiction. Rendered as "style," such aesthetic values are crucial to individualizing Chandler's work and to removing it from the mystery story that deserves not to be written. By the same token they seem something incongruous, unnecessary, and -- as with Marlowe's

use of the bug against Randall -- a gratuitous rhetorical violence aimed at confusion.

In short, as a kind of anti-classicist effluvia, the anecdote of the bug and Chandler's extravagant figures are grotesche in the meaning of that word that became a foundation for our notions of the grotesque: they are a type of "marginal drollery" that nevertheless cannot be readily disentangled from the central import of the meaning they are intended to adorn (Harpham 23-47, 82). As such, moreover, they partake of that "liminal," indeterminate status that both Geoffrey Galt Harpham and Peter Stallybras and Allon White define as the very essence of the grotesque. In Harpham's terms, they involve "a species of confusion," a disturbance of categories that inevitably casts the meaning and stability of the categories themselves into question (xv). Here we can make the relation between Moose Malloy and the language that describes him explicit. As campy, overblown, and unnecessary as Chandler's style can seem, it is internally related to the characterization of Malloy precisely because it rings with the unauthentic. Both language and character here are grotesque for being out-of-place, indeterminate, disturbingly connected to incommensurate orders of reality. Most pressingly, the excesses of Chandler's rhetoric invoke the grotesque insofar as the superfluous aspect of that style dramatizes the schism that is, in this light at least, the focus of his novels:

"[it] appears to us to occupy a margin between 'art' and something 'outside of' or 'beyond' art" (Harpham xxii).

Much the same thing could be said of Hammett's tale of Flitcraft, Millar's collage effect, and perhaps even of the quasi-transcendental violence that ends Native Tongue. To various degrees these all seem, as in Picasso's collage, displaced objects in a universe for which they were not made. Indeed, to the extent that it can be identified, that sense of inappropriateness appears as the tenor of these various devices. Flitcraft, a runaway husband who controls his fear of disorder by reestablishing a suburban existence with a new family, is a man who both does and does not belong where he has been found. The same is true of Art Lemp. He is himself a remainder from the hard-boiled landscape of corrupt urban machine politics, and his leavings constitute a catalog of incongruous objects reminiscent of the collection in "The Tenth Clew" -- in addition to the birth certificate, "a timetable for a kidnapping packed with a sentimental pair of baby boots, . . . [and] a vapid love-poem on the flyleaf of a corrupt book" (122). And Native Tongue concludes with the chaotic immolation of a landscape dedicated to carefully planned leisure. Like Moose Malloy, all of these stories depend on a melodramatic impression of the inappropriate. In fact, it might be said of hard-boiled fiction as a genre that it takes the isolated incidents of incongruity basic to the pastoral form of "classic" detective fiction and so multiplies

them that the hard-boiled world becomes a universe of the homeless and out-of-place.

But it is specifically as aesthetic devices that these aspects of Hammett, Millar, and Hiassen's fiction seem most out of keeping. Each courts the charge of going too far for genre fiction, of surpassing the bounds of believability or expectation. And inasmuch as they are unnecessary additions, aesthetic extras for the crime story, they make it difficult for us both to determine their relevance to their own particular narratives, and moreover, to situate these stories as art or trash fiction. Here, of course, is the dilemma of Cultural Studies in small. To take hard-boiled fiction and decisively consign it either to irremediable commodity or to legitimate literature seems both to do a kind of violence to the material and to rob it of its own particular violence. That is because, I have been trying to suggest, hard-boiled fiction is a body of writing that seeks often to disturb not just through the narration of shocking events, but by provoking a sense of displacement and uncertainty about its own aesthetic or cultural status. By Harpham's definition the grotesque is grotesque because it can be seen simultaneously either "as a limit to the field of art" or "as a figure for a total art that recognizes its own incongruities and paradoxes (xxii)." It is in this sense as well, I think, that we can conceivably regard Chandler's style, Hammett's anecdotes and

Millar's collage as part of an avant-garde program: by their very displaced position they pose a challenge to the status and definition of literature.¹⁷

2

By this point it should be obvious that the focal point of my argument is in itself a proposition that many would regard as extreme. The more apparently sensible assumption about pulp fiction is that it is a cheerfully unconscious genre of popular writing that is made to bear a load of pretentious baggage only upon being taken up by marginal intellectuals desperate for meaning and pleasure somewhere outside the already staked territories of canonical art. Against that assumption I have been suggesting that from the first, hard-boiled writing has been inhabited by a species of vanguardism and that in good measure the vital force informing its idiosyncratic aesthetic has been a determined antagonism to the authority and status of legitimate culture. Of course, these two claims are not necessarily exclusive. It is possible that marginal intellectuals are drawn to marginal art precisely because it thematizes cultural inadequacy. It may even do so in ways that under a certain attention reveal a type of cultural or aesthetic radicalism. To entertain such possibilities, however, is to push the idea of the avant-garde in some unexpected directions.

Those possibilities may appear more clearly if we speak not of mass cult, or trash, or pulp fiction, but, as the Germans do, of trivialliteratur (Calinescu 233). That formulation captures the intense involvement that pop culture may show, as in Chandler's paper clip anecdote, with the neglected materials of ordinary life. It renders nicely as well the ephemeral quality of the products of mass culture -- the tactile and spiritual impression of weightlessness that can either achieve a nearly ecstatic appeal or lend solemn credence to Burger's intuition that pop fiction savages the boundaries between art and life. This unsteady ground is the territory of Chandler's uniquely pulp account of becoming a writer: "[w]andering up and down the Pacific Coast in an automobile, I began to read pulp magazines, because they were cheap enough to throw away." But, in the etymological sense -- where trivia derives from the Latin for crossroads -- trivialliteratur might also suggest those melodramatic habits of detective fiction apparent in Millar's collage. Here, in moments of crisis, the features of mundane life are suddenly revealed to inhabit the heart of structures that stretch beyond ordinary ken and the banal matters of existence stand at the crucial meeting-place of historic forces. In this sense, the throwaway materials of pulp fiction might also be said to wait at the crossroads of our cultural institutions and to contain the possibility -- released under the pressure of a transvaluation of values -- of casting those institutions

into dramatic relief. Chandler's remarks about becoming a pulp writer, for example, continue:

I never had any taste at any time for the kind of thing which is known as women's magazines. This was in the great days of Black Mask (if I may call them great days) and it struck me that some of the writing was pretty forceful and honest, even though it had its crude aspect. I decided that this might be a good way to try to learn to write fiction and get paid a small amount of money at the same time (Letters 236).

As David Glover and Cora Kaplan point out in their essay "Guns in the House of Culture," this brief autobiography narrates an attempt to delineate a purely masculine pop world, one free of interference from those women's magazines (presumably "slicks" like Ladies' Home Journal or Colliers) that numerically were a vastly more significant popular form in American pre-War culture than Chandler's pulp magazines (213-215). Bound up in that misogyny, however, is an attempt to mobilize the "honest, even . . . crude" energies of pulp writing against cultural forces Chandler regards as antagonistic. In his own mind, the regressive sexual politics that are so evident and unattractive to readers today are indistinguishable from and even less important than his distaste for middlebrow art. Thus, Chandler's scorn can pass

easily from "women's magazines" to "serious novels" and onwards: "the problem of what is significant literature I leave to fat bores like Edmund Wilson" (238). In all cases, not just the virility of masculine pop culture but its very triviality serve as a critical counterbalance to the weight of cultural authority. The vision of a commercialized, pointedly inauthentic, throwaway art -- a matter to which, as Chandler intimates, the whole notion of greatness seems immediately foreign ("if I may speak of greatness") -- becomes here a rebuke to the "pretentiousness" of "significant literature."

From its earliest days, hard-boiled crime writing is grounded in this type of cultural antagonism. It continually invokes a sense of conflict that may reach an apotheosis in Chandler's confusing, rhetorically aggressive style and -- outside the fiction -- in Chandler's many vicious attacks on figureheads of literary status.¹⁸ But as Race Williams's remarks about long-winded professors (noted in Chapter One) suggest, the very making of hard-boiled fiction is inseparable from conflicts over the meaning and value of culture, intellect, and education. Thus, when Carroll John Daly has his trigger-happy hero defend vigilantism by saying "[i]t may not be good morals or good ethics but it's good common sense," that attitude is in good measure a refusal of the "affectation of gentility" that, in Chandler's description, characterized the golden-age detectives (Letters 297).¹⁹ That, as William

Nolan puts it, "Daly invariably associated toughness with illiteracy" should be traced, beyond artistic inability, to a similar antagonism (Black Mask Boys 36).

As Chapter Two suggested, however, this antagonism is best understood when it is situated in a context wider than a disinterested struggle over genre and narrower than a broad anti-intellectualism. Rather, on the level of fictional rhetoric, Race Williams's aggressiveness can be said to address an opposition built into the pulp publishing from which hard-boiled fiction emerges. In this context, the private-eye's refusal of morals, ethics, gentility, and literacy is simultaneously an expression of the antagonism between the pulp magazines and the "slicks" where much of "classic" detective fiction finds its natural home. Daly's hard-boiled hero is born as a rebuke to the middle-class, middlebrow values enshrined in those magazines. And, whether celebratory or dismissive, many commentators on the heroism of the private-eye miss how deeply that petty antagonism extend through the pulp world and how basic it is to the hard-boiled attitude (probably because a later romantic like Chandler works hard to obscure this antagonism even as his very style hones it to a nasty edge). Against the benevolent intellectualism of the "classic" detective, then, Daly's contemporary Dashiell Hammett emphasizes the astonishingly global aggressiveness of the hard-boiled hero:

Your private detective does not want to be an erudite solver of riddles in the Sherlock Holmes manner; he wants to be a hard and shifty fellow, able to take care of himself in any situation, able to get the best of anybody he comes in contact with, whether criminal, innocent by-stander or client (Goulart vi).

To note the similarity between Daly and Hammett, however, is not by any means to make them the same writer, and if we sense in Hammett's comments a self-consciousness -- a level of reflexive critical analysis evident in his epigrammatic delineation of genre -- that is missing from Daly's remarks, I don't think we're mistaken. That impression reflects both Hammett's theoretical concept of the distinction between hard-boiled and "classic" detective fiction and, more importantly, the very readiness to explain and use this definition in a manner that includes and surpasses Daly's sense of antagonism. The pulp reader needs no, indeed rarely tolerates such, explanations and theories. As Hammett's distinction itself should indicate, erudition of this type is for other worlds, and the important distinctions must of necessity be drawn -- as with Daly's disavowal of ethics and morals -- in passing in the narrative. Such are the subtleties of pulp fiction. As his vocabulary alone might suggest, however, Hammett's contrast between the "erudite solver of riddles" and the "hard and shifty fellow" is aimed at a different audience. In this

sense, they are like the "Memoirs of a Private Detective" Hammett published in Smart Set in 1923. Those remarks bring an air of populist, blue-collar experience and skepticism to Smart Set's cynical chic and use that exotic perspective to waylay the familiar enemies of the magazine: earnest moralism, piety, anti-vice campaigners, and Prohibition.²⁰ Hammett's delineation of the hard-boiled protagonist likewise uses the energy and antagonism apparent in Daly to vilify the middlebrow habits of golden-age detective fiction for a purpose and an audience that extends far beyond Daly's pulp horizons.²¹

Hammett's remarks, in other words, are much like Chandler's more elaborate critical theories. The work of both writers is firmly rooted in the traditional values of thriller action that descend from dime novels to pulp magazines. For both, those values and the history of distaste accompanying them become a form of literary inheritance, a type of pulp chic. Perhaps as a result, they frequently raise to new levels of explicitness the emphasis on the picaresque hero's violent, emphatically physical, anti-ratiocinative journeys through a criminal underworld. At the same time, however, the very conscious manner in which these writers delineate and explain such traits suggests a remove from the world where those habits are most effective. As Chandler often bemoaned, his ruminations on detective fiction and literature suffered deep internal contradictions precisely because of this hybrid

status and, more specifically, because of a glaring lack of necessity that it inevitably brought to the surface. Of his influential and oft-celebrated essay "The Simple Art of Murder," for example, Chandler said:

I had no desire to write it I think most critical writing is drivel and half of it is dishonest . . . and there is no point in my adding to it. It is a short cut to oblivion anyway. Thinking in terms of ideas destroys the power to think in terms of emotions and sensations. I suppose, like other people, I have at times a futile urge to explain to whoever will listen why it is that the whole apparatus of intellectualism bores me. But you have to use the apparatus of intellectualism to do it. Which is the bunk (Letters 35).

To his editor, Chandler added that the essay was a "frustrated attempt to be brilliant about nothing," and the formulation captures nicely the sense of paradox and impossibility that his own critical efforts forced upon Chandler (36). Detective fiction, as Chandler imagined it, did not demand and even resisted the kind of criticism he brought to bear. And that lack of necessity, as well as Chandler's frequently repeated desire to make crime novels a part of legitimate literary culture, indicates decisively that

the audience for this critical writing was not the pulp world from which Chandler drew the energy to lambast cultural authority and to which he asserted ultimate loyalty, but precisely the precincts of "serious literature" that he pretended to scorn. For Chandler, then, the "apparatus of intellectualism" presented a dangerously infectious and personal form of "bunk." His anguished, lifelong attraction to and denunciation of this "loathsome language" continually presented the disquieting possibility that the con was internal and inescapable (36). His critical writing, in other words, casts in a far less sanguine perspective, the very ventriloquism -- the capacity to speak the hard-boiled "vernacular" -- that was the foundation for Chandler's positive sense of himself as an artist.²² It raised that same melancholic intimation that shadowed James M. Cain's analogous sense of his work: "The only way I can keep on the track at all . . . is to pretend to be someone else -- to put it in dialect and thus get it told. If I try to do it in my own language I find I have none" (Hoopes 180).

We need only compare the tenor of these remarks to the brash rhetorical authority of a writer like Carroll John Daly in order to realize how profoundly this sense of an ambivalent ventriloquism affected the development of the hard-boiled aesthetic. For Daly, it is ultimately Race Williams's guns themselves that talk -- as in "[b]oth my guns had spoken . . . and, so help me God, but a single hole appeared in Lutz's

forehead" (Nolan, Black Mask Boys 39). They need do so only once with their customary deadly accuracy for Williams's enemies and the "long-winded professors" to be silenced; for the gunplay that settles every plot indicates a kind of pure physical violence that overcomes the effete involutions of thought. Much the same thing is implicit in Williams's remark, repeated often in numerous variations, that "[w]ith me the thought is the act" (Snarl 12). Daly's stories constantly seek to reduce all action to this level of immediacy and intensity, cutting a single broad swath through the confusions of false sophistication. No Derridean education is necessary to recognize the almost metaphysical presence of popular voice that Williams's guns are meant to signify. It stands in stark contrast to the feelings of ventriloquism, frivolous experiment, and shaky authenticity that plague Chandler and Cain's desire to speak the vernacular.²³

For all the attraction writers like Chandler and Cain might feel, then, to Daly's "forceful and honest" kind of populist violence, the anguish apparent in their remarks indicates a more complicated sense of the antagonisms to which the popular voice is given. And while the maudlin admissions of futility and frustration are perhaps particularly resonant of Chandler and Cain, that sense of complication is already suggested, I think, by Hammett's appeal to the "hard and shifty fellow" who can take advantage of every situation. The comments of all three writers suggest an awareness not only of

the "crude" virtues of pulp fiction's populist rhetoric, but also of the way those virtues might be put to use in a calculated literary manner. As Chandler would eventually phrase it: "All I wanted when I began was to play with a fascinating new language, and trying, without anybody noticing it, to see what it would do as a means of expression which might remain on the level of unintellectual thinking and yet acquire the power to say things which are usually only said with a literary air" (sic) (Letters 43).

All of the tensions that do so much to inspire and derail hard-boiled writing operate in this paradoxical and, perhaps, faintly disingenuous claim. Submerged beneath Chandler's allegiance to artistic experiment and populist spirit, on the one hand, lies a far less attractive possibility of manipulation. As with Philip Marlowe's own rhetorical aggression, Chandler's avowal of secret intention and pleasure raises the same specter of sham and confusion that haunts the writer's thoughts about "The Simple Art of Murder." Here, as in Marlowe's case, Chandler's rhetoric draws on an almost folkloric impression of a wily popular voice that conceals cleverness beneath a mask of rude manners. That same trickery, however, leaves open the nagging possibility that Chandler has been cleverer than even he admits or knows. The sneaking admissions to a dabbling play can make his alliance with the "vernacular" seem a shallow form of amusement and self-advancement rather than the deep ethical commitment he

often pretends. Seen from this perspective, Chandler's letter could serve well as mass-culture's emblematic confession -- a recognition that its trumpeting of popular voice is less an act of discovery than, at best, a decadent and self-defeating form of creation and, at worst, a covert form of oppression. As Harpham would have it, this is an art whose grotesquerie forces an awareness of its "incongruities and paradoxes." It recognizes in those inconsistencies, however, marks only of failure or bad faith.

Against that suggestion, however, I think Chandler's remarks hold out another, more interesting option. In the appeal to "a fascinating new language," there lies something more than the colonizer's fervent appraisal of vulnerable territory. Like the previous implication, this more optimistic view refers to a use of populism, but one that, beyond manipulation from above, includes the expansive sense of freedom and communication that redeems the opposed intimations of futility and fraudulence. This is the feeling of possibility and development that attaches to Chandler's hope of "acquiring the power to say things which are usually only said with a literary air." With that remark Chandler takes up like Race Williams the contemporary problems of intellect and education, of Culture and its authority. Beyond Williams's brash refusal, though, Chandler's suggestion that this power might be acquired "without anybody noticing" includes the possibility of a subtle reordering of affairs, a

slippery undermining of literary hegemony via pop culture's "unintellectual thinking." To borrow Glover and Kaplan's phrase, Chandler suggests that the "guns" of pulp fiction might enter the "house of culture" through the back door, and in doing so might secretly undermine the familiar arrangement of rooms. Here the paradoxes of the grotesque offer not merely a sign of failure; their very strangeness and displacement bear the potential for a utopian recognition.

Looking back from the triumph of postmodernism, this seems a prophetic claim, one of at least equal penetration to the awareness of mass cult's false populism. It is, in any case, this latter hope that writers like Cain, Chandler, and Hammett appear to express in their desire to be themselves like their protagonists -- hard and shifty, capable of taking advantage. That aim suggests more than either resentment or a lack of naiveté about the difficulties of populism. It includes beyond those sentiments an extensive sense of the literary field, of the writers' own uncertain status in it, and of the way that this unusual position might nevertheless be turned to radical advantage. As with Hammett's Smart Set memoirs, it is a perspective that surpasses the comparatively cloistered antagonism of Daly or Harold Hersey, takes in that antagonism, and exploits it as a form of literary capital. This is perhaps what Chandler alludes to with the almost oxymoronic phrase "studied insult" (Letters 31). Like his more explicit comments on the "vernacular," the remark

suggests a paradoxically learned use of cultural populism, one that, while holding out the possibility of a new anti-literary power of expression, would lead inevitably to the contradictions implicit in the forced conjuncture of the "literary" and "unintellectual thinking."

One way to describe what writers like Hammett, Chandler, and Cain discover, then, would be as an extension of the awareness that informs Harold Hersey and Carroll John Daly's impudence. Hersey and Daly and the vast majority of their confreres direct their hostility and the "crude" virtues of pulp writing against an immediate enemy -- the genteel aspirations of "slick" magazines or, in slightly wider focus, the disdain of cultural authority. Writers like Hammett, Cain, and Chandler, however, realize beyond that antagonism a structural parallel in the field of literature that manages to suggest both enormous possibility and limiting confinement. Quite simply, the strict hierarchies of publishing that define the literary field between the Wars and in the immediate post-War era create some unlikely coincidences. Among them is a striking similarity between the pulp antagonism to middlebrow culture and the disdain modernist and bohemian intellectuals express for the nightmare of bourgeois civilization in the United States. For the writer who recognized it, this parallel offered a chance to leapfrog directly from vulgar entertainment to highbrow authority. Such is the import of

Chandler's claim that "I am at home with the avant garde magazines and with the rough tough vernacular. The company I really cannot get along with is the pseudo-literate pretentiousness of, let us say, the Saturday Review of Literature" (Letters 200).²⁴ The same conjuncture is already apparent, though, in Hammett's tale of Flitcraft. The image of "beams falling" combines the pulp vision of cleansing, anarchic violence with a Menckonian disdain for the booboisie.

As many critics have noted, this episode cuts to the heart of Hammett's aesthetic. That is the case, though, not only because it reveals Hammett's exploitation of the fictive qualities of the ordinary world or his proto-existential sense of the randomness of life, but because it allows us to find one source for those qualities in the equally outlandish juxtapositions of Hammett's own literary career. In this light, the tale of Flitcraft's bizarre journey can be read not only as an illustration of post-World War I American life, but as a parable of the mixed prospects of freedom and confinement that pulp writers could discover in the literary marketplace. It suggests both the enormous possibilities of Hammett's journey from anonymity to fame and the sense of limits that undercut that achievement. Indeed, if Flitcraft is a man cast suddenly and violently from one world into another -- who discovers that nevertheless this new existence looks strangely identical to the one that precedes it -- his story can serve well as a cautionary tale for ambitious pulp writers like

Hammett himself. Hammett's first three novels for Knopf are reprints and reconstructions of his pulp stories, and, in effect, he finds himself doing in hardback much the same thing as he was doing when he wrote for Black Mask. The main difference is that now he works in a new context, for new readers and reviewers with new expectations, that, ironically, may do as much to undermine the certainty and substantiality of the activity as to endow it with new significance. The story of Flitcraft, with its eery atmosphere of repetition, captures the quality of ceaseless reproduction that pop culture and mass consumer economy make a regular part of modern existence. More directly, though, it parallels the strange combination of mobility and stasis that defines Hammett's career.

Given this experience, it should come as no surprise that Hammett's stories depend on a well-developed sense of the fictive structures that organize ordinary existence. That sensibility aptly expresses the egalitarian and liberatory possibilities of literature. It parallels the way that America's rapid post- World War I expansion of education and publishing was actually spreading an awareness of culture through all parts of society. And Hammett's many tales of flight -- of children fleeing parents, spouses abandoning marriage, people leaving homes and jobs, all by literally conjuring up new existences -- might even refer distantly to the feelings of freedom and mobility that the growth in

education may have encouraged. At the same time, however, the tale of Flitcraft, like the story of the Quarres, for example, suggests the ultimate insubstantiality of our ordinary stories. By contrast with many of the later writers who will share Hammett's sense of the fictive quality of life, then, this awareness brings little sense of liberation or play to Hammett's novels. Rather, when Sam Spade tells Brigid the Flitcraft anecdote, it is as a warning that the past cannot be dispensed with as readily as she might imagine, that it follows one from place to place, and, most importantly, that the lies and tales we may invent to jettison history ironically recreate it. As a tale of Hammett's own career, the anecdote is unfortunately prophetic. Like the early distinction Hammett draws between "erudite" and "hard and shifty" detectives, the story itself displays both Hammett's pulp credentials and populist background and the educated sensibility that will make him a worthy discovery for Blanche Knopf. At the same time it suggests, along with Hammett's awesome cultural mobility, the limited capital upon which that movement is based and the circumscribed range of possibilities it allows. Finally, Hammett resembles not only Flitcraft but Brigid herself; after publishing five short novels in five years with Knopf, Hammett gives up writing. As in Brigid's case, it is as though a feverish spate of story-telling culminates in the sudden realization that the stories are at

an end and anyway can no longer provide the hope of movement.

What the Flitcraft anecdote suggests, then, is that Hammett, as Chandler would many years later, recognized early on both the explosive possibilities in the combination of high art and low fiction and an awareness of the limiting divisions of literary life that in themselves did much to make those combinations seem daring. Both writers shared, though they came at it from a different direction, the vanguardists' desire to outflank middlebrow culture. At the same time they seemed to know that such a maneuver was doomed by the very parallels that seemed to encourage it. If pulp fiction shared the distaste for middleclass values and genteel culture that was such an important part of modernist literary experiment, their own juxtaposition promised to reveal not only that similarity but the huge differences between them. Here, from 1928, for example, is a section from one of Hammett's earliest letters to Knopf in which Hammett discusses his first novel, Red Harvest.

I'm one of the few -- if there are anymore -- people moderately literate who take the detective story seriously. I don't mean that I take my own or anyone else's seriously -- but the detective story as form. Some day somebody's going to make 'literature' of it (Ford's Good Soldier wouldn't have needed much

altering to have been a detective story), and I'm selfish enough to have my hopes, however slight the evident justification may be (Johnson 72).

In retrospect, it is a poignant letter, suggesting both a young writer's hesitant self-assertion and the eagerness to impress of the autodidact suddenly plucked for polite company (the same letter mentions "adapting the stream-of-consciousness method . . . to a detective story"). Its tentative and breathless quality, especially apparent when the letter is read whole, should remind us just how momentous Knopf's republication in hardback of a pulp serial may have seemed at the time and of the infinite possibilities for making literature out of mass culture it suggested to Hammett. But, by the same token, Hammett's reading of The Good Soldier as a detective story is striking for its bizarre critical insight. This association seems like the kind of connection that might be drawn much later, when the structuralist habit of tracing narrative forms across varied domains of writing and of recognizing shared norms in disparate cultural realms had already become familiar. In Hammett's own day, however, when the distinctions between high and low literature may have been near their most religiously intense, the association of Ford Maddox Ford with pulp literature must have seemed -- like the very idea of regarding detective fiction as literary "form" -- a shocking juxtaposition. For, if a stream-of-

consciousness detective novel suggests mass culture made into "literature," Hammett's invocation of Ford explicitly suggests an opposite movement -- "literature" made into mass culture. By Harpham's definition, Hammett's comparison, like Chandler's outlandish style, is a signal example of the grotesque. Forcing legitimate culture to acknowledge its prodigal siblings, it is motivated by an underlying utopian demand that literature "recogniz[e] its own incongruities and paradoxes" in the realization of a "total art."

What we should recognize, I think, is the sheer improbability of the comparison and the unlikelihood that it illuminates in the whole hard-boiled enterprise. Who besides Hammett could possibly have imagined Ford's novel as a detective story? (Even today the comparison is strange and unclear.) If the juxtaposition suggests Hammett's determination to take advantage of his own situation and his eager desire to make "literature" in whatever fashion, the very overreaching ambition of its grasp is again like the extremity of Chandler's style. It suggests the vast expanse of the territory both writers seek to cross and points to the ultimate impossibility of the project. As with Chandler and Cain's sense of their own work and of its place in the literary debates of their day, Hammett's letter displays a broad sense of the literary marketplace -- an awareness of the possibilities implicit in the nearly symmetrical alignment of pulp fiction and modernist experiment against the middlebrow

world of "slick" literature. At the same time it reveals that this awareness is always shadowed by an anticipation of failure and by knowledge of the writer's "slight justification" in the eyes of legitimate culture.

Thus, although Hammett, Chandler, and Cain each had a vastly deeper understanding of literature than fellow populists like Daly, that expanded sensibility ironically did little to increase a sense of comfort or accomplishment or distinction. That would have been too much like the bland dream of self-cultivation that Chandler mocked as "the human struggle for decent expression" (Letters 57). Instead, their obsession with "literature" meant for these writers an ever greater sense of conflict and paradox. It is this fact that I mean to stress when I emphasize that the remarks of Hammett, Chandler, and Cain always suggest wide understanding of the literary field or of their cultural markets. Knowing "literature" for these writers almost inevitably means something more than having a decent literary education. Along with that knowledge comes an awareness of the way literature is something less than a "total art," of the manner in which it may function as a badge of education and distinction, and of the means by which it is consequently divided. For these writers, knowing "literature" necessarily means knowing it as a business and as an institution and, moreover, knowing the unusual places they hold in its domain.

The sensitivity that writers like Cain, Chandler, and Hammett so often display to the unlikely status of their own most cherished ambitions should remind us, therefore, that these problems are at once greater than craft and more individual than the fundamental paradoxes that may be common to all literary activity. The anguish Chandler and Cain express regarding their populist ventriloquism is not simply a philosophical discovery of the failures of the sign. It is not merely that presence constantly escapes signification or that the populist voice resists the fixity of literary form. Cain's discovery that he has no language of his own and Chandler's similar obsessive fear of charlatanism, like Hammett's awareness of slight justification, indicates a social conflict built into the literary world in which they work. These writers seek to bridge institutionally incommensurate realms of aesthetic activity. What they discover is that they have imagined an impossible space or condition. As David Madden says of Cain: "He wanted it both ways -- popularity and commercial success, and critical acclaim, and never understood his status somewhere in between" (Hoopes 517). That fantasy of an in-between status realized and made substantial is much like Chandler's ideal publishing forum: "a high class pulp detective story magazine aimed at the rather large class of people who find the pulps mostly too juvenile and who don't like the big magazines because of their fundamental dishonesty" (Letters 7). As the best hard-boiled

writers eventually all come to understand with some degree or another of explicitness, that dream of a unified culture -- a meeting, over the slaughtered body of genteel expression, between pulp fiction's crude energy and literary culture's refinement -- remains impossible. Arrayed against it are the deep segmentations of cultural life. In Chandler's bitter expression: "You cannot have art without a public taste and you cannot have a public taste without a sense of style and quality throughout the social structure."²⁵

It is in this context of a conflicted and ultimately despairing dream of a public culture (and, consequently, of a heroic individual success) that I think it makes sense to refer to an obscure millennial import in the notion of trivial literature. In the minds of its creators, hard-boiled fiction illuminates a particularly charged crossroads in American cultural life. Most immediately, writers like Cain, Chandler, and Hammett and many of their successors reveal the discontinuities in the institutions of American publishing. They stand on the battlescarred frontiers between the realms of pulp, paperback, and slick publishing, and at the same time their appearance in the Knopf catalog places them on the margin of a whole other domain of literary activity. They are uniquely positioned therefore to recognize some of the elective affinities between high and low art while being fated to learn the feebleness of the current. And their careers

offer numberless encounters with the myriad minor structures that demarcate aesthetic activity and cultural status.

It is no accident, then, that hard-boiled writing flourishes not only in the work of those discomfited writers who feel an irritating lack of fit between their ambitions and their habitat, but in those unlikely places and moments where the typical arrangements of literary life are disturbed and uncertain. Hammett and writers like Raoul Whitfield, Frederick Nebel, Paul Cain, and Horace McCoy fashion the hard-boiled crime story at the height of the pulp era in a magazine, Black Mask, that seemed to many to approach Chandler's ideal and to suggest the unlikely possibility of a "high-class" pulp. Chandler, on the other hand, does his best work in hardback as the pulp world from which he emerged is dying out. Writers like Jim Thompson, David Goodis, and Chester Himes bring a third wave of innovation to the hard-boiled crime story during the most tumultuous days of the paperback revolution, when the tremendous expansion of the paperback market, and of the debate over reading and literacy it encourages, create new publishing possibilities and render old divisions even more entrenched. All of these cases combine to suggest a further sense in which hard-boiled writing occupies a crossroads in American cultural life.

Hard-boiled writing flourishes during an era and especially at crucial moments when cultural valuation, the public meaning of art as a mark of education and sensibility

and as a possibility for national growth and communication, is a matter of significant dispute. It is in this context that its pulp values sometimes seem to rise to a nearly vanguard level of provocation. That impression exists not only in hard-boiled fiction's relentless refusal of those middlebrow visions that formed such a major part of the public investment in Culture. In pursuit of its own, even less plausible dreams of a public art, hard-boiled fiction at certain moments passes beyond the populist, anti-snobbery implications of most pulp publishing. Summoned by writers like Cain, Chandler and Hammett to a more pointedly critical role, the populism that in a writer like Daly is as simple and effective as a firing pistol suffers a kind of dramatic elaboration and overstatement. It becomes not just an anti-elitism but a grandiose spectacle of disenfranchisement and disenchantment, a schadenfreude of cultural impotence that, in its most intense moments, issues in a paradoxical anti-literature -- significant in its lack of significance and important (as Chandler's letter suggested) in its refusal of greatness. Its apotheosis may come appropriately enough in the operatic vision of cultural antagonism and willed self-destruction created by Jim Thompson --the last and most violently extreme of the truly innovative hard-boiled writers. In his autobiographical novel, Now and on Earth, Thompson describes an important crisis he suffers as a young man courting a woman

whose parents are determined that she should marry a prospect of more likely status and success:

That's the way it had been at Lois' house. They didn't hide in the kitchen there. They seated you in a room with a baby grand and more books than a branch library, and then they pelted you with words until your hide became so sore that you began to shout and snarl even before you were touched, until you made such a fool and boor of yourself that you could never go back.

It is but a short step from this portrayal of cultural insecurity to that apocalyptic, ultimately surreal paranoia that dominates Thompson's writing and that could stand as an epitaph for all the hard-boiled writers:

You ringed me with my failures, and each action of mine that was unlike yours you snatched up and laid on top of this ring. And in time I was walled in with nothing but failure to look at And I began to think perhaps I was wrong, perhaps the things I thought right were wrong and the wrong right, and I began to lose something called character (McCauley 43, 5).

Far from being merely a novelty attractive to marginal intellectuals for its anti-canonical anonymity, then, hard-boiled fiction is from its earliest days the creation of marginal intellectuals. The universe of grotesques, of the homeless and displaced, that these writers create is an apt expression of their own failure to find for themselves a comfortable location even as so many thinkers and artists are turning Culture into a spiritual and institutional home. And the shifting, Machiavellian landscape these grotesques inhabit, the world of blank position that Chapter One describes, forms a kind of objective correlative for the bankrupt exercise of cultural authority the hard-boiled writers often describe.

Moreover, as with the European bohémias that gave birth to the aesthetic avant-gardes, hard-boiled writers emerge from a kind of cultural demimonde. The circles of "worn intellectuals" who write for pulp magazines and trash paperbacks from the mid-twenties through the fifties experience a set of economic pressures and social experiences that in some very direct ways parallel the factors that created Europe's artistic underground. Large numbers of young, ambitious, usually poorly educated men (and some women) find themselves summoned to urban centers by the possibilities for social and economic advancement created by the long-running publishing boom and the expansion of a national

cultural market. Most find there far less than the open road to success they anticipated.

Struggling, during the heady years of the celebration of the American novelist, to transform themselves into successful authors, these writers typically become instead workers in the factories of "industrial literature" and members of an army of low-priced scribblers. Often times they are forced to occupy themselves with desperate efforts to survive on meager earnings. And while they are able to draw upon the residual cultural values attached to literature, they are continually confronted not merely with their poverty and stagnation but with a more subtle form of frustration. The same expansion of literary activity, the opening of new cultural markets and publishing opportunities, that allows for widened prospects of cultural and economic advancement has the effect of encouraging new valuations and discriminations in the social meaning of aesthetic activity. Among other things, the sheer number of America's professional writers encourages a kind of cultural inflation and devaluation. Across the whole first half of the twentieth century, distinctions among kinds of writing and authorship in the U.S. become more various and complex and at the same time deeper and less porous. This is that contradiction at the heart of the career of a Hammett or Chandler whose literary analogue may be Hammett's tale of Flitcraft. Able to escape the pulp demimonde and to win limited consideration as serious writers, these figures at the

same time find themselves constitutionally unable to imagine themselves or to be imagined as writers of anything but a limited form of popular entertainment.

What sometimes makes hard-boiled fiction resemble an avant-garde is that a handful of writers are able to transform these conditions into a form of cultural capital and a source for an unusually compelling literary vision. As with the "crisis of the intelligenstia" to which Benjamin traces the invention of Surrealism, for a scattering of well-placed pulp writers their status as marginal intellectuals becomes at certain moments the impetus for a provocative reimagining of literature and, moreover, of the whole institutional arrangement of aesthetic life (177). All of this suggests, however, that while it may make sense to regard a small group of writers from such a perspective, it would be a mistake to take the question in the subtitle of this chapter seriously and speak of a "vanguard genre." The implications raised by the designation "genre fiction" -- of a willing accommodation to the habitual limits of certain forms of literary activity -- point in an opposite direction from the discomfort and straining against boundaries that inspires the best hard-boiled writing and that on occasion sparks an impression of avant-garde sensibility.

It is this kind of agonistic encounter with the institutional demands of the literary life that does most, I think, to prepare the ground for what we now recognize as a

hard-boiled aesthetic. That is the point of this chapter's epigraph from Breton. Like Breton, the hard-boiled writers discover that "between my thought . . . and me . . . there is a world, an imperceptible world of phantasms, of hypothetical realizations, of wagers lost, and of lies." As may very well be the case for Breton, with the hard-boiled writers that spectral landscape is beyond doubt the very institutions of culture. What rises up to complicate their every effort is precisely the unforgettable realization of literature as a stacked playing field, of their own wagers for cultural success and of their awareness of failure. In this sense, the hard-boiled writers, like Chandler, are caught up in composing autobiographies of split personalities; in good measure their stories become narratives of the attempt to negotiate this "world of phantasms" and to overcome it in charismatic or apocalyptic expressions of voice.

Yet the oxymoron "vanguard genre" remains useful, partly because it suggests the failures of analogy and reminds us of the places where the comparison between hard-boiled fiction and the historical avant-gardes can be at best partial. More to the point, the phrase indicates the specific and limited ways that it makes sense to draw the comparison. To refer back to Benjamin again, the notion of a "vanguard genre" illuminates the sense in which hard-boiled writing is "not literature but something else." That is, if we think of the avant-garde as involving a literature outside Literature, an

aesthetic practice opposed to the institutions of Art, then the term "vanguard genre" reminds us that hard-boiled fiction presents an analogue insofar as it stands on the boundary between pulp fiction and legitimate culture. If a handful of hard-boiled writers are able at times to cast the institutions of literature into relief and to suggest new ways of imagining aesthetic activity, that is not merely because they indict cultural authority, but because they confront it with an entirely different kind of writing, with the habits and demands of trash fiction.

Some of the more specific forms that this confrontation takes will be addressed in the next chapter. For now, perhaps, it will be enough to say that moments like Hammett's tale of Flitcrat or aspects of the writing like Chandler's outrageous style can be read as heightened, theatrical accounts of the meeting between pulp fiction and legitimate literature and that together they point us toward the two ways that hard-boiled fiction ultimately most resembles the avant-garde. On the one hand, the conflicted desire to speak the vernacular that Chandler's style dramatizes, like the deep involvement that both writers show with the banal matters of ordinary existence, displays a democratic attachment to a world that escapes Culture and a faith in its capacity to reorient literature. Drawing on the resources of pulp fiction in those beliefs, hard-boiled fiction ironically parallels the vanguardist desire to create a collective art released from

the bounds of institutional autonomy and reintegrated into everyday life. No doubt, mass culture presents, as Peter Burger contends, a nightmare parody of this avant-garde dream. But writers like Thompson, Chandler, and Hammett, finding themselves situated on the border of literary legitimacy, are able to recognize the provocative potential in that nightmare and the way that its atmosphere of artificiality, anonymity, chance, and insubstantiality can be mobilized against the commonplaces of mainstream literature.

That raises the second aspect in which hard-boiled fiction could sometimes be said to resemble the avant-garde. It is a sense particularly apparent in the tale of Flitcraft, but it is evident as well in the aggressiveness and deliberate confusion integral to Chandler's rhetoric. For hard-boiled writers, as for the avant-garde movements, the democratization of culture is conceived as a transgressive, convulsive affair. It may be the ultimate idiosyncrasy of hard-boiled writing that it holds desperately to this possibility, that, through the three or four decades of its prominence in American publishing, it continues to suggest the power of pulp fiction to disrupt and reinvigorate literary culture and of its populist values to act as a critical countervision of American life. It comes as no surprise, then, that a writer like Hiassen who works determinedly to resuscitate the critical edge of hard-boiled writing makes much also of the rebellious possibilities of rock and roll. In the Woodstock-era

fantasies that often crop up in his stories, the anti-authoritarian attitudes and libidinal energies of pop music hold out the possibility of a democratic experience that overcomes all of the typical structures and boundaries of ordinary living.²⁶

That ideal of "a screaming disruption of civil life" informs all of the most memorable hard-boiled stories and may finally be one of the more reliable ways to distinguish hard-boiled writing from other varieties of thriller fiction. In order to fully appreciate the difference we need to recognize the real weight of both sides of the equation. The fascination with mundane existence and an awareness of its resilient patterns of discipline is at least as important as momentarily overwhelming waves of transgressive energy. Another way to describe the apocalyptic habits of hard-boiled fiction, then, would be to say that like the historical avant-gardes, hard-boiled writers envision an explosive meeting between art and everyday life. That may be the briefest account of the "beams falling" in Hammett's tale of Flitcraft, and it could refer with equal accuracy to what occurs both in Hiassen's vision of Disney-in-flames and in Chandler's tale of the paper clip. As the culmination of the protagonist's attempt to literally write the park out of existence and as the final incident of his anti-authoritarian inventiveness, the immolation of the Amazing Kingdom of Thrills in Native Tongue is colored as a kind of ultimate populist creativity.

Similarly, the stylistic ability to redeem the mundane banalities of office life in Chandler's anecdote is implicitly equated with the violent arrival of death. In this pulp vision, art eventually invokes a nihilistic, potentially transformatory destruction of ordinary existence.

As with Surrealism and the other historical avant-gardes, that nihilist pursuit -- the anticipation, as Benjamin puts it, of "experience" that exceeds and disrupts our established structures -- indicates a frustrated desire to overcome the cultural institutions through which experience is typically interpreted or created. As Renato Poggioli suggests, avant-garde movements are partly evident in the desire to pass "beyond the limits of art, . . . [in] aspiration toward what the Germans call Weltanschauung" (18). Where hard-boiled fiction may be most interesting is in the source from which it draws this excessive energy. For the Surrealists and the other historical avant-gardes, the attack on cultural institutions was part of an attempt to liberate art in a way that, rather than simply overcoming them, would extend the values of idealist aesthetics through all aspects of life. In this vision, every event and person would achieve the uselessness, autonomy, and beauty of the art object. The impetus for hard-boiled fiction's vanguardism, however, was an apotheosis of the implicit values of pulp fiction. If, as Bourdieu suggests, popular culture's typical appeals to legitimacy rest in the ideal of a truly democratic mass

culture, writers like Hammett, Chandler and Thompson so emphasize and elevate the faith in a potential culture of the people that, much as in the case of the avant-garde's investment in art, that belief rounds back upon itself to become the source of paradoxical, agonistic interrogations of literature and millennarian revisions of society.

Thus, in Chandler's repeated claims to mobilize the vernacular against stuffy authority and in his repeated paeans to deep homosocial bonding, in Millar's description of a sudden access to nearly mystical sympathy, in Hammett's carnivals of anarchic violence, and in Hiassen's vision of inflammatory liberation from consumer thralldom there is a lurking sense of popular knowledge and freedom and an intimation of imminent, transformative community. Even Thompson's bitter irony is redeemed, as in the conclusion of The Killer Inside Me, with the gothic vision of a heaven of freaks: "Our kind. Us People. All of us that started the game with a crooked cue, that wanted so much and got so little, that meant so good and did so bad. All us folks" (188). In each case, the impossible ideal of a mass culture that speaks from and for the people becomes the foundation for a critical revision of existing life and the source for a utopian image of popular transformation.

Thriller fiction of the type that Carroll John Daly and his heir Mickey Spillane create -- while it shares much with the stories of Hammett, Chandler and, Thompson -- differs in

the simple fact that its populist appeal remains so tacit and secure. The ideal of a culture of the people and the visions of popular justice that are subject to defeat and contradiction in Chandler and Thompson, for example --and that, as with the end of The Killer Inside Me are rendered unachievable in the same motion that makes them transcendent -- are readily carried out in Spillane and Daly through a straightforward progress from injustice to justice. It is enough for Race Williams once to fire for the "long-winded professors" to be silent. In Hammett's Red Harvest, by contrast, the silent and invisible Old Man retains to the last the authority to demand the Continental Op's doleful efforts to render an acceptable report.

By the same token, the middlebrow fantasies implicit in the "classic" varieties of detective fiction offer a vision of the smooth sublation of art and everyday life, a picture of culture that heals and improves mundane existence. It is for much this reason that the later work of Ross Macdonald disappointed so many fans of the hard-boiled even as it was winning reams of legitimate critical approbation. The melancholy that overwhelms Lew Archer novels like The Barbarous Coast is informed not by the radical populism of pulp fiction, but by a vision of the unredeemable ugliness of ordinary life and of the contrasting wisdom and beauty of civilization that is in fact little different from Philo Vance's faith in refinement. And the transition from the

perspective of Howard Cross to the perspective of Archer -- about whom there is nothing of Race Williams or Mike Hammer -- removes at the same time the tension and contradiction between a culture of the people and cultural authority, between vernacular wit and literary wisdom, between democratic violence and hierarchical constraint that energizes the best hard-boiled writing.

Both these varieties of popular fiction could serve as examples for Poggioli's description of the dream of a golden-age of art, where the artist (or his mirror image, the detective) is seen "to obey naturally and instinctively the norms of taste and culture dominating his environment, to exercise his civic, collective function with perfect ethical and psychic integration" (104). For many hard-boiled writers that remains a potent but impossible ideal, constantly undercut by their experience and dissatisfaction with the institutional divisions of culture. As a result, however, writers like Hammett, Chandler, and Thompson remain loyal to the vanguard sense of writing as potentially disruptive. What makes their stories interesting, then, and what likens them to the historical avant-gardes is that, freighted with such importance, their populist ideals become overdetermined and contradictory. Thus, Chandler's style, of course, indicates not simply the vernacular, but a grotesque combination of the vernacular and the hyperliterary. Hammett's accounts of liberatory violence -- in "The Tenth Clew," the tale of

Flitcraft, and Red Harvest -- are sandwiched by stifling hierarchy and routine. Millar's depiction of mystic sympathy comes similarly from a brief epiphany rendered possible only by the convulsive juxtaposition of the remnants of life. And the very extremity of Hiassen's destruction of the Amazing Kingdom of Thrills, like Thompson's freak paradise, indicates the purely utopian character of its popular appeal.

What finally makes these writings resemble the historical avant-garde is not simply the grandiosity of their revolutionary appeals to community and popular violence, but the fact that these visions are everywhere undone by a contradictory impulse toward constraint and loss. "[F]ailure," as Peter Burger says, "is the mode in which the avant-garde artist reaffirms the Utopian quality of the project" (Modernism 153).²⁷

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NOTES

1. Benjamin, Reflections 179; Breton, Manifestoes of Surrealism xi, 29; Chandler, Letters 176.
2. For passages in The Little Sister that might easily have been the reworked source for Millar's Neptune, see, for example, pp. 17-30, 44-52. A brief example of the sociality that is so distant to the air of cultured, liberal distaste coloring the Ross Macdonald novels and that gives a comic energy to even the late Chandler can be seen in this passage from The Little Sister:

I got my wallet out and handed him one of my business cards. He read it thoughtfully and tapped the edge against his porcelain crown.

'He coulda went somewhere without telling me,' he mused.

'Your grammar,' I said, 'is almost as loose as your toupee.'

'You lay off my toupee if you know what's good for you,' he shouted.

'I wasn't going to eat it,' I said. 'I'm not that hungry.'

He took a step towards me, and dropped his right shoulder. A scowl of fury dropped his lip almost as far.

'Don't hit me. I'm insured,' I told him.

'Oh hell. Just another screwball.' He shrugged and put his lip back up on his face. 'What's the lay?' (28)

William Stowe points out that "the world talks back to Marlowe . . . and whereas the often sentimental content of the backtalk is perhaps the single weakest element of Chandler's novels, the fact that there is any room at all for backtalk in the story of Marlowe's investigations makes them all the more seductive to the reader" (380).

3. See also Burger's discussion of the aesthetic of montage and its reliance on "the insertion of reality fragments" that distinguishes it "from the techniques of composition developed since the Renaissance . . ." (Theory 77, 72-82).
4. In conversation with Francoise Gilot and Carlton Lake, Life with Picasso (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), p. 70; quoted at Perloff p. 44. See also Christine Poggi, In Defiance of Painting: Cubism, Futurism, and the Invention of Collage. New Haven: Yale U P, 1993.

5. The deep similarities between the methods of Surrealism and detective fiction can be remarked by comparing Jameson's discussion of Surrealist imagery (Form 95-106) and his response to Chandler. Similar affinities exist in Benjamin's remarks on detective fiction and Surrealism. See, for example, the "Surrealism" essay and Benjamin's description of the flâneur and the detective in Charles Baudelaire: The Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism.
6. "Someone told me that they had read in a book by Chesterton about a detective who, in order to find someone he is looking for in a certain city, simply scoured from roof to cellar the houses which, from the outside, seemed somehow abnormal to him, were it only in some slight detail. This system is as good as any other" (Manifestoes 45). "I know that in Paris, on the boulevards, the beautiful luminous signs are making their appearance. . . . In our cities the parallel avenues, running from north to south, converge everything into a vague area, bounded by our glances, like those of blasé detectives" ("Introduction to the Discourse on the Paucity of Reality," What is Surrealism? 19, 28).
7. E.g., Marinetti: "Courage, audacity, and revolt will be essential elements of our poetry. . . . Up to now literature has exalted a pensive immobility, ecstasy, and sleep. We intend to exalt aggressive action, a feverish insomnia, the racer's stride, the mortal leap, the punch and the slap" (41). On this "activism" as a vital principle of artistic vanguardism, see Poggioli p. 25. On the parallel attraction to hooliganism, see Poggioli, pp. 33, 39.
8. The phrase "l'humour noir" was apparently coined by Breton and was used in the title of an "Anthology" of discussions of Surrealist antecedents like Swift and La Fontaine. For excerpts, see What is Surrealism?, pp. 188-196. On the intentional and accidental "humorism" integral to the avant-gardes' attacks on classicism, see Poggioli pp. 140-143 and Calinescu 124-125. See also Roger Shattuck's discussion of "humor" as one of the four basic attitudes of French avant-garde aesthetics between 1885 and 1918 in The Banquet Years (32-42) and his emphasis on the crucial role of la blague, or great joke, for vanguard aesthetics generally in his essay "The Demon of Originality" (The Innocent Eye 62-81).
9. Beautifully described by Geoffrey O'Brien: "The hardboiled novel -- which is meant to be concerned with action, with dialogue, with the complicated and dynamic interrelationships of people and places and times of day -- that perpetually humming machine tends in fact toward a zero state of silence, solitude and immobility. If we remove the temptress and the gunmen, we are left with a drab room in

which a man alone smokes many cigarettes and empties many bottles of Scotch" (110).

10. The city-in-flames anarchy that concludes Hiassen's novel can be traced in pulp fiction back to the nineteenth century. For an excellent example that also emerges from a variant of the hard-boiled tradition, see Ed McBain's 1960 novel, The Heckler. For a pre-hard-boiled-era version, see Edgar Wallace's 1908 novel, The Council of Justice and Robert Sampson's discussion of it (v. 1, 175). For a discussion of the pulp-era convention of the city reduced to anarchy, see Sampson, vol. 4, pp. 123-124. Hard-boiled fiction like Hammett's Red Harvest, "The Gutting of Couffignal," and "The Big Knockover," Paul Cain's Fast One, David Goodis' Street of No Return, Fredric Brown's Night of the Jabberwock, and all of Chester Himes's Harlem domestic novels, though most especially Blind Man with a Pistol, obviously draw heavily on this tradition. What most of them share is an official opposition to criminal anarchy combined with an only slightly less evident revelry in the no-holds-barred destruction of ordinary life that such anarchy offers. Compare Eugene Ionesco's claim that "[a]n avant-garde man is like an enemy inside a city he is bent on destroying . . . (quoted at Calinescu 119).
11. One shocking feature of Hiassen's novel is its placid inattention to innocent victims, which frequently surpasses malevolent indifference and revels in humiliation of dull-witted tourists. It is a reminder of how often pop culture resurrects that feature of Breton's provocation that seems most resolutely anti-populist: the claim that "[a]nyone who, at least once in his life, has not dreamed of thus putting an end to the petty system of debasement and cretinization in effect has a well-defined place in that crowd, with his belly at barrel level" (125).
12. Chandler had much to say and frequently congratulated himself about his style. See, for example, Letters 48, 64, 87-88, 269. He also recognized the way that the Marlovian combination of blank affect and outrageous simile had passed quickly into a popular usage as the hard-boiled voice. See Letters, pp. 126, 175. Chandler's style has also received a great deal of critical discussion. See, especially, Marling, pp 78-82, 100-114. On hard-boiled diction generally, see Hamilton, pp. 37, 139-142, 153-154.
13. William Marling also notes the connection between Moose Malloy and Chandler's exaggerated style, situating both as "grotesques": "[In Farewell, My Lovely, Chandler] assembled a cast of lonely giants, drunken widows, Hollywood Indians, indolent policemen, traveling psychics, and sphinxlike hotel clerks. They are walking similes, Dickensian dreams. . . . Chandler was the first to stretch the genre's language. He

showed that hyperbole, overstatement, irony, simile, metaphor, sarcasm, and cliché could be exotic. In allowing the narrator to stretch the detective novel stylistically, the reader consents to participate in an ironic appreciation of the genre. He is allowed to be in the action, and above it, on a pseudo-authorial level. This was a revolutionary step in technique" (96, 100).

14. One need only compare Eliot's "[t]he yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window panes" with Lautreamont's vision of umbrella and sewing machine on a dissection table, much celebrated by the Surrealists, in order to get a sense of the possible differences in degree to which I'm referring here. Chandler's figures seem much closer to the latter.
15. For an excellent discussion of Marlowe's rhetorical violence, its employment in contests of repartee and linguistic "virility" among Chandler's characters, and its aim of producing confusion, see Marling, p 113.
16. "They had Rembrandt on the calendar that year, a rather smeary self-portrait due to imperfectly registered color plate. 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 a down payment. His face was aging, 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" (Farewell, My Lovely 25).
17. This argument might also be put as a restatement of the problem of kitsch. As Matei Calinescu summarizes, "the whole concept of kitsch clearly centers around such questions as imitation, forgery, counterfeit, and what we may call the aesthetics of deception and self-deception." By its very nature as a conceptual boundary defining art and non-art, "it is one of the most bewildering and elusive categories of modern aesthetics" (229, 232, 225-262). The connection to the gothic and grotesque is further emphasized by Calinescu's claim that the first remark associating modernity with kitsch was Frank Wedekind's 1917 claim that "[k]itsch is the contemporary form of the Gothic, Rococo, Baroque" (225). In this context, it is important to recognize, as Jameson suggests, that Chandler's novels are "inauthentic" and "camp" from the first ("Chandler" 133-134).
18. Predictably, no figure comes in for more anger than Wilson, who had written scathing critiques of the mind-numbing qualities of detective stories. The scatological attacks on him are one of the ugly little pleasures of Chandler's letters. See, pp. 58, 79, 238. But Chandler is equally

scathing on a whole range of other figures of intellectual and cultural authority, and it is clear when he refers, for example, to "the kind of dulness that comes from letting flatulent asses pontificate about things they know no more about than the next man . . . ," that in large part their authority itself is what is at issue for him (Letters 33). See also, for example, pp. 69, 151, 180.

19. Daly, "It's All in the Game," Black Mask (4/15/23), quoted in Nolan, Black Mask Boys p. 36.
20. That combination issues in a charmingly ironic and witty catalog of observations. See Johnson, pp. 44-49. It is crucial to note, though, how important the impression of an exotic perspective was to this article and how skillfully Hammett played with his audience's expectations. Thus, for example, section 19 reads in its entirety: "In 1917, in Washington, D.C., I met a young lady who did not remark that my work must be very interesting" (Johnson 47). As Johnson puts it, "Not only the pulps but the smart set thought that a literate detective was a very glamorous thing" (43). It is impossible to imagine Carroll John Daly playing this role.
21. See also Hammett's writings in The Saturday Review of Literature where he is quite harsh on "affectations of gentility." E.g.: "Philo Vance is in the Sherlock Homes tradition and his conversational manner is that of a high-school girl who has been studying the foreign words and phrases in the back of her dictionary." Carolyn Wells's characters' "dialogue reaches its real depth when they indulge in what is supposed to be sophisticated banter." By contrast, Hammett praises Edgar Wallace's violent thriller fiction, an ancestor of the hard-boiled tradition (Johnson 62, 61).
22. See, for example, Letters pp. 138, 238.
23. That physical violence functions for Daly as an infallible form of populist rhetoric opposed to intellectual sophistication can be seen quickly through brief attention to an exchange in Daly's first novel, The Snarl of the Beast. Meeting with his client, Danny, in a Lower East Side tenement in that novel, the avowedly unintellectual Race Williams suggests at the same time the correlative, almost physically coercive, power that education and cultural authority can bear in the hard-boiled universe. The exchange begins with Danny's remarks: "'You have heard of Daniel Davidson. That is I.' And I sat the straighter. 'Is I' had slipped out so naturally, so unconsciously, it staggered me. I wasn't expecting that sort of English, even after spotting some of the books. But now my head half turned, and the gilt letters of Thackery and Dickens and even the dry Macauley glared dimly out at me" (26-27). As the novel progresses, Danny turns out

to be a villain who is betrayed and undermined by his lack of physical skill and courage. Race Williams, of course, regains his balance and authority through precisely these attributes.

24. This is a claim about which Chandler remains significantly ambivalent. E.g.: "[t]he highbrows, fantastic as they sometimes are, seem to be about the only people we can rely on for a perpetual challenge to what passes for truth. That's why I read the Partisan Review. There's a lot of nonsense in it and some of the terminology used by these birds like Allen Tate nearly makes me throw my lunch. But at least they don't take things for granted" (Letters 193). In another context, Chandler will dismiss the "little magazines" as "polite pickpockets" (Letters 111). See also, Letters, pp. 57, 64, 77, 180, 203.
25. As Chandler continues, it is clear how much he, like so many of the avant-garde and high culture critics, traces the disappearance of the public to the rise of middlebrow, mass culture:

Curiously enough this sense of style seems to have very little to do with refinement or even with humanity. it can exist in a savage and dirty age, but it cannot exist in the age of Milton Berle, Mary Margaret McBride [a radio personality], the Book of the Month Club, the Hearst press, and the Coca-Cola machine (Letters 181).
 See also Chandler's claim that: "I am not interested in pleasing the intellectuals by writing literary criticism, because literary criticism as an art has in these days too narrow a scope and too limited a public, just as has poetry" (68).
26. It is an indication of how fantastic these hopes and the desire to revivify the original hard-boiled aesthetic may be that Hiassen's characters favor music ten to twenty years out of date. The result is an illogical but emotionally cohesive idea of "classic" rock that manages to bind together immediacy, nostalgia, and endurance in the vision of a permanent yet resigned rebellion.
27. Poggioli makes a very similar point about the utopian agon of avant-garde failure. See, for example, p. 66.

CHAPTER IV

"Terrible Seconds": Violence, Labor, and Style in
Hard-Boiled Writing

We welcome the divine amateur, but the
divine professional rules the roost.

-- Harold Brainerd
Hersey

[S]carcely anything in literature is
worth a damn except what is written
between the lines.

-- Raymond Chandler¹

1

It has been noted often of Farewell, My Lovely that much of what makes Raymond Chandler a distinctive writer can be found in the unusual scene that opens the novel's tenth chapter. Beginning with a deliberate sense of confusion and a burlesque of schizophrenia, the scene offers one of Chandler's wilfully ostentatious displays of literary skill. It continues to include a portrayal of the fragile and romantic machismo that Chandler made a basic part of the hard-boiled hero and offers a stylized example of the mordant, self-deprecating interior monologue that became a crucial element of the hard-boiled voice. What concerns me

for the moment, however, is how closely these things are linked to a narrative of intense physical pain.

'Four minutes,' the voice said. 'Five, possibly six. They must have moved quick and quiet. He didn't even let out a yell.'

I opened my eyes and looked fuzzily at a cold star. I was lying on my back. I felt sick.

The voice said: 'It could have been a little longer. Maybe even eight minutes altogether. They must have been in the brush, right where the car stopped. The guy scared easily. They must have thrown a small light in his face and he passed out -- just from panic. The pansy.'

There was silence. I got up on one knee. Pains shot from the back of my head clear to my ankles.

'Then one of them got into the car,' the voice said, 'and waited for you to come back. The others hid again.' . . .

I balanced myself woozily on the flat of my hands, listening.

'Yeah, that was about how it was,' the voice said.

It was my voice. I was talking to myself, coming out of it. I was trying to figure the thing out subconsciously.

'Shut up, you dimwit,' I said, and stopped talking to myself (39).

The chapter continues in this vein for several pages, alternating almost mechanically between laconic joshing at the narrator's own expense ("I could still use the head, I could use it another year anyway") and a luxuriant poetry of bodily discomfort:

I was still on my knees. The smell of the sage was beginning to bother me. The sticky ooze from which wild bees get their honey. Honey was sweet, much too sweet. My stomach took a whirl. I clamped my teeth tight and just managed to keep it down my throat. Cold sweat stood out in lumps on my forehead, but I shivered just the same. I got up on one foot, then on both feet, straightened up, wobbling a little. I felt like an amputated leg (40).

The cold water of the closing simile is pure Chandler, of course -- a typical and deliberately overdrawn stroke of writerly bravado. Emphasizing, as always, the "schism" that Chandler places at the heart of his work, the outlandish figure resembles Marlowe's "subconscious" voice:

it is mockingly counterposed to the lyrical description of suffering, as if to cast both the narrator's pain and the author's poetic narration itself in acid disavowal. Yet, as distinctive as this passage is, there is also something about it that feels representative and that alludes to fundamental features of the hard-boiled aesthetic. As chapter two suggested, in the years between the wars, hard-boiled fiction establishes itself as a recognizable genre and simultaneously revives the American tradition of the detective thriller by opposing pursuit and violent conflict to the "classic" detective story's emphasis on feats of intellect. "Action," the crude elements of bodies in motion and struggle, becomes the genre's most definitive aspect and its central means of exposition. In the attempt to render an overwhelming sense of immediate bodily experience, Chandler's scene falls squarely within this tradition. The comic counterpoint between the "subconscious" explanatory voice and the answering "silence" of pure pain even recapitulates sardonically hard-boiled fiction's efforts to distinguish itself. Intellect enters here only as a kind of pre-rational form of understanding, and it is cut off by the appropriately brutal and impatient slapstick of the active hero: "Shut-up, you dimwit."

More specifically, though, Chandler's passage calls to mind a number of scenes appearing throughout the genre where the doling out and, especially, the reception of torture is

featured and the promethean sufferings of the hard-boiled hero are dramatically portrayed. The several-page-long brutal description of the beating of Ned Beaumont in Hammett's The Glass Key; the Continental Op's whiskey- and opium-induced sufferings in Red Harvest; the burning by acid of Coffin Ed's face in Chester Himes's A Rage in Harlem; Dolly Dillon's auto-castration in Jim Thompson's A Hell of a Woman; not to mention the numerous druggings, thrashings, and imprisonments that Philip Marlowe and his prototypes undergo throughout Chandler's stories -- all these call to mind countless other examples and attest to the genre's underlying attraction to gothic renditions of sadomasochism. Indeed, for readers tempted to view pop culture from a mythic perspective, no feature of the genre could be more encouraging. The sheer extremity of these scenes appears to reach beyond the bounds of civilized discourse towards a terribly elemental narrative of suffering, betrayal, retribution, and redemption. The hard-boiled emphasis on the body in pain comes to seem more than a means to counter the artifice of the "classic" detective story with realistic depictions of crime and law-enforcement; beyond that mundane goal, it serves as part of an ever more excessive attempt to render a shattering authenticity.

A final example, the denouement of Raoul Whitfield's The Virgin Kills, makes the case still more clearly. As chapter two noted, Whitfield's 1932 novel is a cross between

the English country-house murder mystery and the hard-boiled detective story. It concerns a disparate group of characters isolated on a yacht anchored in the upper Hudson, and, as in the classic country-house mystery, each of these characters falls under suspicion for crimes that at least one of them must have committed. The influence of the hard-boiled appears partly in the fact that these crimes concern the underworld rigging for illegal gambling of a major sports event. Babe Harron, the star stroke in a college regatta -- the occasion in the first place for the novel's characters to have travelled together up the Hudson -- has been poisoned so as to collapse in the middle of the race. A series of linked murders on the yacht immediately follows. By the novel's final chapters, it is clear that each character is all but hopelessly entangled in webs of corruption and duplicity.

What is striking about Whitfield's denouement is the means taken to resolve this confusion. As with the classic detective novel, guilt is assigned in a scene of public revelation. The agent of that revelation, however, is not the typical detective genius, but the movies. In a device that surely would have had enormous resonance in the early Thirties, when the dominance of Hollywood filmmaking as mass media and public theater was just fully established, Whitfield has his characters realize that the only way to discover the murderer is to force all the suspects to gather

and view newsfilms taken of the regatta. In an appropriately democratic twist on a classic motif, the movies become the thing to catch the conscience of a murderer. At the climactic moment, the characters have been watching scenes of the race shot from a plane when the truth suddenly appears.

And then there was a close-up. It came so suddenly that it was startling. Above the engine beat of the plane I could hear the exclamations in the saloon.

'Babe--Harron!'

It was the stroke. He was pulling an oar, but he was having a terrible fight with himself. His head was thrown back, his eyes were staring. His teeth were clenched, bared by his parted lips. For what seemed like an eternity of seconds his head and the upper portion of his naked body filled the screen. And they were terrible seconds. The slide rig took him away from us, brought him back. He was swaying now, and the special lens seemed to have brought him within a few feet of the camera. . . .

I stared toward the center aisle. Mick O'Rourke was sitting erect now -- he was

staring at the screen. But there was no fear in his eyes, no pain. . . .

[T]here was still a close-up of Babe Harron. His head half-filled the screen -- the slide rig seemed to shove him forward into the camera. And as his strained eyes stared into it, his lips moved.

My body jerked as I caught the word they formed (223-225).

Like Philip Marlowe's struggle with himself, the "terrible seconds" of this "terrible fight" offer a signal example of hard-boiled action. Violence here, as Joseph Shaw once put it in defense of his magazine Black Mask, acts as moral theater, aiming to dramatize "recognizable human character" (Intro. vi). And precisely because this scene is so isolated in Whitfield's novel and so crucial to the plot's resolution, it may itself reveal aspects of the intimate connection between "action" and "character" that are less apparent in stories riven with fistfights and shootouts. At first glance, that significance seems little more than a prototypically American metaphysics of force. As in Hammett's "The Tenth Clew," for example, Whitfield's scene shows a "startling" access of violence overwhelming the constraints of reason and the deceptive forms of civilized society. Pain reveals character, and action tears the veil from truth. A closer look, however, both

reinforces that impression and makes the case slightly more complicated.

The cinematic display of Babe Harron's death occurs at the point in the novel, of course, where the chaos and suspicion that have characterized the narrative are due to be repaired. In Whitfield's scene, though, that restoration occurs not merely in the revelation of truth and the determination of guilt, but by the circulation of feeling through the witnesses of the victim's pain. Watching Babe Harron's "tortured expression," the characters form a theatrical community of suffering. One "breath[es] fiercely," another unconsciously holds her hands "pressed against her throat," the eyes of a third contain "an expression of pain; his mouth . . . twisted as he watched the stroke sway before him" (224). Most important of all, though are the physical virtues of Mick O'Rourke and the narrator, Al Connors. The novel has figured the disorder introduced by murder into the community mainly in the dissension and suspicion that develops between these two central and most sympathetic characters. (They are a kind of hard-boiled Ishmael and Queequeg, even sharing a cabin aboard the yacht and experiencing a number of uneasy bedtime scenes.) When Mick O'Rourke watches the movie attentively and fearlessly and when the narrator's "body jerk[s]" at the stroke's death, we see their innocence registered in appropriate physical responses. The narrative lingers on

their postures because, in contrast to the chapters of intrigue and evasive dialogue that have prepared us for this moment, the characters' pre-discursive physical reactions reveal inarguable truths and serve as the literal embodiment of their feeling for the victim.²

Appearing as hard-boiled epiphany, then, the violence of Whitfield's scene suggests, as does Chandler's passage from Farewell, that action is important in pulp fiction for the way it allows figures to display authentic character -- "the special type of poise," as Erving Goffman puts it in his classic essay, "that pertains to dealing with the contingency of being under the observation of others while in an easily discredited role" ("Where the Action Is" 226). Much as in the spectacle of morality that the Barthes of Mythologies discerned in wrestling, Mick O'Rourke's manly posture offers a grandiose performance of this kind of "recognizable human character," as do the contortions of Philip Marlowe in his struggles to revive himself.³ By contrast, Babe Harron's murderer gives himself away because he lacks this sort of bodily control: "He was on his feet, in the aisle. His short body swung around, he screamed in a horrible voice. . . . He was running now -- a sort of staggering run toward the rear of the room" (225). And a comparable loss of poise encourages Marlowe's macho disdain for Lindsay Marriott, his dead client ("he passed out -- just from panic. The pansy").

The clearest way to get a sense of the basic importance of this kind of action for hard-boiled fiction may be by comparison: in "classic" detective fiction the body grants only vulnerability; it signifies beyond control and gives its owner away. A woman walks through a door, and Sherlock Holmes can immediately tell her that she is a near-sighted typist who left home in a hurry. In hard-boiled writing, by contrast, the Holmsonian obsession with the semiotic activity of everyday life assumes a different vector. Rather than abject submission before an evaluative gaze, it often indicates the protagonist's opportunity to establish or, better, impose his identity. The stories consistently advance their plots by staging minor scenes of confrontation, dramatic examples of what Goffman refers to as facework, that allow the hero to proffer and confirm a sense of self. When the stories explode into deadly conflict, it as though an underlying violence is manifest. Thus, in a story appropriately called "I'll Tell the World," Race Williams remarks: "Both my guns had spoken ... and, so help me God, but a single hole appeared in Lutz's forehead" (Nolan, Black Mask Boys 39). The rhetoric of gunfire makes clear how powerfully the genre's attraction to violence echoes its obsession with position: under their twin influences, the hard-boiled world begins to look like a laboratory of Goffmanian social interaction, a landscape defined by minute jockeyings for power and determinations of

social place. In this sense, hard-boiled action becomes analogous to Clausewitz's war; it is the continuation of everyday life by other means. And what the final scenes of The Virgin Kills offer Mick O'Rourke is the opportunity to physically prove himself.

Yet, in addition to this fairly predictable use of action, both Whitfield's and Chandler's scenes suggest another, perhaps contrary, significance for pain and violence. The fact that Al Connor's body jerks at the climactic moment of the murder film, and that his fellow characters respond in equally involuntary ways, refers to a different type of authenticity and a kind of character unlike that involved in Goffman's "patroll[ing]" of the "territories of the self" (240-41). Here the borders of character are not reinforced but traduced in a transindividual, almost transcendent movement of feeling. The same direction is evident in the passage from Farewell, where Marlowe's laconic self-mastery is far outweighed by the delirious immediacy of pain. As the indulgent lyricism in Chandler's account of the hero's suffering makes clear, the temptation here is not macho self-assertion but a sublime lack of control. And, as if to underline the importance of that temptation, Farewell, My Lovely returns to this sensibility later when Marlowe has been kidnapped and drugged. Again Chandler's protagonist shows a heroic effort to dominate his rebellious limbs, but far more time

and energy is expended on the comic effects of Marlowe's loss of consciousness and control. What seems important is less a well-patrolled self than the simultaneously agonizing and burlesque dispersal of identity.⁴

A comparable confusion exists, I think, in the very fact that The Virgin Kills places so much reliance on the device of the movies. Detective fiction is a genre that depends heavily on face-to-face contact to personalize its disparate social tensions and to reintegrate the discontinuous features of modernity that are its underlying concern. In what might be seen as an anticipation of years of Hollywood melodrama, however, Whitfield renders his novel's revelation of truth and its crucial and solitary moment of empathy entirely spectacular. In the end, the solution of the murders and the reestablishment of ordinary life have nothing to do with genius or human agency and everything to do with film's technical capacity to represent and its theatrical power to elicit embodied feeling. Thus, in contrast to the classic detective fiction Whitfield seeks to emulate, sympathy and the social contract in The Virgin Kills remain, as it were, thoroughly mediated. If, on the one hand, this moment of spectacle looks like an optimistic expression of the possibilities for public life raised by electronic communication (Ross Perot avant la lettre), from the other direction it resembles that familiar tendency of hard-boiled fiction -- its predilection for loose margins,

raveled threads, uncertain closure. It is as though the apparatus of the revelatory film, in the very motion with which Whitfield sought to overcome that uncertainty, reintroduced it as a spectral but nagging presence.

Whitfield's denouement leaves us, then, with an unresolved tension between the organic and the mediated, the personal and the spectacular, the intensely physical and the diffusely abstract, and a similarly paradoxical emphasis on the theatrical force of the embattled body is evident in Farewell, My Lovely. Indeed, it is a confusion that runs through the best hard boiled fiction. On the one hand, hard-boiled writers turn to the physical body as a representative of the authentic and elemental, and the sole point of the fiction often seems to be to depict the substantial, basic, suffering male figure in conflict or simply in motion. Thus, a typical paragraph of hard-boiled exposition reads:

I went through another room and into the kitchen and on through, out the back door. I crossed the backyard and jumped a low fence and walked through another yard to a gate that led into an alley. I sloshed along through the mud until I came to a cross-street, and went on down to the corner that was diagonally across the block from the McCrary house (Cain, Slayers 14).

The body that conforms to this action is the intractable figure presented by Sam Spade or Philip Marlowe in the moments when they are most imposing and resolute and when the moral significance of their poise is most legible. And the narrative that describes it is not, as it might first seem, an affectless depiction of empty movement, but a voice correlative with physical grace. The skill and assurance with which the hard-boiled protagonist acts are the only meanings to be conveyed.

Yet, hard-boiled fiction is often drawn to another possibility implicit in Whitfield and Chandler's scenes. Here, the extremity of violence and physical pain issues in a surreal dispersal of the very reality effects that the emphasis on the physical seems designed to evoke. Rather than substantial, the hard-boiled body is rendered hallucinatory and overdetermined, potentially empty of secure meaning and identity, and subject to the most grotesque and comic distortions. The quintessential hard-boiled figure in this context is not the ramrod pose of the heroic private eye, but the grotesquely twisted policeman who appears at the scene of Miles Archer's murder, or the withered frame of General Sternwood in The Big Sleep, the grizzled tramps of David Goodis's books, or the mutilated and horrifically imprisoned heroes of Jim Thompson novels like Savage Night and The Getaway. Figures such as these present the nightmare inversion of the hard-boiled hero's

moral stature, and they are characteristically invested with the combination of awe and repulsion that folk religion reserves for the deformed. Nevertheless, hard-boiled fiction is drawn compulsively to these grotesques, pulled in a direction effectively summed up by the grimly humorous title of one of Hammett's earliest stories, "Bodies Piled Up."

A simpler way to put all of this might be to say that from its earliest moments hard-boiled thriller fiction places an undue emphasis on physical experience as the fundamental locus of meaning and that a predictable condition results: the human body becomes the notorious unstable signifier. Fraught with importance, it is subject both to a spectacular apotheosis and a complementary abstraction, where meaning slips away to be replaced by marks of confusion. In fact, as the passage from Farewell, My Lovely reveals, a constantly renewed exchange between control and dispersal naturally follows. The contrast between ascetic self-management and a delirious loss of command is paralleled by a conflict between laconic narration and writerly excess. And this tension partly explains the close connection the genre draws between masochism and sadism: both show action and meaning that veers between the moral legibility of asceticism and violence screamingly out of bounds.

Nothing makes this point clearer than Jim Thompson's novels, perhaps the most deliberately brutal and excessive in the genre. Lou Ford's comically sadistic use of cliché in The Killer Inside Me (discussed in chapter three) immediately draws hard-boiled fiction's intimate connection between violence and signification, and it further links them to the schizophrenic excess of Ford's identity. Aggressively trite expression indicates Ford's cruelty and the mock-Olympian manner by which he manipulates other characters, but it is also our first glimpse that his self-control is waning. As Ford's attempts to manage his public image and his efforts to plot the collective knowledge of his small city grow more risky and helpless, the novel descends into ever greater violence and confusion. Ford's sadism reaches its infamous nauseating culmination when he beats his fiancée Amy to death ("my fist went back against her spine, and the flesh closed around it to the wrist") and plots to blame it on a vagrant he has captured. The following lines describe both Ford's cruel pleasure in his authorial control over the helpless bum and, in the bewildering mix of fantasies that results, a suggestion of a vertiginous loss of command:

[H]e kept making that damned funny noise,
his lips quivering ninety to the minute and
his eyes rolling all-white.

I laughed and laughed, he looked and sounded so funny I couldn't help it. Then, I remembered what he'd done and I stopped laughing, and got mad -- sore all over.

'You son-of-a-bitch,' I said. 'I was going to marry that poor little girl. We were going to elope and she caught you going through the house and you tried to . . .'

I stopped, because he hadn't done it at all. But he could have done it. He could've done it just as easy as not (142, 145).

Ford is appropriately enough undone when a letter left by Amy is discovered and when Joyce Lakeland, a prostitute he believes he has murdered, survives to contradict his account of events. As his control over the town's interpretation of his actions diminishes, Thompson's narrator becomes more violent and his first-person monologue grows similarly uncontrolled, the folksy tone and the rural bromides illogically disconnected from the story and repeating in violent succession: "What are you going to do and say? Why, pardner, that's simple. It's as easy as nailing your balls to a stump and falling off backwards. Snow again, pardner, and drift me hard, because that's an easy one. You're gonna say, a winner never quits and a quitter never wins. You're gonna smile boy, you're gonna show 'em the ol' fightin' smile" (158). In the end, Ford is shot by a dozen policemen

as, in a suicidal gesture, he attempts to murder Joyce Lakeland before them. Like the helpless tramp, she is rendered in the final scene as one of the genre's characteristic grotesques -- so violently disformed and reduced to a mere faltering voice as to seem a caricature of a Beckettian stage figure. Ford's own end comes fittingly as an explosive dispersal of voice and person:

Her neck was in a cast that came clear up to her chin like a collar, and she walked stiff-backed and jerky. Her face was a white mask of gauze and tape, and nothing much showed of it but her eyes and her lips. And she was trying to say something -- her lips were moving -- but she didn't really have a voice. She could hardly get out a whisper. [. . .]

And I sprang at her, I made for her just like they thought I would. Almost. And it was like I'd signaled, the way the smoke suddenly poured up through the floor. And the room exploding with shots and yells, and I seemed to explode with it, yelling and laughing and . . . and . . . (187).

The apocalyptic conclusion is reminiscent of the boldly experimental end of A Hell of a Woman, where the narrator's gruesome suicide is told in two confusing and contradictory

accounts, alternating line-by-line. As events grow more violent and out-of-control, Thompson's narrators become suitably wilder, their stories fractured, raving, and incoherent, and their voices ultimately fading, as above, into oblivion.

A good deal of the interest of Whitfield's Virgin Kills, though, stems from how distant it at first seems from this kind of rampant violence and disorder. And that distance tells us something not simply about the way hard-boiled fiction attempts to use violence, but about how central to the genre that reliance on action is and how deeply it is involved in defining a hard-boiled sense of identity. Part of the interest of Whitfield's novel, then, is that it also seems quite unlike the vast majority of Whitfield's own work. When The Virgin Kills was published in 1932, Whitfield had already written Green Ice and Death in a Bowl, two of the most celebrated hard-boiled thrillers, and Black Mask magazine was near the height of its pervasive influence. Yet, the isolated, ritzy setting of Whitfield's third novel, its glamorous society, and its compatible comedy of manners make The Virgin Kills seem like a departure from Whitfield's more familiar work and an imitation of the golden-age detective novel. Until the novel's final scenes, that is, when the incongruous movie offers a sudden return of the pulp thriller's emphasis on action. We see briefly what "classic" detective fiction

almost never reveals -- the moment of murder -- and the melodramatically suffering, embattled body makes an unexpected and disruptive reappearance.

From this perspective, Babe Harron's death serves as a sort of return of the hard-boiled repressed. The newsfilm not only establishes a contrast between the polite but bitchy atmosphere of the yacht's cabin and the monumental struggles of the murder victim. As instrument of the novel's denouement, it provides an answer to The Virgin Kills' comic opening passages (noted in chapter two), where the pulp stereotype Mick O'Rourke arrives as an equally displaced emissary from the hard-boiled. Like Hammett's "Tenth Clew" or the passage from Farewell, My Lovely noted above, then, Whitfield's novel comes to seem like a conscious meditation on the distinctiveness of the hard-boiled genre. In the final scenes, the temporarily banished values of pulp fiction reassert themselves and take command of the "golden-age" environment that had estranged and restricted them. And the "terrible seconds" of Babe Harron's death thus offers an example of a basic function of hard-boiled action: it serves as a charismatic reordering of affairs, where the dramatic elevation of the masculine body allows a recasting of popular values and, in this case implicitly, a reassessment of the values of popular fiction.

That charismatic moment need not come solely through the depiction of suffering, but violence and duress emphasize basic features of this structure -- items that Goffman refers to as the "presence" and "fatefulness" integral to action (163-166). It is important to hard-boiled stories, as it is to other varieties of thriller fiction, that the protagonist's body be on the line, that its integrity be threatened. The perfect example might be the conclusion of The Big Sleep, where, in a dramatically isolated moment and setting, Philip Marlowe conclusively identifies the murderer by allowing her to shoot at him. A quite similar scene concludes Farewell, My Lovely, and, again, the pattern can be seen to run throughout the genre. What stories like Thompson's Killer Inside Me reveal is merely this structure's inversion. Rather than the heroic poise of Marlowe, we see the integrity of Lou Ford's body literally blown apart. But the same basic situation exists in all cases: in a moment whose fatefulness is emphasized by real or potential violence, the story is resolved by the theatrical display of the hero's body. Babe Harron's death demonstrates how inseparably the ultimate truth of the hard-boiled story is tied to what Goffman would call the presentation of the self.

At least one more element enters into hard-boiled fiction's emphasis on the active body, then, for The Virgin Kills' assertion of a pulp perspective occurs crucially

through a reference to work. The resolution of the novel's tensions occurs not simply through the screening of the death scene, but in the effects it produces. And, as if to demonstrate the two sides of hard-boiled action, Babe Harron's dramatic disintegration is immediately followed by the reintegration of his pulp counterpart, Mick O'Rourke. As a direct consequence of the film, Mick O'Rourke is able to perform successfully for the first time the job for which he was hired: the hard-boiled role of bodyguard. Through the course of the narrative O'Rourke has been immobilized by the suspicions of other characters, the surveillance of the police, and perhaps by his own sense of failure. But the spectacular display of the victim's suffering and the reassuring flow of feeling it stimulates in the screening room dispel those doubts and free O'Rourke in the symbolically crucial moment to perform his task: "And then Mick . . . was blocking the . . . [murderer's] path. . . . [He] stepped in and brought up his right arm. There was a thudding sound, and I saw Vollmer's body collapse. Mick stood motionlessly, looking down" (225). Thus, an additional problem complicates the question: in hard-boiled fiction, the attraction to violence often seems intimately related to the genre's comparable obsession with work, with its protesting emphasis on the protagonist's status as laborer. It is perhaps in this way that hard-boiled action is most distinctive; not only does it place the

protagonist's body on the line, but that figure is above all a working body. In the moment that he raises his arm, Mick O'Rourke is transformed from comic figure to that familiar Thirties icon, the noble working man.

The moral oppositions that underlie this moment are clear. Not only is the legibility of Mick's poise contrasted to the panicked floundering of the murderer. The ease with which he finally performs his job is distinguished from his earlier failures as it is from the glamorous intrigue and gossip of the other characters. The authenticity of violence is joined with the simple virtues of honest work, and the disruptive force of hard-boiled action is implicitly attributed to its role as labor in an environment dedicated to effete and disabling leisure. The cabin where Mick O'Rourke performs his redemptive task could be described, then, by the same phrase that Philip Marlowe uses to dismiss Lindsay Marriott's living-room: "It was a room where anything could happen except work" (30).

Marlowe's disparaging reference to Marriott's home occurs as the two prepare to leave on the errand where Marriot will be murdered. That is the same mission, of course, where Marlowe will suffer the pains and confusion described in the passages quoted above, and the negotiations that private eye and client engage in over the task reinforce the similarity of Chandler and Whitfield's tales.

Confronting Marriott and brushing off the client's complaints about his "manner," Marlowe says:

Let's look at this job a little. You want a bodyguard, but he can't wear a gun. You want a helper, but he isn't supposed to know what he's supposed to do. You want me to risk my neck without knowing why or what for or what the risk is. What are you offering for all this? (32)

As in the less explicit example offered by The Virgin Kills, Marlowe's catalog reveals the fundamental connection that hard-boiled fiction draws between action and the "character" of honest labor. Marriott's high-brow refinement and genteel manners indicate a distaste for and a desire to remain ignorant of the realities of the protagonists' work. But they also signify a constraining managerial control that the client attempts to maintain over the hard-boiled hero. The violence of hard-boiled action serves, therefore, as an irruption of the real within an artificial world of leisure, one that typically causes clients to confront the consequences of their aversion from the facts. And the first major consequence is the charismatic rearrangement of relations between, as it were, management and labor. Another way of putting this might be to say that hard-boiled fiction associates action's emphasis on self-control with a vision of control over work. Whether one considers The

Virgin Kills, Farewell, My Lovely, or countless other examples from Red Harvest through Double Indemnity through Chester Himes's Harlem domestic series, hard-boiled fiction nearly always features some tense contest between manager and worker, and violence almost always offers the hard-boiled protagonist the opportunity to seize control and dramatically reverse the terms of that relation.

There is hardly a hard-boiled crime story, then, that could not take as its motto the first sentence of Studs Terkel's book Working: "This book, being about work, is, by its very nature, about violence" (xi). Hard-boiled fiction, it has often been noted, is almost obsessively occupied by work. Indeed, this is one of the obvious ways that it tends to differ from other varieties of crime literature. In a representative remark, Race Williams, the first hard-boiled private eye, explains his rudeness to the police by asserting flatly: "I work for a living," and the implicit contrast to the foppish aristocrats who dominate the contemporary detective fiction (e.g., S.S. Van Dine's Philo Vance) is clear (Daly, "Some Die Hard," Adventures 13). The hard-boiled protagonist Williams defines is first and foremost a paid employee who claims to be engaged in the world of crime and law-enforcement not for amusement or justice but as a way of earning his keep.⁵ More importantly, for hard-boiled writers, as for Terkel,

violence captures a fundamental truth about labor, one that manages at the same time to subsume ideas and feelings about work that are related but barely harmonious. Violence indicates first of all the constraint of the worker's relations with management -- the protagonist's discomfort and frustrated desire to control the meaning of work and life. In this sense, it offers a portrait of labor reduced to its baldest features, and in Babe Harron's terrible fight, Mick O'Rourke's capable service, and Philip Marlowe's confrontation with Lindsay Marriott and the ensuing trouble, Whitfield and Chandler offer pop fiction versions of a potent fantasy. In all these cases, a leisure class comes face to face with unsettling examples of the effort and exploitation that support its comfort, and the sufferings of the protagonist suggest an incipient mythology of working-class martyrdom.

At the same time, violence typically indicates -- as with O'Rourke and Marlowe's struggles -- the redemptive authenticity of honest effort. Again, a contrast to a hypothetical middle-class perspective is drawn, but not to delineate the control exercised by management or the worker's frustrating limitations. Rather, here, as in so much of the contemporary proletarian literature, an impression of anti-bourgeois sincerity is stressed. Frederick Nebel's hero Donahue, for example, defends his work by saying: "It keeps me in butts and I see the country

and I don't have to slave over a desk. . . . It's not a pretty game, and no guy ever wrote a poem about it. But it's the only hole I fit in" ("Rough Justice" 165-166). Together these two fantasies create the kind of partial and distorted view of working life that one might expect from pulp literature, and that points us to the third and perhaps most important connection that hard-boiled fiction draws between work and violence -- one especially apparent in the spectacular distortions of the heroic body noted above. Struggling on the grounds of pop fiction to make appeal to the contemporary experience of work and to adapt adventure fiction to the limits of ordinary living, hard-boiled writers make an unusual discovery: within the terms of their genre, pulp writers find that work can appear only as action. Thus, violence comes to suggest not so much the constraints or conditions of labor; it is literally what hard-boiled protagonists do as work, and its disruptiveness indicates among other things the sheer difficulty of representing labor within pop culture.

Hammett's 1925 story "The Gutting of Couffignal" makes this point especially clearly. Like the later novel Red Harvest, the story draws a direct connection to broader conflicts between labor and capital by making a convulsive historical episode an important part of the story's background. But where Red Harvest places its action in the context of I.W.W. organizing efforts in western mining towns

and the brutal repression of the Wobblies by Pinkertons, "Couffignal" refers to the still recent October Revolution.⁶ The tale concerns an island just off the mainland in San Pablo Bay that serves as an idyllic retreat for:

well-fed old gentlemen who, the profits they took from the world with both hands in their younger days now stowed away as safe percentages, have bought into the island colony so they may spend what is left of their lives nursing their livers and improving their golf among their kind. They admit to the island only as many storekeepers, working people, and similar riffraff as are needed to keep them comfortably served (Big Knockover 4).

Summoned to this island to guard the gifts from a lavish wedding, Hammett's Continental Op finds himself in the middle of something between a coup and a siege. During a nighttime storm, the island is plundered by what seems to be a small army wielding machine guns and grenades, and the Op chases around the island hoping to discover the thieves and prevent their escape. Only later, after some calm has returned, does the Op discover that the army is an illusion, much of the fighting diversion, and that the "gutting" was in fact organized by a family living on the island -- the Zhukovskis, White Russians who have fled from the

Bolsheviks. Hammett's story manages to seem, then, like a variation on Fitzgerald's fantasy "The Diamond as Big as the Ritz" and an inverted retelling of the Russian Revolution. This time around, it is the aristocrats who seize the state from the "bewildered civilians," and their motivation, as Princess Zhukovski explains, is much like that of Fitzgerald's Washingtons (30). They aim to hoard: "always our capital shrank, and always the day approached on which we should be shabby and hungry There was no place for us in the world. Outcasts easily become outlaws. Why not? Could it be said that we owed the world any fealty? Had not the world sat idly by and seen us despoiled of place and property and country?" (32)

It is moments like these that warm the hearts of Hammett's leftist admirers and that suggest a correspondence between the populist fantasies of pulp fiction and the radical politics Hammett would turn to during the Depression. For, in contrast to the xenophobia the story at first suggests (Russians, in a sense inspired by communism, taking over a small American town), Hammett's narrator is careful to draw a parallel between his villains and the "retired capitalists" who own the island (16). Not only are the Zhukovskis residents of the island and their robbery therefore something of an auto-coup. Their motivations are the same as those of Couffignal's legitimate citizens, who want nothing more than to secede, wealth intact, from

political society. Indeed, the Op offers an ironic parallel to General Zhukovski's assault force. Working as a security guard, he is on the island as something of a private army, and his presence is a reminder of how little "fealty" the legitimate residents pay to public life.

Moreover, the narrator's description of the island's wealth -- "t[aken] with both hands . . . , stowed away as safe percentages," and symbolized by the literal pile of wedding presents the Op guards -- is a clear echo of the Zhukovskis, who caché their stealings in a pit beneath a garage. The upshot is a populist image of political economy: "capitalists" are plunderers and hoarders. And the island setting -- with its "main street" lined by "the usual bank, hotel, moving-picture theater, and stores" -- suggests both that these "economic royalists" (as F.D.R would phrase it 10 years later) have absconded with the national wealth and that they have taken over the national community (3). Five years before the Red Decade, Hammett's story cynically implies that the revolution has already happened here. Its battlefield was the post-WWI boom and the era's expansion of conspicuous luxury, and its victors were the "retired capitalists" who have deceived the "bewildered citizens" by false alarms, shadow armies, and a sham main street.⁷

The Continental Op's response to this fantastic situation comprises one of the more famous passages in Hammett's early pulp fiction. Like some of the moments from

his other stories already noted and like "Couffignal"'s deft series of echoes and its rich invention, the passage demonstrates Hammett's unusual felicity as a thriller writer -- among other things, his gift for sharp, comic dialogue, his sense of the absurd, and his ability to suggest character and dramatic conflict through verbal manner. Yet, like the similarly unusual scene from Chandler with which this chapter began, Hammett's passage also seems representative. It offers perhaps the first and most compelling statement of one of the hard-boiled hero's signal attributes, the famed adherence to a moral "code." At the story's conclusion, the Op confronts the Princess Zhukovski. In a clear anticipation of The Maltese Falcon, she tries to bribe him with plunder and love and attempts to appeal to his sense of gallantry. His response is deliberately blunt:

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 thousand 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 work makes you want to do it as well as you can.

Otherwise there'd be no sense to it. That's the fix I am in. I don't know anything else, don't enjoy anything else, don't want to know or enjoy anything else. You can't weigh that against any sum of money. . . . It's the only kind of sport I know anything about, and I can't imagine a pleasanter future than some twenty-five years more of it. I'm not going to blow that up!

When the Princess persists with a veiled offer of sexual temptation, the Op, in one of Hammett's best-known lines, uses his work to draw more resolutely away from typical human interaction: "You think I'm a man and you're a woman. That's wrong. I'm a manhunter and you're something that has been running in front of me" (33).

Caught between capitalists and aristocrats, then, and resisting the decadent secession of both, the Op maintains an impression of independence by opting for a different kind of remove -- the route of a seeming professionalism. His own "fealty" is to vocation, the value of honest labor and the neutral principles of craft and service. (A good part of the Op's disdain for the Zhukovskis comes in response to their aristocratic unprofessionalism: "here are you people with absolutely no criminal experience trying to swing a trick that needed the highest sort of criminal skill. . . . Amateur stuff!" {32}) The curious thing, however, is that

the Op's declaration has no effect. The Princess persists in disbelieving him, and it is as though on this resort island -- dedicated to leisurely consumption and cut off from "working people and riffraff" -- the Op's emphasis on honest labor has little meaning. At the story's conclusion, the Op, immobilized by a sprained ankle, holds a pistol on the Princess, and she turns to leave, sure of the hero's gallant unwillingness to shoot a woman. The Op, in the only action that can give his speech any meaning, responds by shooting her in the leg.

Couffignal, in other words, is but a more graphic representation of the terrain sketched by the cabins of The Virgin Kills and Lindsay Marriott's living room. These are all places where no work should occur, and the identity of the hard-boiled protagonist and of his literature is premised on their alienation from this world and an allegiance to the virtues of honest labor. Yet, the very structure this opposition sets up and the capacity it cedes to leisured wealth to define a sham version of ordinary life guarantees that work will appear as a pure violence that automatically tends toward the spectacular and unreal. It is a situation that brings to mind Hannah Arendt's claim that violence is the opposite of power (56 and passim). In a world where anything can happen but work, work can only be disruption. Thus, having shot the Princess, the Op already

finds his confidence and sense of identity shifting in the shock of the moment:

She sat down -- plump! Utter surprise stretched her white face. It was too soon for pain.

I had never shot a woman before. I felt queer about it.

'You ought to have known I'd do it!' My voice sounded harsh and savage and like a stranger's in my ears (37).

There is little doubt that the simple declarative of "I felt queer" is intended largely for a perverse comic effect. A striking contrast to the Princess's aristocratic demeanor ("'Adieu,' she said softly"), it is part of Hammett's career-long effort to mock and undermine the pretense and sentimentality of pop fiction (36). Yet, there is also something typically Hammettian about the next sentences, where that satiric edge is loaded with a deeper sense of estrangement.⁸ In the context of the rest of the story, that intimation of confusion and despair might be said to refer to the disorienting effects of forcing a recognition of labor upon a world determined to ignore it. The carefully manicured main street of Couffignal, in this context, refers not just to a suburbanizing post-WWI America, but to the universe of entertainment, geared to a developing consumer society, that represents it. Fashioning

itself as a kind of insurgent populism arrayed against this culture, hard-boiled fiction inevitably construes its own appearance and its most deeply held values as a type of violent confusion.

2

The very form of the pulp magazines where hard-boiled fiction develops emphasizes the implicit tensions that define Hammett's "Couffignal." As chapter two pointed out, although the pulp industry thrives in the years between the wars, in its most fundamental aspects, it remains a holdover from nineteenth-century traditions of cheap publishing. The anomalous presence of the Continental Op in Couffignal's manicured playground mirrors the incongruity of the pulp magazines in a publishing boom driven by advertising and a swelling consumer economy. If for no other reason than default, the pulps become thought of as a kind of working-class culture by comparison. During the Twenties expansion, mainstream publications grow rich by stressing status and taste and the vital power of consumption to achieve them. But, in much the same way that stratified income distribution prevents America's working-class families from wholeheartedly joining the consumer economy ("too much frozen capital," Philip Marlowe accurately diagnoses the

Depression),⁹ the pulp magazines are by their very structures cut off from slick-type boosterism. They remain anchored to publishing methods of the past and construe the mass circulation publications as their bitter enemies.

As chapter two also pointed out, the little advertising pulps do contain reinforces the impression that the magazines are targeted to a working-class audience. Not only are there hardly any pitches for consumer goods and brand-name luxury products in the magazines, their two most prevalent kinds of advertisement are for correspondence courses offering a quick path to advancement through acquisition of a trade ("because I mailed that coupon two years ago, I am a trained man -- making a trained man's pay") and Charles-Atlas type body building programs (Hersey 68-81).¹⁰ These latter especially, in the emphasis they place on potency and the visible display of strength -- on what Bernarr Macfadden would celebrate as "physical culture" -- suggest the self-image of the working-class body and its distance from middle-class refinement.¹¹ Thus in 1923, when Black Mask's fiction was still dominated by imitations of the cultured diction of S.S. Van Dine, advertisements for the program of "muscular development" sponsored by Earle E. Liederman, "the acme of physical perfection," were already undercutting the magazine's rhetorical refinement:

IF A SNAKE HAD BRAINS -- he would still be a snake. With his present body he would be

forced to continue crawling on his belly. So he would be no better off.

Of what use is your brain? A snake is the lowest and meanest of animal life, while mankind is the highest. Do you make use of your advantages? Your brain is used to direct your body. If you don't keep the body in fit condition to do its work, you are doomed to failure. How are you using this wonderful structure? Do you neglect it or improve it. EXAMINE YOURSELF. ¹²

Confused as Liederman's rhetoric may be, its message and underlying antagonism to the era's emphasis on middle-class educational self-improvement and consumer grooming is apparent. As Harold Hersey recognized, pulp advertising was "not interested in appearances, cleanliness and the things that make life easy," and it disdained the slick magazines' obsession with "beauty, personal hygiene and the creature comforts" in favor of "big muscles [and] virility" (77-78). The contrast is indeed striking. Most advertising in the Twenties and Thirties presents a bizarre parallel to "classic" detective fiction's use of the signifying body. In the same manner that the presentation of the self in "classic" detective stories renders characters vulnerable, the burgeoning mass-market advertising of the Twenties and Thirties makes the body a locus of fear and anxiety. It

"attempted to focus man's critique against himself -- his body had kept him from happiness. . . . Ads constantly hammered away at everything that was his own -- his bodily functions, his self-esteem -- and offered something of theirs as a socially more effective substitute" (Ewen 46; Levine, Unpredictable Past 212-213).¹³ While Liederman's demand that the reader "examine himself" makes a similar plea to anxious self-awareness, the emphasis that his advertisement places on physical potency is entirely absent from the slicks' warnings about dandruff and halitosis. Pulp advertising's implication is not merely that some health or beauty product will enable the consumer to avoid humiliation, but that a program of "muscular development" will grant the reader the kind of monumental bodily authority that the classically posed photo of Liederman accompanying his text suggests. As in the case of Macfadden's physical culture, pulp advertising of this variety made the "body an end in itself and boasted to readers that . . . , even in the middle of a complicated corporate world, [it] could be shaped, molded, and controlled" (Fabian 53).

During the later Twenties and the Thirties, hard-boiled fiction would all but take over the pulp industry, fulfilling Liederman's focus on the qualities of our "wonderful structure" with a physical culture of its own. As if to realize a potential inherent in the pulps, hard-

boiled stories would displace the snakey qualities of brain work in "classic" detective fiction with the authority of physical action and feeling. They would offer, in Michael Denning's terms, a portrait of a different kind of "virtue" than that which prevailed in publications aimed at a middle-class readership, stressing a "manly" autonomy and defiance against the "vacuous expression" of the "'Arrow-collar' ideal" (Mechanic Accents 194, Hersey 63). The charismatic presentation of the heroic figure evident in Mick O'Rourke's triumph would serve as a fictional parallel to Liederman's imposing stature -- the hard-boiled body become a monument of honesty and authority.

As a story like Hammett's "Couffignal" suggests, though, and as Hersey's comments make abundantly clear, pulp fiction's appeal to bodily experience was situated squarely within the dynamics of the era's growing consumer culture and its newly developing sense of identity as a matter of dramatic self-presentation. If, as Hersey points out, the stress on virility was implicitly posed as an alternative to the artificial qualities of consumer image, it remained, by Hersey and Liederman's own terms, an alternative within consumer culture -- an advertised authenticity. As the billboards at the murder scene in The Maltese Falcon perhaps suggest, little could rival mass-market advertising in the inter-war period for its suddenly acquired and awesome power to make the human body a spectacular, dramatic entity.

Hard-boiled fiction and the pulp magazines may have aimed for an opposed aesthetic, a desire to stress the elemental and honest terms of bodily experience, but for that very reason they remained bound to their opponent like an answer to its riddle. The active body is haunted by its opposite, the lifeless or, worse, manipulated manikins or the "dummies" Shaw recognized in non-hardboiled fiction, "stuffed into the clothes of the parts they are supposed to act."¹⁴ It seems appropriate, then, that the most aestheticized object in hard-boiled fiction is the (often exquisite) corpse. Stripped of the energy that drives it through a gamut of dramatic poses and robbed of the power to aggressively assert an authentic identity, the body slips back to the slick meaninglessness of an advertisement:

Leopardi lay squarely in the middle of the bed, a large smooth silent man, waxy and artificial in death. Even his large mustache looked phony. His half-open eyes, sightless as marbles, looked as if they had never seen.

. . .

A small Mauser lay cuddled in his right hand, on top of the bed's second pillow.

'That's artistic,' Steve said (Chandler, "The King in Yellow," Simple Art of Murder 117).

The conclusion of Hammett's "Couffignal" and the film in Whitfield's Virgin Kills portray a strikingly similar result: what should be the most fundamental features of hard-boiled authority disperse into the surreal and uncertain.

As "Couffignal" suggests, that confusing dispersion of meaning is essentially what happens with hard-boiled fiction's portrait of work. For all of the Op's emphasis on the values of his trade, labor itself comes to seem unbelievable and disorienting on the Zhukovskis' island. Much the same thing occurs in Red Harvest, where the Op's obsessive pursuit of his task issues in a killing spree that leaves him avowedly "blood simple," and in The Maltese Falcon, where Sam Spade's defense of his trade ultimately appears a too heavily protested rationalization. Of course, as pop culture par excellence, detective stories, even at their boldest, are congenitally limited to fantasized images of work.¹⁵ But what is striking about hard-boiled fiction is the way that, on the one hand, it seems to press against the bounds of pulp fiction in an effort to suggest the conditions of real working life and how, on the other, it casts its own images of labor into doubt and a disappearing history.

It has become something of a commonplace to note that detective literature offers a portrait of unalienated labor. That, after all, is a good part of the proletarian romance

Nebel's Donahue and Hammett's Op describe -- a picture of work unbounded by place and time, by managerial supervision, by the exchange of labor power for salary (Freedman and Kendrick 210).¹⁶ Marlowe's conflict with Marriott points, though, to hard-boiled fiction's concern with a more specific situation. Their disagreement is a kind of negotiation already placed within the context of a labor contract. It turns on the conditions of the private eye's task and, more importantly, on the questions of who will control the knowledge essential to the job and who will direct its completion. To Marlowe's demands for information, Marriott replies with the predictable answer of autocratic management: "I'm offering you a hundred dollars for a few hours of your time. If that isn't enough say so" (32). Where Marlowe asks for job control and the definition of a specific task, his boss offers to purchase the abstract quality of labor power and, implicitly, the right to dispose of those few hours of Marlowe's time as he thinks appropriate.

The remainder of Farewell, My Lovely, of course, will demonstrate Marlowe's unwillingness to be bound by any constraints in the completion of his job. Indeed, the parallel plot of Marlowe's sentimental efforts on behalf of Moose Malloy portrays a transmutation of compulsion into freedom, as Chandler's hero willingly carries out the task Malloy first threateningly demands of him. Yet, in

Marlowe's brief conflict with Marriott and in their five or six pages of negotiations, Chandler highlights a feature that hard-boiled fiction introduces to popular culture -- explicit struggle over work. Typically, the hard-boiled hero asserts against deceptive or timid clients, or repressive police, or simply impossibly difficult circumstances the right to do a job as he or she sees fit. Moreover, hard-boiled writers make of their protagonists' conflicts with the police something more than a contrast between official bumbling and individual innovation. Their disagreements become institutional conflicts in which the police seek to protect or extend their authority and the hard-boiled hero attempts to defy or evade surveillance, offering perhaps the first pop culture treatments of the inter-war era's rapidly expanding bureaucracy (Levine, Unpredictable Past 247).

If hard-boiled fiction's overwhelming first impression is of bosses handily defeated and constricting institutions readily circumnavigated, though, Marlowe's conflict with Marriott suggests an important corollary: in order to make the hero's liberty meaningful, the genre must invest nearly as much energy in realizing the protagonist's restraint. The potential therefore exists for these stories to become tales not so much of autonomy as frustration. Indeed, if we turn to the dramatic apologies for honest labor that Hammett gives his characters in "Couffignal" and The Maltese Falcon,

they look not simply unbelievable, but like an inversion of the pattern sketched in Farewell, My Lovely. Here the movement is from apparent freedom to compulsion. Everything about Sam Spade's famous speech at the end of Hammett's novel stresses not what he wants but what he must or should do: "When a man's partner is killed he's supposed to do something about it. . . . Then, it happens we were in the detective business. Well, when one of your organization gets killed it's bad business to let the killer get away. . . . 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" (213-214). The curious passivity and lack of freedom implicit in this vocabulary is confirmed by the fact that the police arrive at Spade's apartment immediately after the speech has been completed. Although Spade has sought aggressively to defend his independence and privacy from the law throughout the novel, his most strident appeal to his autonomy as a working detective comes as he is about to answer the demands of the cops and turn the murderer over to them in his own home. Part of what makes Spade's appeal to his work seem empty and unrealistic, therefore, is that it is quite literally surrounded and enforced by the police.

Although Sam Spade's final speech to Brigid is often thought to indicate his attainment of a kind of "daemonic" independence from ordinary human entanglements, then, what

it in fact reveals is both the temptation and the frustration of a kind of professional autonomy. The remarkable catalog of Sam Spade's eight reasons to turn over Brigid to the police looks at first like his earlier justifications for taking her money and telling her what to do, just as it resembles his and every hard-boiled protagonist's arguments for evading the police: "If one can convince others that one's skills are unique, that one is an expert whose decisions cannot be challenged, then one can become insulated from the commands of others" (Sennett and Cobb 237). The ultimate pathos of The Maltese Falcon is that Spade cannot achieve this kind of insulation at all, and its semblance comes only from an implicit compliance to the institutional force of law that the private eye seeks so often to escape.

A similar disappointment occurs in "Couffignal." Although the police in that story are not quite the antagonistic force they are in Hammett's later novel and although the Op's appeal to work seems far less cynical and passive than Spade's, there, too, the apparent independence and authority of the protagonist is undercut. The Op, we have seen, resembles Spade in his impassioned appeal to vocation, but the estrangement emphasized at the story's conclusion dissolves what should be the reward of the professional. "[O]nly in the professions," Sennett and Cobb assert, "does the man of action, exerting his abilities,

appear united with the real self" (229). In contrast to this vision of working harmony, the final lines of Hammett's story reveal a concise portrait of alienation. Action's promise of self-assertion instead leaves the Op discovering that the voice that in the previous moment had confidently defended his work resembles "a stranger's."

The simplest explanation for these contradictions may be that neither the Op nor Spade claim to be a professional in the manner that Sennett and Cobb describe. Rather each makes appeal to values of skill and trade that the contemporary boom in professionalism was helping to render all but obsolete. During the inter-war period, as chapter two noted, long-term trends in expert training and higher education, what Burton Bledstein calls a "culture of professionalism," reached a kind of fruition and expanded dramatically. That development was not just a natural outgrowth of increased schooling, though. It was underwritten by post-World War One expansions in bureaucratic management, the assertion by manufacturers of greater control over workers and their tasks, and the increasing rapidity of a process that had begun years before: the enforced erosion of skilled labor and its replacement by technical expertise.¹⁷ The tendency, as one historian describes it, was toward a "working world of officers and enlisted men" -- of sharpened distinctions between professionals pursuing a calling versus degraded

wage workers.¹⁸ If, as it often seems, pulp magazines were lead by circumstance toward becoming a literature for the enlisted men, it is unsurprising that the hard-boiled fiction that develops there is bitterly obsessed with control over work. The progress, or decline, charted from "Couffignal" to the Falcon, where the Op's cheerful but ineffectual appeal to his trade gives way to Spade's passivity and cynicism, can be taken for an eloquent account of the decline of the skilled worker's autonomy.

Perhaps this is part of the reason as well for why the hard-boiled protagonist is always worker as antiquated craftsman. On the one hand, hard-boiled stories almost always stress the intuition associated with deeply assimilated skill. This is one crucial implication of the Op's method of "stirring up" matters, as it is of Sam Spade's claim that his "way of learning is to heave a wild and unpredictable monkey-wrench into the machinery" (45). The image in that latter phrase is especially appropriate because it manages to suggest both the seemingly ad hoc procedures of non-professionalized learning and its fundamental opposition to the technocracy that displaces it. Likewise, the aim of hard-boiled action seems often to be to bring forward the non-intellectualized, essentially bodily basis of craftsmanship. Even for the ultra-violent Race Williams, the point of gunplay is to emphasize not merely force but skill, as Carroll John Daly reveals when he has

his protagonist assert: "I have brains, I suppose. We all have. But a sharp eye, a quick draw, and a steady trigger finger drove me into the game" (Snarl 1).

But, in addition to this dexterity, the actions of the hard-boiled hero seem to stress a disappearing local knowledge. A story like Hammett's "Bob Teal" (discussed in chapter one), in its depiction of the death of the Op's naive apprentice, emphasizes the way such ability, slowly and laboriously transmitted, is in danger of being lost; the similar death of Marlowe's admirer George Anson Phillips in Chandler's High Window makes the same point. And the famous passage in The Maltese Falcon, where Sam Spade, having learned of his partner's death, pauses to roll a cigarette in a painstakingly observed passage, offers a parallel example.¹⁹ Spade's "deliberate care" is another reflection of the genre's emphasis on learned physical skill, but here as elsewhere the anachronism of the task already makes that ability part of history. Like the murder of the Op and Marlowe's apprentices and like the eroding urban territory that Philip Marlowe, as honest working-man, is forced to inhabit, Sam Spade's cigarette places the working skills of the private-eye in a fading and scarcely retrievable past.

The oft-noted critical force of hard-boiled fiction's emphasis on work comes, then, less from a realist reflection of actual labor than from the genre's capacity to confront the inter-war years with work habits whose charged values for most were part of fading historical memory. In its relentless focus on physical experience, hard-boiled fiction may have offered a fictional response to the way managerial reform and forced increases in industrial productivity placed the working body at the center of conflicted relations between management and labor. Yet it implicitly countered the professional canons that underlay management justifications of command -- science, training, rationality -- with an ultimately nostalgic source of authority, the "physical skill" of the experienced worker. That anachronism should be attributed, I think, not to pop culture's ideological ability to offer imaginary solutions to real problems, nor even so much to its capacity to preserve and tap popular memory (an idea perhaps consistent with the wholesale belatedness of pulp magazines), but to the working conditions and the notions of literary ability encouraged by the structures of pulp publishing. It is a case, in other words, of convergence, where the fantasy world of pulp literature not only reflects social values, but creates meanings subject to popular valuation. In this sense, hard-boiled fiction offers compelling evidence of the notion floated by Pierre Bourdieu that "[literature] is the

arena par excellence of struggles over job definition" ("Field of Cultural Production" 342).

That pulp publishing would occasion, even encourage, such struggles was evident from its earliest days. Establishing the original pulp magazine, Argosy, in 1896, Frank Munsey sought to define an aesthetic suitable to the market for low-cost literary entertainment he was aiming to corner:

We want stories. That is what we mean -- stories, not dialect sketches, not washed out studies of effete human nature, not weak tales of sickly sentimentality, not 'pretty' writing. . . . [W]e do want fiction in which there is a story, a force, a tale that means something -- in short a story. Good writing is as common as clam shells, while good stories are as rare as statesmanship (Theodore Peterson 15).

Munsey's pronouncement may illustrate his own disdain for fine prose, but, more importantly, it sketches principles of the pulp industry that will maintain relatively unchanged over the first half of the twentieth century. Writing some fifty years later from the other end of the pulp era, Raymond Chandler echoes the import of Munsey's demand in his repeated claims that "emotions and sensations" rather than "ideas" are appropriate to literature. "I am not at all

sure that I approve of the fiction writer as a thinking animal. It's possible that he should do all his thinking with his solar plexus and leave the critical stuff to the boys who cannot write anything else" (Letters 35, 148). Though the ideology may have fractured and grown more complex in the intervening years, the common orientation of Chandler and Munsey's pronouncements is clear: both remarks are polemics addressed to what they imagine are more authoritative conceptions of the literary, and both seek to escape or overcome that authority through a consciously transgressive reversal of the terms of aesthetic judgment. At the focus of the parallel series of structurations that together they invoke -- head vs. guts, art vs. entertainment, effete beauty vs. brutal force -- is the active, working male body. In a parallel to the pulp magazines' advertisements for muscular development, the stress that Munsey and Chandler place on substance, skill, and force seems an apt corollary for the emphasis that hard-boiled fiction places on the physical body as a site of conflict and an emblem of craft and potency.

Remarks like those made by Munsey and Chandler, however, signify something more than a calculated will to transgression. They indicate a real contradiction in the increasingly autonomous and professionalized sphere of American literary activity -- one that publishing histories, biographies, autobiographies and surviving letters suggest

assumed an enormous importance in the lives of participants. And nowhere is that sense of conflict and division clearer than in the manner in which pulp authors, editors and publishers describe the action of writing. As Munsey's demand predicts, pulp figures come to construe literary creation as a skill fundamentally distinct from refinement or even art. Thus, Joseph Shaw, speaking of Hammett, describes the pulp magazine as "a medium in which he could achieve his aim [of reinventing the detective story] while developing his talent into a highly skillful instrument" (Intro. vi). As with Munsey and Chandler, the focus is on a no-nonsense ability whose mundane qualities are stressed by the mechanical metaphor. And, if only coincidentally, Shaw associates the two matters I have been suggesting are fundamentally connected: the resuscitation by Hammett and Carroll John Daly of an emphatically physical variety of thriller fiction, foregrounding the skillful instrument of the protagonist's body, and the craft demands of pulp writing.

Other pulp figures, including those uninterested in hard-boiled fiction, concur with Shaw's description of pulp labor. What distinguishes their remarks from more renowned writers' contemporary discussions about craft is that pulp figures explicitly disavow reference to art, genius, sensitivity, inspiration -- any of the matters that typically remove literary prose from the purely workmanlike

-- and stress the sheer laboriousness of their task. Thus, one forgotten pulp writer, E.H. Stover, says: "I lay no claim to flashes of genius. The only thing I am really proud of is the fact that I seem to have a capacity for work" Another, William H. Heath, notes: [i]nspiration ha[s] little to do with it; writing is largely a grind." And, describing the making of the first Race Williams story, Carroll John Daly says: "[i]f I have ever had an inspiration I have not had the wit to recognize it. With me it's mostly work and fun."²⁰ Many later critics will agree with Daly's assessment of his abilities, passing over both the intended humor and the ideas of literary effort built into the remark. Writers like Daly and his peers are aware that there are less mundane, more artistic ways of conceiving writing, but they also sense that the genres and forums in which they publish make those conceptions inapplicable to themselves. In effect, they imagine a harshly divided literary world, split between celebrated authorship and degraded craftsmanship, and, in a form of symbolic reversal, they disdain art for the scut work of storytelling. In a more sensitively developed and bitter fashion, the same inversion underwrites Chandler's claim that:

something in the literary life . . . repels me; all this desperate building of castles on cobwebs, the long-drawn acrimonious struggle to make something important which we all know

will be gone forever in a few years, the miasma of failure which is to me almost as offensive as the cheap gaudiness of popular success. . . . [T]o be very poor and very beautiful is most probably a moral failure more than an artistic success (Letters 171-72).

Chandler concludes his letter by referring to what Shakespeare might be doing today, the classic trope in popular attacks on literary hauteur. But the hackneyed quality of his example shouldn't conceal the accuracy of Chandler's diagnosis of the marketplace of words when he opposes "popular success" to the art world's "refinement" and "withdrawal" and its unspoken strictures against economic success. Like Daly, he describes a division between pop "work" and "literary life" (the terms, used by Chandler, are themselves indicative) that grows wider as literature itself becomes a bigger, more successful and independent field of activity in the years after WWI. The terms are caricatures, but the distinctions are real, as James M. Cain confirms with this defensive credo: "I believe the conscious creation of art is a form of literary smugness" (Hoopes 405). They inform as well the hard-boiled writers' typical references to grinding labor; for descriptions of work indicate to these figures a defiant acknowledgment of their status and a claim to a sort of pulp

authenticity. Consider, as examples, Chandler's own admission that he learned how to construct plots by slavishly rewriting Erle Stanley Gardner stories; Jim Thompson's account --part misery, part braggadocio -- of professionally writing some 16 million words before attempting his first novel; and Cain's graphic conception of literary texts as ova wrested from the author's body (Chandler, Letters 8; McCauley 94; Hoopes 394). These are only representative remarks, complemented by countless testimonies to interminable hours at the typewriter. (More than one of these writers invokes Jack London as patron saint.) Faced with the consistent manner in which they construe writing as a laborious and physically grueling experience, it is not difficult to see why Harold Hersey describes the professional pulp writer as "one who has learned to take punishment" (122).

Our own predilection, of course, is to situate that pain within a related pair of dynamics: the industrialization of literary skill and the commodification of culture.²¹ As I hope chapter two made clear, however, those terms risk creating a distorted view of what hard-boiled writers were actually doing and the way they conceived of their work -- partly because our reactions to the buying and selling of culture typically reflect, even when we otherwise disown it, a deep allegiance to a literary life untrammelled by the sordid concerns of money. Pulp

writers reject that sensibility and embrace, as the epigraph from Hersey suggests, a notion of literary professionalism. But included in that acceptance of the exchange of writing for money is a vision of trade whose underlying realities extend far beyond commercial activity. Thomas Roberts describes it beautifully. When pulp writers call themselves professionals:

they would like their readers to think of them as having rare natural gifts; as having developed those gifts through discipline; as having a clear-eyed recognition of the differences between the glamour and the realities of writing; and, especially, as having the capacity for writing, for rent money or by invitation, the kinds of stories that will make the very editors who commissioned them and established the parameters sit up in surprise at the depth and power of their storytelling (203).

In fact, much as in the case of the hard-boiled protagonist, the use of the term professional probably reflects the honorific's currency more than anything else; for what is being described is not the social authority and self-policing autonomy of expert groups that we have come to associate with professionalism. Indeed, those are the qualities pulp writers tend to assign to the legitimate

literary authorship from which they feel so distant. Rather, what Roberts illustrates and what pulp writers celebrate are the attributes of a craft or skilled trade, whose informally learned abilities are measured by the unpredictable whims of the popular market.

Central to that sense of craft is a conscious awareness of working within "parameters," what Joseph Shaw referred to as the "constrain[ing] and restrain[ing] . . . boundaries" of pulp fiction (Intro. vi). Their clearest example is pulp fiction's basic reliance on genre. Where the literary life of serious fiction demands of its authors that they break new ground and create new forms, aiming in Roberts' terms for "a literature without genres," pulp fiction asks its writers to bring freshness and flexibility to established structures. The tendency, the opposite of serious fiction's, is toward a "literature without texts," where that term indicates isolated monuments subject to the variorum's orbiting interpretations and commentary (187). One way of conceiving of this distinction is to say that, where the autonomy achieved by the world of literature as a form of life gives substance to the Kantian dictum that art demands "genius," the subworld of pulp culture that thrives beneath legitimate art remains the province of the ancient principle of "taste."²² As Roberts describes it, in this respect pulp fiction nearly resembles a form of classical culture, for it disdains absolute originality in favor of

the taste-driven remaking of convention. A still better description, though, is implicit in Lawrence Levine's marvelous oxymoron, "the folklore of industrial society" (Unforgettable Past 291-319). Although Levine doesn't make these matters explicit, that term manages to include the enormous commercial activity of pop culture, the almost classical sense of regulatory form that it develops, the tendency it shows toward becoming a vast unauthored discourse, and the stress consequently placed on the small, local skills of craftsmen to reinvigorate and recombine the familiar.

This is the activity that pulp figures typically refer to when they describe fiction professionalism, and, thus, although they happily acknowledge "constraints and restraints," it would be a mistake to imagine that those remarks indicate only frustration at barriers and limits. Pulp fiction flourishes paradoxically within its boundaries, both in the sense that writers of minor or middling talents are often liberated by the demands of genre and in the larger fact that during the pulp era a universe of writing and reading, strictly segregated from serious fiction, achieves a positively lush volume and caliber of activity. Peter Brooks's description of the Victorian environment of Wilkie Collins could easily describe American pulp industry between the wars: "a prelapsarian age of unlimited storytelling and the unlimited consumption of story; a world

in which narrative, whatever the subject, enormously mattered" (Reading 170).²³

Writing in this world closely resembles the work of the hard-boiled detective; it is a learned, embodied skill, and the writer is seen, in the term Hersey offers along with professional, as "tradesman" (107). A metaphor still more apt, though, might be the writer as athlete. That image best captures the pulp sensibility's conviction that writing is a competitive and practiced physical activity, occurring in a circumscribed arena, and demanding both an awareness of the constraints of tradition and the expectations of a discerning audience. In one memoir, a forgotten pulp writer makes the analogy explicit: "A beginning boxer may be clumsy. Continued practice will improve him. Continual practice gives a writer facility, stimulates him, improves his work" (Gruber 137-138).

Seen in this context, hard-boiled fiction's familiar attraction to professional fighting as well as its fondness for action in general take on a new significance. They are, at least in part, I want to suggest, unconscious models of cultural activity cast in opposition to the sacralizations of high literary culture. Thus, the image of writing as boxing captures both the agonistic component of pop authorship -- the need, as one writer put it, to "fight for your reader's attention and interest" -- as well as a sometimes less apparent communal, mutualistic ethos that

pervades the world of pulp publishing.²⁴ Against the ideals institutionalized in romantic or modernist versions of literary culture -- of organic beauty, timeless import, radical aesthetic experiment, the exploration of subjectivity, etc. -- they pose a popular ethos that focuses, instead, on variation within accepted form.²⁵

Moreover, implicit in the boxing metaphor is a broader image of readership and cultural participation. To be a boxing spectator in hard-boiled fiction is to be a bettor, one preferably with an edge or inside track (e.g., Hammett's Red Harvest and Paul Cain's Fast One). It is thus to be a knowledgeable spectator with an active interest in the proceedings. Against the reverence encouraged by what Roberts calls "the bookscape of the serious novel," then -- the approach to literary texts that emphasizes an appreciative or awed sense of beauty and a studious awareness of difficulty -- the image of literature as boxing poses the pop reader as a critical participant who consciously measures the performance of the writing athlete (171). Drawing on the comparable simile of musical performance in his recollection of pulp writing, John D. Macdonald makes much the same point:

I think that writing -- good writing -- should be like listening to music, where you identify the themes, you see what the composer is doing with those themes, and

then, just when you think you have him properly identified, then he will put in a little quirk, a little twist, that will be so unexpected that you read it with a sense of glee, a sense of joy, because of its aptness, even though it may be a very dire and bloody part of the book (Intro. xii).

The point is that the beliefs built into pulp culture and the forms of cultural activity encouraged by it sponsor a notion of authorship profoundly unlike the way we habitually think of artistic writing. Bound up with the post-WWI expansion of literacy, its explosion of literary activity, and the increasing cultural emphasis placed on Literature, that distinctiveness must have assumed a radical definition during the pulp era, since pulp magazines themselves were considered already a terrain apart. Perhaps consequently, a forgettable but revealing bit of Hammett ephemera brings forward another aspect of the pulp conceptions of authorship. In "The Second-Story Angel," published in Black Mask in 1923, Hammett describes a young writer named Carter Bringham who surprises and wrestles a burglar to the floor of his apartment only to discover that the crook is a beautiful young woman. The burglar, feigning a sudden recognition, claims to have read all the writer's nicely parodied pulp fiction: "'Poison for One' in Warner's Magazine, 'Nemesis Incorporated' in the National, and all

your stories in Cody's!" At that moment, a Detective Cassidy appears at the window, and the writer, attracted to the woman and excited by her interest in his work, bribes the detective to drop the matter. Embracing the grateful young thief, the writer confesses, though, that he has an ulterior motive for the bribe: "That money I gave Cassidy was an investment in a gold mine. The things you can tell me will fairly write themselves and the magazines will eat 'em up" (116).

With this image of the pulp magazines as a voracious maw, Hammett effectively captures the Twenties' publishing boom and the pulps' seemingly endless demand for material and talent. In the complementary association woman/story/gold mine, he indicates the era's massive commercial transactions in narrative and the specific way that pulp writers accordingly come to think of their work as commodity production; that is, not as alienated and abstract labor, but as an almost natural, discovered form of wealth. Shorn of the power of art to convey some kind of added, lasting value -- and self-evidently unoriginal, communal forms -- pulp stories can seem strangely separate from the grueling labor that their writers also describe. Much as in the efforts of the hard-boiled protagonist, the crucial feature of writing labor is difficult to portray, and narrative becomes not work but a kind of found money. (Perhaps this sensibility contributes to the populist image

of capitalism as hoarding that runs through hard-boiled fiction and is exemplified in "Couffignal.") Hammett soon punishes his protagonist for his good fortune, though, for the angel fails to follow their plan and meet the writer the next day. Carter, nevertheless, is unconcerned; his main interest is not the woman but her story, and he turns immediately to it. Having submitted the tale to a magazine, however, the author is summoned to the editor's office where he discovers four other writers who have produced the exact same narrative. "My God!" one remarks, "I wonder how many other men are writing that same story right now." The tale concludes with Hammett's protagonist wondering to himself "if she kissed this whole bunch, too" (118).

The story, in its use of the badger game and the femme fatale, is an obvious rehearsal for some of Hammett's later work, and its deceitful angel is a clear predecessor to Hammett's later fictionalizing heroines -- the Princess in "Couffignal," the conwoman of "The House in Turk Street" and "The Girl with the Silver Eyes" (who likewise tricks a writer by pretending to love his work), and most notoriously Brigid O'Shaughnessy in The Maltese Falcon. That pedigree, illustrating as it does pulp fiction's self-plagiarizing repeatability, itself nicely illustrates the point. Personifying the meretriciousness of pop culture, the aptly named second-story angel illustrates the underside of pulp authorship. Her con dramatizes the essentially fair and

oft-repeated charge that trash fiction tells the same story over and over again. The equation of that anonymity with sexual commerce is an unattractive humor squeezed from the traffic in women, but it would be still uglier if it were not used to mock and undercut Carter Brigham's gallantries and his associated preening in pulp authorship. The angel remains lost and unknown, but it is the greedy Brigham and his faceless peers who, in their shared embarrassment, are "eat[en] . . . up" by the pulp industry. To use the title of one of Brigham's stories, the hunger of the pulps is their own "nemesis incorporated."

What Hammett's story literally capitalizes on is a corollary to the sense of democratic participation implicit in images of pulp writing as sport and skill. If almost anyone, given proper training and discipline, can become an author, the prospects of the author becoming a no one dramatically increase -- a factor emphasized by pulp fiction's tolerance, exploited by Hammett himself, for the endless multiplication of pseudonyms. From its first moments, "The Second-Story Angel" brings to the fore this tenuous quality of pulp identity. Dashing into his livingroom to confront the burglar, Carter Brigham displays the courage, fortitude, and manly self-assurance of the square-jawed pulp hero for whom he seems to be mockingly named. Yet, all of the protagonist's confidence slips quickly away when, pouncing and punching on the thief, he

discovers at once that the intruder is a woman. The intractable pulp hero gives way to that inversion of Sam Spade -- a flustered and manipulable sap. Thus, where the resolute figure of hard-boiled action, in his momentary capacity to bring definition, stands in some way for the writer-athlete who struggles to remake the familiar, the objective correlative for this side of pulp authorship is that other form of hard-boiled violence -- its tendency to slide into the anonymous and confusing. The undefined, agent-less mixture of body parts below gives a more specific example:

Delaguerra dropped sideways, twisting in the air. he shot a snakelike arm back. His hand grabbed an ankle as he fell. A swept gun missed his head, cracked the point of his shoulder and sent a dart of pain down his left arm. There was hard, hot breathing. Something without force slammed his straw hat. There was a thin tearing snarl close to him. He rolled, twisted the ankle, tucked a knee under him and lunged up (Chandler, "Spanish Blood," The Simple Art of Murder 44).

Action here is a kind of pure, identityless confusion, the epitome of what one critic of pulp fiction effectively summarizes as an "inability to regulate somatic semiosis"

(Brown 376). Yet, even this kind of violence does not always assume the mournful guise it sometimes acquires in Hammett and Chandler. Rising to a kind of carnivalesque fever, hard-boiled action can assume a rollicking hilarity that momentarily overwhelms the burdens of individual identity with what Bakhtin calls "the immortality of the people." Here, for example, is a passage from a Frederick Nebel story printed in Dime Detective:

The gang charged and Cardigan went down under five who were youths in everything but heft and punch. Drawing his gun was out of the question: so was trying to reason with five drunks. By sheer numbers -- and two of the lads were as big and husky as he was -- Cardigan was carried to the door amid a downpour of blows.

'O.K., Charlie! Remember how we used to put the shot, old kid, old pal, old sock. Ready! Eins, zwei, drei! . . .'

Cardigan felt himself sailing through free air. He cleared the porch railing, twisting; caromed off the staircase balustrade, slammed into the steps. He tried to stop himself, but went head over heels down the steps, shot into space again and landed on a balustrade below, cracking, breaking it; fell

plummetlike again and crashed into hard earth and loose stones, rolled and slid downward and came to an abrupt stop against a pillar of a lower switchback in the staircase.

Bruised, dazed, half senseless, he lay there panting hoarsely, long tears in his overcoat, his hat gone.

'Boy-oh-boy!' he muttered, and again, 'Boy-oh-boy!' (Goulart 63-64).

Of all the forms of hard-boiled action, this may be the type least appreciated by the genre's critics and yet the most revealing. Again, examples spring to mind: the chaos of Hammett's "Big Knockover" and Red Harvest, the burlesque energies of Chester Himes's riots and rumbles, the screwball rhythms of Jonathan Latimer stories, the black comedy of Jim Thompson's grotesques. What all of these examples of physical comedy share is an element running through much of hard-boiled violence -- a boundless, ecstatic activity that washes over every barrier and submerges all distinctions in a sea of sheer disruption. Like the confusion that surfaces when Hammett's Carter Bringham tackles his "nemesis," it is perhaps the most potent image of the unauthored action that lies at the heart of pulp fiction's populist sense of literary activity. In the hard-boiled universe, a riot is often the essence of popular culture.

The hard-boiled body, then -- as site of action and agent of labor -- is, at one level, the literary representation of a popular aesthetic that places great emphasis on "traditional" skill and local knowledge and that rests on an ideology of democratic, unrestricted storytelling. The violence that so often foregrounds that body serves not only to manifest that ideology; it must be seen as part of a willful assault on the legitimate literary culture that itself so consistently and violently attacked pulp writing. Writers like Hammett are interesting, though, not merely because they take part in this conflict, but because in a very real sense, they incarnate it. Trapped between the populist ethos of pulp writing and the authority of legitimate literary culture, they remain likewise stranded between incommensurate aesthetic dispositions. To wrap things up, I want to suggest that the sadomasochistic fascination apparent in the passages from Chandler and Whitfield with which we began and the spectacular effects that are generated out of that attraction can be traced in good measure to the unresolvable nature of the conflict in which writers like Whitfield, Chandler, and Hammett find themselves.

Here, for example, is Hammett's conception of literary effort as he phrased it in 1925:

The eternal problem of the creative worker in whatever field is to bring his whole mind,

his every faculty, to bear on the task under his hand. To the extent that he succeeds, granted adequate equipment, he produces what we ordinarily call a work of genius. As he fails he has to rely on his talent, his craftsman's skills (Johnson 53).

On the one hand, we see here the typical pulp emphasis on writing as skilled, almost mechanical labor -- reinforced by the strange reference to "adequate equipment" -- and the proto-marxism of the pulpster's sense of himself as "creative worker." On the other hand, however, there is that unusual reference to "genius" (a word, as we have seen, that pulp figures distrust) and the contrast drawn between it and the craft that pulp writers ordinarily stress. It is, however, the gratuitous way that this notion of "genius" is just tossed into the mix that is most revealing. That offhand use demonstrates, I think, a problem common to the low theorists of pulp writing. Given the notions of craft and performance by which they live, pulp authors have at their access (at least by comparison with the elaborate critical vocabularies of institutional literary culture) little means for distinguishing the difference between adequate and excellent writing. As with "The Second-Story Angel" and the work of the private eye, the labor of writing is mysteriously evanescent. The common formulation becomes, as a result, skill plus a little something extra. That "je

ne sais quoi" is ordinarily "grace" or "style" -- the linguistic equivalent of the bodily authority of the protagonist. Hersey describes it as "the precious spark . . . this inexplicably magic quality -- call it what you like" (109).

For writers like Hammett, Chandler and Whitfield, however, that certain something is exacerbated and overloaded with significance because it defines not merely the difference between decent and truly good pulp writing, but the distinction between pulp fiction and literary culture and thus also the nature of their own ambiguous and uncertain positions. What in Hammett is the ineffable quality of genius, then, becomes in Chandler's letters the constantly reiterated and similarly undefinable qualities of "fire and dash"; "magic with words"; "music"; "high spirits and impudence"; or "afterglow" (29, 59, 114, 64, 88). Chandler draws clearly on the vocabulary of aestheticism that he picked up as a young man in Edwardian England, but applying it to mid-twentieth-century American literary culture, he gives it a new import. The essence of what according to Chandler distinguishes him and Hammett from both the oppressive legitimacy of established culture and the crudities of most pulp publishing, these qualities remain by their very nature susceptible only to negative definition. Like the writers themselves, such qualities live, as the epigraph put it, only "between the lines."

So also exists the suffering of the hard-boiled hero. If, as I suggested above, in most pulp fiction pain functions as the momentary justification for a pleasure to be taken in sadism -- a brief legitimation that marks out a charismatic hero to bear Race Williams' signifying power -- in writers like Chandler and Hammett and Whitfield that course is deviated. The pain and uncertainty are suspended and prolonged as if to indicate the doubtful assurance of the potency that Williams' wields so cockily and as if, moreover, to emphasize, against the pleasure in a popular voice that a writer like Carrol John Daly takes, the writer's "punishment" mentioned by Hersey. Such a "suspension" after all is a main component of one of the textbook definitions of masochism; so too is the "shattering" force that accompanies that suspense.²⁶ In the classic paradigm of saintly suffering, that force is the "heterocosmic" power of Christian deliverance -- the meeting between the earthly and the divine. In writers like Hammett, Chandler, and Whitfield, I want to suggest, dilatory scenes of intense physical suffering (as well as the more generalized atmospheres of vulnerability, uncertainty and doubt) mark the intersection between pop writing and legitimate culture. As if to emphasize that fact, it is during such shattered moments that the writing is at its most daringly "literary" -- as though high literary culture's emphasis on subjectivity and its

idealization of radical literary experiment can enter the hard-boiled landscape only accompanied by the "fire and dash" of pain. It is in these "terrible seconds" as well that the uncomfortable awareness these writers have of their place between two worlds receives perhaps its clearest and most anguished literary expression.

* * *

NOTES

1. Hersey, Pulpwood Editor 109; Chandler, Selected Letters 149.
2. As if to emphasize that victim's libidinal potency as object of desire, Whitfield gives him a name, Babe, that resonates simultaneously with the sound of snapping towels in locker rooms and the adulation of Hollywood fandom. In the sexually laden atmosphere of the screening room, the novel dramatizes both the homosocial desire that subtends so much of this fiction and, coincidentally, the possibility of a homosexual erotics of film. The passage from Chandler's Farewell seems likewise to all but invite a camp misreading. Marlowe's dizzying loss of control takes place after he drives with the "pansy" Lindsay Marriott to Purrissima Canyon, a location another character refers to as a necking spot.
3. "We are, therefore, dealing with a real Human Comedy, where the most socially-inspired nuances of passion . . . always felicitously find the clearest sign which can receive them, express them and triumphantly carry them to the confines of the hall. . . . What is thus displayed for the public is the great spectacle of Suffering, Defeat, and Justice. . . . Leaving nothing in the shade, each action discards all parasitic meanings and ceremonially offers to the public a pure and full signification, rounded like Nature" (Barthes, "The World of Wrestling," Mythologies 18, 19, 25)
4. E.g.: "It was night. The world outside the windows was a black world. A glass porcelain bowl hung from the middle of the ceiling on three brass chains. There was light in it. It had little colored lumps around the edge, orange and blue alternately. I stared at them. I was tired of the smoke. As I stared they began to open up like little portholes and heads popped out. Tiny heads, but alive, heads like the heads of small dolls, but alive. There was a man with a yachting cap with a Johnnie Walker nose and a fluffy blonde in a picture hat and a thin man with a crooked bow tie. He looked like a waiter in a beachtown flytrap. He opened his lips and sneered: 'Would you like your steak medium or rare, sir?'
Time passed -- an agony of nausea and staggering and dazedness and clinging to the edge of the bowl and making animal sounds for help" (101).
5. That assertion is nearly always undermined by the protagonist's decision to do right, a choice that almost invariably demands that the hero not profit financially or

even that he lose money. But the assertion alone is enough to distinguish hard-boiled fiction from all other popular crime fiction of the day, and, of course, a corresponding emphasis on the low-rent, emphatically non-luxurious life style of the hard-boiled hero is a major feature of the genre.

6. For a discussion of the relation between labor and rhetoric in Red Harvest and the bearing on them of the history of labor conflict in the mining towns, see Kendrick and Freeman. For discussion of Hammett's personal connection with the lynching of I.W.W. organizer Frank Little in Butte, Montana, see Johnson 20-21, 138; Nolan, Hammett 13-14, and, for its bearing on Red Harvest, 74-75. For a labor-history perspective on these same events, see Dubofsky 126 and Painter 336-337. It is an interesting coincidence that the October Revolution that forms the background to "Couffignal" and the American labor violence that provides context for Red Harvest occur in the same year, 1917, eight to ten years before Hammett publishes his fictional versions.
7. "Couffignal's main street . . . has the usual bank, hotel, moving-picture theater, and stores. But it differs from most main streets of its size in that it is more carefully arranged and preserved. There are trees and hedges and strips of lawn on it, and no glaring signs. The buildings seem to belong beside one another, as if they had been designed by the same architect, and in the stores you will find goods of a quality to match the best city stores" (3). The implication that this proto-Disneyland is in some ways a critical reflection of post-WWI America is lent weight by Diane Johnson's report that Hammett saw Twenties society as vastly new and referred to "the world B.C. . . . before credit and the crisis of 1918" (xviii).
 Among the post-"B.C." changes to the American economy that "Couffignal" suggests Hammett was aware of is one illustrated by census statistics. During the '20s boom, while overall wealth grew, U.S. income inequality actually increased sharply. The share of total income received by the richest 5% of the country went from one-quarter to one-third. The richest 1% had their share increase from 12.2 to 18.9% (Gordon et al. 105).
8. In the original context, the humor of Hammett's prose seems far clearer. Thus, the lines "[y]ou ought to have known I'd do it!" My voice sounded harsh and savage and like a stranger's in my ears" are immediately followed by a phrase of comic deflation. This last sentence of the story refers to an earlier scene when the temporarily disabled Op takes a newsboy's crutch to pursue the Princess. The Op uses the comic outrage of that theft to end his narrative: "Didn't I steal a crutch from a cripple?" (37) The aim is obviously

to cast the Op's violence, the Princess's high-flown rhetoric and the story's drama all in an ironic light. The sudden change in rhythm between the steadily building confrontation between the Op and the Princess and this irony does have a sharp, humorous effect. I have deliberately allowed the subnote of confusion and estrangement to be emphasized by selection partly because it allows a less apparent element of Hammett's prose to surface, and partly because Hammett's deft comic dialogue is the most difficult part of his work to render without extensive quotation.

9. The quote is from an interesting scene in Farewell, My Lovely where Chandler ironizes hard-boiled fiction's typical populism. Marlowe is talking to the corrupt cop who beat him in a previous chapter, and the cop is given lines that comport well with the familiar Thirties' anger at machine politics and systematic corruption and its celebration of the little people. ("A guy can't stay honest if he want to. . . . That's what's the matter with this country. He gets chiseled out of his pants if he does. You gotta play the game dirty or you don't eat." Of another corrupt cop: "Try and think nice about people. . . . He's human -- just like the rest of us.") While these are sentiments Marlowe might himself echo, Chandler undermines them by putting them in the mouth of a figure who is attempting to justify his own corrupt and brutal behavior and who becomes a spokesman for the crackpot Moral Rearmament movement. Marlowe's economic analysis of the Depression is given as a sarcastic response (139). The most comprehensive discussion of the socioeconomic features that combined to turn the '29 crash into a decade-long downturn is Michael Bernstein, The Great Depression: Delayed Recovery and Economic Change in America, 1929-1939.
10. Advertisement for International Correspondence Schools, Dime Detective Magazine 27.3 (June 1938), inside front cover. The full text of the ad stresses Depression-era economic misery as well as the limited horizons that seem to have class resonances as much as echoes of the time: "I was stuck. A wife and three kiddies -- and the same old pay envelope. I couldn't see a thing ahead except the same old grind." A similar ad for the I.C.S. in the previous Dime Detective refers implicitly to the inequalities in access to education typical of the day (see ch. 2). A drawing features arrows pointing to a man's head and his reversed pocket. The caption reads: "This [head] empty means this [pocket] empty. It takes brain to earn money -- trained brain!" The same issue has an ad for LaSalle Extension University that likewise stresses limited class mobility and resentment: Stay a wage-slave IF you wish . . ." (123).

11. See Bourdieu's discussion of the "bodily hexis" as "the most indisputable materialization of class taste . . ." (Distinction 193, 190, 190-211).
12. Black Mask 6.2 (April 15, 1923), p. 12, advertising section.
13. The connection between these matters is perhaps already implicit in Conan Doyle's stories. It is, of course, Holmes who is able to so readily decipher appearances, and he constantly rebukes Watson for attending to the wrong features. What Watson notices, though, are the semiotic features of ordinary life that advertising exploits: the indications by dress and manner of class, status, etc. In effect, Doyle's characters are doubly vulnerable. The result is a striking intimation of unease and timidity well suited to the social mobility and disturbance of class distinctions that mass consumerism encouraged in late-nineteenth century England and the inter-war U.S.
14. Editorial, Black Mask 16.10 (December 1933), p. 7.
15. As Freedman and Kendrick put it: "Work in the normative capitalist sense of productive wage-labor -- that is to say, economic labor -- is in fact absent from the manifest text . . ." (210).
16. Jameson's discussion in Marxism and Form of the science-fiction scientist offers an interesting parallel, especially insofar as it emphasizes a matter that hard-boiled fiction is likewise concerned with but treats in a different way: "caricatures of what the non-intellectual imagines brainwork and book-knowledge to be" (405).
17. Frederick Taylor, the avatar of this development and the ideologue of its vanguard, explained the aim in his 1912 testimony before Congress: "the deliberate gathering in on the part of those on management's side of all the great mass of traditional knowledge, which in the past has been in the heads of the workmen, and in the physical skill and knack of the workman, which he has acquired through years of experience" (quoted at Montgomery 101).

A number of historians have come to agree (though with varying emphases and interpretations) that Taylor's scientific management offers an extreme example of changes in the organization of work and in the relations between workers and owners that occurred across the first several decades of the Twentieth Century. By all accounts, the interwar period is crucial in the development of both fully rationalized production and broad-based labor movements equipped to contest managerial autocracy. The Twenties begin with the recession-forced death of the labor militance labeled by Montgomery the "worker's control movement" -- a

diffuse refutation of Taylorism and management reform whose most extreme expression was the I.W.W. radicalism forming the background to Hammett's Red Harvest. The decade continues with increased management power, often brutal "speed-up" of productivity, and the search for new ways of controlling workers -- including the rapid expansion of bureaucratic and pseudo-sociological "personnel management" and tentative explorations of "corporate welfare." When the misery of the Depression exacerbated matters, the situation was ripe for the Thirties' dynamic expansion of industrial unionism and the widespread striking and "industrial violence" of the later Depression. See generally, Harry Braverman, Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century; Melvyn Dubofsky, Industrialism and the American Worker, 1865-1929; Richard Edwards, Contested Terrain: The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century; David M. Gordon, Richard Edwards, Michael Reich, Segmented Work, Divided Workers: The Historical Transformation of Labor in the United States; James R. Green, The World of the Worker: Labor in Twentieth-Century America; Herbert Gutman, Work, Culture & Society in Industrializing America; David Montgomery, Workers' Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles.

18. Sam Bass Warner, Jr. describing Philadelphia, quoted at Green 107; see also, Dubofsky 141. In Middletown, their study of Muncie published in 1929 and based on research done in 1925, Robert and Helen Merrell Lynd echo Warner's characterization, dividing the city into "the Working Class and the Business Class" -- basically, those who work with things and those who work with people. The Lynds consider and reject "the conventional tripartite division into Lower Class, Middle Class, and Upper Class," finding that industrialism renders this structure obsolete and that "social stratification" now occurs by vocation and bicamerally. "[I]t is after all this division into working class and business class that constitutes the outstanding cleavage in Middletown. The mere fact of being born upon one or the other side of the watershed roughly formed by these two groups is the most significant cultural factor tending to influence what one does all day long throughout one's life" They suggest that Muncie in 1925 has 2.5 times as many workers as businessmen (22-24).

According to James Green, the Twenties see a "falloff in the blue-collar factory work force [that] contrasted dramatically with the expansion of the white-collar supervisory work force. The number of engineers increased from 77,000 to 217,000 between 1910 and 1930; the number of managers in manufacturing leaped from 126,000 to 313,00 in the same period. The growing army of professionals and managers served as commissioned officers in the corporate

campaign for control" (108, 105-112). On the rapid growth in this period of higher education and professionalism generally, see chapter 2, note 25.

19. "Spade's thick fingers made a cigarette with deliberate care, sifting a measured quantity of tan flakes down into the curved paper, spreading the flakes so that they lay equal at the ends with a slight depression in the middle, thumbs rolling the paper's inner edge down and up under the outer edge as forefingers pressed it over, thumbs and fingers sliding to the paper cylinder's ends to hold it even while tongue licked the flap, left forefinger and thumb pinching their end while right forefinger and thumb smoothed the damp seam, right forefinger and thumb twisting their end and lifting the other to Spade's mouth" (12). This must be by far the longest sentence in hard-boiled fiction. Mechanically rolled cigarettes, by the way, had been marketed since 1881.

20. Stover, Black Mask 6.5 (June 1, 1923), p. 128; Heath, Black Mask 6.20 (January 15, 1924), p. 126; Daly, Black Mask 6.5 (June 1, 1923), p. 127. Note also, the claim by George C. Henderson that "authorship is made up of 90 per cent desire, 10 per cent imagination and zero per cent genius" and Margaret Alison Johansen's pre-structuralist boast about "how I built, yes, built, my fiction" Black Mask 6.15 (November 1, 1923), p. 126. An anonymous pulpster refers similarly to writing as construction or cooking: "[c]oncocting a mystery yarn is quite a fascinating process. Plot, novelty, suspense and reasonableness are the chief ingredients." Black Mask 6.14 (October 15, 1923), 128. Vance J. Hoyt offers similar sentiments: "There was no inspiration about this story. I simply said to myself, 'Here is where I write a detective story,' and in a cold-blooded fashion sat down and wrote it. . . ." Black Mask 6.16 (November 15, 1923), p. 126. See also remarks by Gruber about his work and Hersey's descriptions of pulp authorship.

21. See, especially, Bold.

22. The opposed "relation of genius to taste" is set out in The Critique of Judgment (172-75); Renato Poggioli, claiming that ours is "[a] culture dominated by . . . a dichotomy between genius and taste . . .," gives a good illustration of how the distinction is of fundamental importance to the meanings of modern art and the social forms of cultural life (117, 102-121).

23. Brooks continues to make more explicit the oxymoronic quality implicit in Levine's phrase: "of course, the age of the popular serial novel was tied firmly to the new

industrial means and modes of production and distribution, to the devouring presses that it had to feed." In addition to the accounts of fairly successful pulp writers, letters to Black Mask encourage the comparison of the pulp universe to Brooks' version of Victorian popular literacy. As note 20 might suggest, readers seem to construe pulp writing as a form of assemblage and recombination that can be easily evaluated for skill. Their letters don't tend, therefore, to be about issues raised by stories or to offer interpretations or opinions, but almost solely to refer to how well a story was done, as if a piece of music performed. The underlying assumption is that pulp writing is not a specialized talent but a skill achieved through practice and discipline and fundamentally open to all comers. Thus, one letter says, "I'm a writer myself, and I know what is good. Sometime, perhaps, I may send you a script myself, provided I can come up to the standard of the Black Mask." BM 6.4 (May 15, 1923), p. 125. Another describes belonging to something like a support-group for pulpsters: "our organization of writers and would-be's . . . meet once a week . . . to test out and work out our plots. . . . [I]t's pretty significant to me that the only times I have been able to hit Black Mask have been with plots that I, personally, thought were really first class." BM 6.7 (July 1, 1923), p. 126.

The limits of commodification-theory can be seen in the fact that it passes over the popular sociality built into this vision of literacy. For most critics, the burgeoning of the pulp industry after WWI and its subsequent division into genres -- where all-purpose mags like Argosy give way to western, detective, or romance magazines -- indicates the lamentable logic of commodification (Bold 1-36; Denning, Accents 76; Radway, Romance 23-31). Letters like the above suggest, though, that the crucial factor was the reading habits that made genres into specialized arenas of skill. (See Roberts 213-225.) Hersey is especially revealing in this context, for where he disdainfully refers to his own magazines as industrially manufactured products, his more specific discussions of editing always stress the craft involved in producing unpredictably varied issues that seem identical (e.g., 106-07).

24. William Wallace Cook, Plotto: A New Method of Plot Suggestion for Writers of Creative Fiction (Battle Creek MI: Ellis Publishing Co., 1928), "Seventh Lesson," no pg; quoted at Bold 20.
25. Thus, Chandler -- as if in direct response to Walter Benjamin's claim that the hack writer is one "who refuses as a matter of principle to improve the production apparatus . . .," a definition that automatically includes all popular writing -- identifies the hack, by contrast, as one who

lacks control over his work: "My definition of a hack is a man who lets someone else tell him how and what to write, who writes, if he is a writer, not to an accepted formula, but to some editor's definition of it. But the frontier is always vague" (Letters 224).

26. Theodor Reik, Masochism in Sex and Society; see also, Leo Bersani, The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art; and Kaja Silverman, "Masochism and Male Sexuality," Male Subjectivity at the Margins.

CHAPTER V

'An Amphitheater of Ghosts': The Urban Theater
of Hard-boiled Crime Fiction

[D]eserted streets in which
whistles and shots dictate the
outcome. . . . What is between
these people turns like a revolving
door.

-- Walter Benjamin

The city is not only a civitas -- a
place of communication. It is also
an urbs If its physical
ports cannot be merged into a
unified whole, still they must be
connected to one another. How
should those connections be
designed?

-- Richard Sennett¹

1

In the second chapter of his sixth Harlem domestic novel, The Heat's On, Chester Himes brings his police detective protagonists, Grave Digger Jones and Coffin Ed Johnson, out of their usual Harlem environment to the site of a false fire alarm on the Upper West Side. Although it is 1:30 in the morning, the fire department and a group of white cops have already arrived when Jones and Johnson appear, and the street is abuzz with Himes's peculiar brand of rage and comic confusion. The narrator thus pauses

briefly to note that the conflict he describes is witnessed by a group of unnamed and undefined witnesses:

By that time Riverside Drive was wide-awake. Vaguely human shapes hung from the dark open windows of the front apartments like an amphitheater of ghosts; and the windows of the back apartments were ablaze with lights as though the next war had begun (15).

It is a scene that has come to be familiar in detective fiction -- the police work, the citizens watch warily. But in a way typical of Himes, even this brief and apparently unimportant notation is informed by the racial tension that courses through all the Harlem domestic novels. The reference to ghosts here is more than a description of background figures; it is a playful turn on a slur whose relevance is made explicit on the next page. As Grave Digger and Coffin Ed investigate the false alarm, they notice the anonymous audience watching them from the apartment windows and realize that even in the middle of several fire engine and prowler cars worth of city servants, the residents take them for burglars: "'Hell, what else they going to think about two spooks like us prowling about in a white neighborhood in the middle of the night?' Grave Digger said cynically. 'If I was to see two white men in Harlem at this time of night I'd figure they were looking for whores'" (16). The earlier description of the white residents as

"ghosts," it becomes clear, is a jokey terminological parallel to the confusion of racial characteristics that occurs when black policemen range out of their prescribed region. Like Grave Digger's explication, it indicates the depth of the racial convictions that divide the city into territories and the way in which those convictions and their effects bind black and white residents in an ugly embrace of complementary expectations.

This perverse kind of punning is emphasized by the description of the white witnesses as "vaguely human shapes." That phrase not only invokes the rhetoric of racism, it recapitulates the broad parotic treatment that this rhetoric is subjected to throughout the novel's introductory scenes. The fire alarm, it turns out, has been pulled by a giant, albino black man named Pinky who is accompanied by a white, dwarf heroin dealer named Jake. As with the complementary terms "ghosts" and "spooks," Pinky, as albino Negro, illustrates a fundamentally illogical, sickly comic nexus of racist thinking. When the white cops and firemen confront Pinky they mark, therefore, a definite theme: the inhuman and ultimately insane basis of racist categories:

One of the cops flashed his light into the giant's face to see him better. He saw the white face with the Negroid features and

white hair. He had never seen an albino Negro. He was astonished.

'What the hell are you?' he asked.

'I'm his friend,' the giant said, pointing at the dwarf struggling in the captain's grip.

The captain's eyes stretched. 'By God, he's a nigger!' he exclaimed.

'Well, kiss my foot!' the first cop said. 'I thought there was something damn funny about him to be a white man' (9).

For a moment, the comic implications of the police interrogating a giant, black albino standing beside a white dwarf place us in the Juvenalean terrain of a clear predecessor to Himes's mockery -- George Schuyler's satire of the Harlem Renaissance, Black No More. Himes's violent temperament soon takes over, though, and his more direct sense of racial oppression quickly displaces satire with depiction of official brutality. The cops demand a form of identity, and friend to a white dwarf drug dealer will not do. The cruelty that underpins and follows from their authority soon becomes apparent. Pinky tries to escape, and, in a striking analogue to the scene of Miles Archer's murder in The Maltese Falcon, he is snagged in a tableau that sums up the novel's tensions:

For a brief instant he was caught in the glare of a fire engine spotlight, a grotesque figure in the strained, shocking, ugly position of panic-stricken flight.

Automatically, as though the target were irresistible, a cop drew a bead with his service revolver (14).

Much as in The Maltese Falcon, the "grotesque figure" defined by Pinky echoes in some definite ways the uncertain status of the novel's protagonists. In the farcical logic shared by all of Himes's plots, both Pinky and Himes's detective team race through the remainder of the narrative, crossing paths repeatedly in a furious chase after the same items (most significantly, an illusory map to an imaginary buried treasure in Africa). More pointedly, the paradoxes of Pinky's identity mirror the tension that is the meat of all of Himes's detective series. As black detectives working in Harlem, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger are continually confronted with the problem of working for an institution they recognize as potentially, if not largely, corrupt and oppressive, in the name of people who will respect them (the novels suggest) only for brutality. They try to mitigate this conflict by overlooking "the established underworld catering to the essential needs of the people -- gamekeepers, madams, streetwalkers, numbers writers, numbers bankers" -- and prosecuting the

exploitative -- "purse snatchers, muggers, burglars, con men, and all strangers working any racket" (Rage 49). But the stories constantly emphasize the impossibility of this kind of just discrimination, and their resulting likeness to Pinky's paradoxical status is made definite shortly after the "albino Negro" manages to escape. A black woman interviewed by Jones and Johnson about Pinky becomes sullen when she realizes the men are police. "'Nigger cops,' she said scornfully," indicating both derision and a sense of betrayal (17).

A later description of the detectives makes the underlying tension still clearer. On the one hand, they share a popular identity defined by the visible marks of violence and oppression and all but devoid of individual characteristics. (As with many novels of Harlem nightlife or of the black underworld, this is a sense of communal identity that tends toward nostalgia de la boue.) On the other, they are sharply distinguished by an institutional authority justifying the "legitimate" use of force:

Both of them looked as red-eyed, greasy-faced, sweaty and evil as all the other coloured people gathered about, combatants and spectators alike. They were of a similar size and build to other "working stiff" -- big, broad-shouldered, loose-jointed and flat-footed. Their faces bore marks and

scars similar to any colored street fighter. Grave Digger's was full of lumps where felons had hit him from time to time with varied weapons; while Coffin Ed's was a patchwork of scars where skin had been grafted over the burns left by acid thrown into his face.

The difference was they had the pistols, and everyone knew them as the "Mens" (25).

As in the earlier scene on Riverside Drive, the problem here is one of public recognition and public identity. Like Pinky, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger illustrate a difficulty with the way these matters are parceled out along racial lines. As the description suggests, Himes's novels insistently tend toward making the black population of Harlem into a unified people opposed to the institutional racism and oppression that defines a shared identity. At the same time, however, the ambivalent position of Himes's protagonists acts as a reminder of the many forms of exploitation and conflict that prevent any but the most ephemeral sense of communal identity from forming within Himes's fictional Harlem. By the same token, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger point to the larger racial tensions that divide the city. In the novel's final paragraph, Coffin Ed makes this complaint explicit: "What hurts me most about this business is the attitude of the public toward the cops like me and Digger. Folks just don't want to believe that what

we're trying to do is make a decent peaceful city for people to live in" (174). That might be the most concise statement of the theme common to all of Himes's Harlem detective novels: the sheer unbelievability of a decent, peaceful city and the impossible task of protagonists who -- given the imaginary quality of nationalist utopias -- are nevertheless committed to pursuing it.²

In essence, then, Jones and Johnson's own grotesque position -- between black Harlem and white authority -- describes both the possibility and the absence of a fundamental civility, a city's potential and lack of ability to provide for free and fair public life. In the terms set out by the quote from Sennett used as an epigraph, the "amphitheater of ghosts" on Riverside Drive indicates the defeat of civitas by urbs, of communication by the "discontinuous" and "the intractable otherness of . . . urban space" and by the hostile way the city's spaces have been "connected to one another" (88). The possibilities for a public integration sketched by the comic figure of Pinky and the conflicted characters of Coffin Ed Johnson and Grave Digger Jones are undercut by the more powerful, almost tribal division of the city into antagonistic territories. The intimation of the phrase "as though the next war had begun" is indeed that the city is engaged in an unspoken racial battle and that the civitas has broken down into militarized camps whose apocalyptic conflict becomes a still

more definite possibility in angry novels like Cotton Comes to Harlem and Blind Man with a Pistol.

The power of the scene on Riverside Drive is that, even as it renders so overwhelmingly this death of civil society, the figure of the "amphitheater of ghosts," like Coffin Ed's plaintive appeal for support, raises a specter of public life. It is an image potent enough to recur often in Himes's fiction, although it is usually placed within Harlem proper and features the tense and ambivalent interplay among black residents, white cops, and Himes's detective protagonists. Here, for example, is a description from Blind Man with a Pistol of Harlemites reacting as the police arrive to investigate the scene of a white man's murder. It needs to be quoted at length to demonstrate the thick texture of public interaction that is perhaps the greater part of Himes's Harlem novels:

People gathered on the adjoining rooming-house steps, trying to see what they were doing. A patrol car drew to the curb, the two uniformed cops in the front seat looking on with interest.

The sergeant became exasperated. 'You officers get these people out the way,' he ordered irritably.

The cops got sullen. 'Hey, you folks get over there with the others,' one ordered.

'I lives here,' a buxom light-complexioned woman wearing gilt mules and a stained blue nightgown muttered defiantly. 'I just got out of bed to see what the noise was all about.'

'Now you know,' the homicide photographer said slyly.

The woman grinned gratefully.

'Do as you're ordered!' the car cop shouted angrily, stepping to the sidewalk.

The woman's plaits shook in outrage. 'Who you talking to?' she shouted back. 'You can't order me off my own steps.'

'You tell 'em sister Berry,' a pajama-clad brother behind her encouraged.

The cop was getting red. The other cop climbed from beneath the wheel on the other side and came around the car threateningly. 'What was that you said?' he challenged.

She looked toward Grave Digger and Coffin Ed for support.

'Don't look at me,' Grave Digger said. 'I'm the law too.'

'That's a nigger for you,' the woman said scornfully as the white cops marched them off (59).

On its next page, the novel describes the manner in which this public conflict gives way to the same stifled populism that inspires the scene from The Heat's On:

Now that all the soul people had been removed from the street, the five detectives moved swiftly. But they could still feel the presence of teeming people behind the dilapidated stone facades of the old reconverted buildings. Here and there the white gleams of eyes showed from darkened windows, but the silence was eerie (60).

The contrast between the eerie silence enforced by police order and the "teeming people" who wait behind it is one that runs through all of Himes's detective fiction and that may explain a basic feature of the stories. As if to give weight to that contrast and to suggest that it is overcome by the kind of flood that wells temporarily over bitter dams, Himes again and again turns his Harlem into a carnivalesque sea of both violence and exuberance. The anger and frustration that informs the tense interaction between police and citizens, where it does not give way to the silence and empty streets described above, overflows into a teeming comic confusion and a nearly undirected expansion of energy. As with the physical description of Himes's protagonists quoted above, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger all but disappear into the novels' maelstroms of

activity, their presence on the scenes or in the stories as a whole often coming to seem (as Coffin Ed's complaint suggests) like a pointless surplus.³ An example of the novels' constantly reiterated burlesque festivity -- only slightly extreme and a little unusual insofar as it involves both white and black residents -- can be seen early in Blind Man with a Pistol. The description is of a ludicrously idealistic march for racial harmony that turns unpredictably into a riotous "Walpurgisnacht":

When the marchers came abreast of the 125th Street station on upper Park Avenue, a long straggling tail of laughing, dancing, hysterical black and white people had attached itself to the original forty-eight. Black and white people came from the station waiting-room to stare in pop-eyed amazement. Black and white people came from nearby bars, from the dim stinking doorways, from the flea-bag hotels, from the cafeterias, the greasy spoons, from the shoe-shine parlors, the poolrooms -- pansies and prostitutes, ordinary bar drinkers and strangers in the area who had stopped for a bit to eat, Johns and squares looking for excitement, muggers and sneak thieves looking for victims. The scene that greeted them was like a carnival.

It was a hot night. Some of them were drunk. Others had nothing to do. They joined the carnival group thinking maybe they were headed for a revival meeting, a sex orgy, a pansy ball, a beer festival, a baseball game (28).

The isolated items in the incongruous catalog that closes this passage share but one element, each of them offers some vestige of public association. The contrast between the inclusiveness that orgy, revival meeting, beer festival, etc., all hold out individually and their inherent mutual antagonism underscores Himes's theme nicely. The kind of public harmony that the marchers for racial unity promote is nearly unimaginable except within the pure confusion of the carnivalesque. This spontaneous and incoherent "Walpurgisnacht" thus becomes the complement to the recurring motif of the "amphitheater of ghosts": the spectral quiet of the latter and its ghostly promise of public life are redeemed and surpassed by the orgiastic, ephemeral hyper-vitality of the carnival. In Himes's novels, there is no "decent peaceful city." There are only the twin poles of grim silence and clamorous life, and Himes's detective protagonists are forced to negotiate these extremes as much as they must balance white institutional authority and black Harlem.

As striking as this pattern is, though, it is also deeply familiar, and its similarity to moments from other hard-boiled stories discussed in earlier chapters should lead us to recognize that while Himes innovates substantially in making the detective thriller a form for the popular exploration of racism, he also draws on some well-established structures.⁴ The Harlem setting, the fraught relations between black and white characters, the background of both racist and black populist beliefs about inner city life all allow Himes to bring a new intensity to the form. But, as our opening scene from The Maltese Falcon -- with its image of anonymous witnesses and passive "faces at windows" -- might alone suggest, the "amphitheater of ghosts" is an old motif in hard-boiled fiction and its implicit sense of the city, to quote Lewis Mumford, as "a consciously dramatic setting for the more significant actions and the more sublimated urges of a human culture," is a familiar one to the genre (480). The passage from Hammett that places the policeman in his dramatic "grotesque position" continues to emphasize the theatrical qualities present in those scenes from The Heat's On and Blind Man With a Pistol in which hidden spectators watch the very public police: "The building at the other end [of the billboard] had a blank grey sidewall that looked down on the lot behind the billboard. Lights flickered on the sidewall, and the shadows of men moving among lights" (13).

It may have been one of hard-boiled fiction's many innovations to bring this curious kind of urban theater to popular culture. It was, in any case, Hammett along, with his peers and inheritors, who emphasized the sense of disjunct between anonymous witnesses and unknown authority and an associated intimation of empty public action. In an inversion of Himes's vision of a brutally unified people, this is a world where "combatants and spectators" seem entirely isolated. That is the mournful, bereft inference in both the "amphitheater of ghosts" and in Hammett's significantly dangling phrase, "the shadows of men moving among lights." In a late interview, Himes phrased it in a manner that seems designed to emphasize the way routinized forms of popular writing can become an apt expression for a meaningless public sphere: "American violence is public life, it's a public way of life, it becomes a form, a detective story form" (Bell 172).

The contrast between a "blank" public theater, a kind of modern trauerspiel of empty official action, and a teeming social life that escapes institutional form is one that runs all through hard-boiled fiction.⁵ My own favorite illustration of the motif is not drawn from any of the hard-boiled writers proper, but from a film clearly inspired by the genre. In the critical scene of the movie of Graham Greene's The Third Man where Joseph Cotton's Holly Martins finally meets Orson Welles's Harry Lime in occupied post-war

Vienna, they ascend to the top of a ferris wheel. There Martins confronts Lime with the selfish destruction of his penicillin trafficking, and, as the two argue the charge, the camera pans out over the empty fairground below. The moment is brief and eloquent, and it adds a sense of pathos to the movie's many shots of dark, shadowed streets and its constant references to the city's occupied quadrants. The implication is clear: postwar Vienna, as one character puts it, is a "closed city." Lime's black-marketing, the repressiveness of the various military authorities, the empty streets are all testimonies to the death of its civil society. The empty fairground is, likewise, a reminder of a lost public life.

Much the same kind of thing appears in hard-boiled fiction's depiction of the spectral amphitheater of the city. One scene from Himes's The Crazy Kill renders the hard-boiled civitas in almost exactly the same terms -- as "a fairground after a circus has gone" (24). And a passage from Carrol John Daly's The Snarl of the Beast, describing Race Williams on a stake-out, shows the image's long provenance:

The place was as silent as a morgue. Strange too -- a few more hours and it would be alive with push carts, hustling men and lagging boys. I daresay in the daytime you could buy anything in that alley from a ham sandwich to

an automobile, to say nothing of a handful of oil stocks that were guaranteed to rob widows and orphans of their last nickel (108).

While the explicit point seems to be hard-boiled fiction's familiar connection of blue- and white-collar crime and its populist habit of associating business itself with criminality, there is a rarely noted complement to that habit apparent in this passage. Just as hard-boiled writers tend to make violence into a form of labor, their association of business and crime becomes not solely a means of denigrating commercial activity, but a way of making the story's criminal interaction into a form of commerce in which the protagonist cynically but wholeheartedly engages. This is that powerful attraction hard-boiled stories consistently show for Harry Lime's kind of black-market trafficking, or for that "established underworld catering to the essential needs of the people" that Coffin Ed and Grave Digger don't merely overlook but actively circulate through, or for the Continental Op's rhetorical action in the gangster polity of Red Harvest.⁶ Hard-boiled fiction's ambivalent interest in the criminal world is in this context inseparable from the delight it takes in hidden and marginal forms of dealing. A little corruption and certain kinds of lawlessness are always eagerly accepted, and the emphasis is not only on the unorthodox methods necessary to create order, but on the thrill of a kind of subterranean social

action. Thus, while the sarcasm that Race Williams aims at the legitimized thievery of big business may be based partly on sheer resentment of power or on distrust for the intangible modes of white collar profit, it seems to stem as much from the way, as in Hammett's "Gutting of Couffignall," that corporate authority can displace hard-boiled fiction's shady entrepreneurial dealing with a dull and static order. The emptiness of Daly's street is meant to emphasize the vitality of petty commerce by contrast -- "alive with push carts, hustling men and lagging boys." As Race Williams puts it at the denouement of another story: "It was quiet on the street then; a minute later I knew it would be alive with people for blocks around" ("All in the Game" 77).

This contrast between urban bustle and an anomalous emptiness and inactivity is integral to hard-boiled fiction. It informs the genre's affection for those dark, empty streets, abandoned buildings, and blind alleys that will become the basis for film noir's iconography, and it is apparent in the crucial, deserted locations where, as in The Big Sleep, mysteries begin and are solved: "the noise of the city traffic grew curiously and quickly faint, as if this were not in the city at all, but far away in a daydream land" (132). That contrast in itself tells us something important about the way to read hard-boiled fiction's urban theater; for much the same thing could be said about its "blank" locations as Simmel might suggest about the hard-

boiled protagonist's comparable anti-social individualism. "Isolation attains its unequivocal significance only as society's effect at a distance -- whether as lingering of past relations, as anticipation of future contacts, as nostalgia, or as intentional turning away from society" ("The Adventurer"). The hard-boiled dreamscape indicates not only, as is often said, an anti-urban pastoralism, but, as in the "amphitheater of ghosts," a ruin of the city.⁷ What it depicts is precisely civil society at a distance. To amend a quote from Breton cited in chapter three, it suggests that in the hard-boiled world not just life but, more importantly for the genre, public life is elsewhere. For that very reason, though, the urban theater of hard-boiled fiction speaks of a fundamental concern for the possibilities of civility and a public world. Consider, for example, a brief part of the remarkable dream passage from Hammett's Red Harvest:

I dreamed I was in a strange city hunting for a man I hated. I had an open hunting knife in my pocket and meant to kill him with it when I found him. It was Sunday morning. Church bells were ringing, crowds of people were in the streets, going to and from church. I walked almost as far as in the first dream, but always in the same strange city.

The man I was after yelled at me, and I saw him. He was a small brown man who wore an immense sombrero. He was standing on the steps of a tall building on the far side of a wide plaza, laughing at me. Between us, the plaza was crowded with people, packed shoulder to shoulder.

Keeping one hand on the open knife in my pocket, I ran toward the little brown man, running on the heads and shoulders of the people in the plaza. The heads and shoulders were of unequal heights and not evenly spaced. I slipped and floundered over them (163).

Creating a pop culture version of modernism's unreal city, this passage inaugurates an important topos for the hard-boiled fiction, one whose frequent repetition reflects basic qualities of the genre. For, in a parallel to the quote from Simmel above, Hammett's passage seems to perform a kind of dream-work that reveals the antagonistic relation between ordinary social life and the trajectory of adventure. The Op's pursuits occur literally above the heads of the people, and the sharp definition of his conflicts depends on their being separate from the aimless crowds of everyday existence -- "dropping out," in Simmel's words, "of the continuity of life" (187).⁸ But, beyond the

extraordinary "boundedness" of adventure, Red Harvest's dream passage appears to indicate a trouble with this very isolation (189). The extreme violence of the Op's desire to defeat his opponent, his aim to crush the enemy's head like "a large egg," undermines whatever heroic virtue might have been left to the Op and reinforces the claim he makes just before the dream to be "going blood-simple" (158). As the Sunday morning setting of the dream emphasizes, the adventurer's asceticism has slipped into something bordering on merely pathological viciousness. More importantly, where most varieties of thriller fiction function as a kind of momentary public theater and conclude with the suggestion of an unproblematic reintegration of ordinary life, Red Harvest's dream passage makes this relation uncertain.

Seeking to bestride the ordinary world, the Op stumbles over the nameless figures who should form an appreciative audience for his efforts. And even as these obstinately lumpen figures interrupt the adventure, they seem hopelessly distant from the action they should witness. The dream concludes with the Op and his enemy joined in a death grip and falling off a roof "giddily down toward the millions of upturned faces in the plaza, miles down" (164).

The problem seems to be partly that, while adventure fiction demands a heroic isolation from everyday life, the picaresque features of hard-boiled narrative depend on a roaming investigation of the ordinary world and a large

component of humdrum sociality -- talking and arguing with people, feeling sympathy and anger, becoming messily involved in their lives. The city becomes an apt metaphor for a requisite sense of connectedness. Paco Ignacio Taibo II, a Mexican writer who adapts hard-boiled fiction to the District Federale, is able, as is often the case with writers who come late to an established form, to isolate this feature of the genre: "He just sat and listened. Waiting for something. Waiting to know where to start, a street, a corner. Something to lead him into other people's lives, other people's deaths, other people's ghosts. One way or another it all boiled down to a question of streets, avenues, parks, it was a question of walking, of pecking around and sorting out" (19). At the same time, this benevolent heroism is frustrated by the same features that make it possible -- the endlessly complex interweaving of ordinary lives and the diffuse and invisible networks of power that structure the most mundane activity. Again, the city is the natural image: "He knew that when he got to the end . . . he'd come up against a wall standing between himself and justice. A wall of situations, alibis, connections, guns, desks, brute force, habits and complicities that stretched from the deepest corner of the criminal underground to the heights of power" (59). As in The Heat's On, this is the city as simultaneously civitas, a potentially liberatory form of unconstrained communication,

and urbs, the stubbornly sedimented spatial distribution of power: on the one hand, the public freedom of the streets; on the other, the "wall" of diffuse urban power that interrupts it.

Hard-boiled fiction thrives on the complications raised by both these sides of urbanity, but together they present the genre with problems that are all but unresolvable. On the one hand, hard-boiled writers hold most basically to the fundamental aims of adventure fiction -- the desire to lend life's ordinary complications and the city that so aptly represents them a certain legibility. At the same time, the genre is shadowed by the knowledge, as both the Continental Op and Himes's detective team suggest, that such legibility is inseparable from brutality, and, more pressingly, by the suspicion that it cannot be achieved at all -- that the sheer extensiveness and bureaucratic complexity of urbanized life prevent the coherence of heroic fiction. The result is that the public theater that Mumford describes always threatens in hard-boiled fiction to give way to the empty theatricality of Red Harvest's dream sequence and Himes's amphitheater of ghosts. The further implication is that the public life of the decent, peaceful city that Himes's Coffin Ed yearns for may itself be little more than a dream passage.

To say that hard-boiled fiction is a genre fundamentally concerned with the idea of public society -- that, even as it searches out Hiassen's "screaming disruption of civil life," it is imagining the form that a just city might take -- is not necessarily to distinguish it from many other varieties of pop literature.⁹ As Jerry Palmer notes, almost all adventure fiction can be taken as a refutation of Hegel's claim that "[o]nce the state has been founded, there can no longer be any heroes."¹⁰ In Palmer's apt description, the point of the adventure hero's extra-legal action and charismatic status is precisely to "re-foun[d] the state . . . " (85). It tends, therefore, to be guided like Augustine by a vision of the decent, peaceful city. Indeed, one of the pleasures of pulp fiction is that, at its best, it preserves a critical interest in the features of the good social life long after radical forms of literary experiment become occupied with apparently solipsistic concerns.

What makes hard-boiled writers distinctive, though, is that they render Palmer's re-founding difficult and unlikely and they situate the hero's efforts squarely within the competing constraints of the already established state. They are led naturally, then, not just to ideal visions of the just polis, but to an awareness of the problems of real cities. Thus, in 1927 Joseph Shaw introduced the initial version of Hammett's Red Harvest in Black Mask by linking

its originality to a contemporary political relevance -- a matter of little concern to the magazine's predominant fiction since its 1920 founding: "In recent years there have been too many examples where civic politics has degenerated into a business for profit. . . . [Hammett's novel is] a series dealing with a city whose administrators have gone mad with power and lust of wealth. It is also to our minds the ideal detective story -- the new type of detective fiction which Black Mask is seeking to develop."¹¹ From its earliest days, hard-boiled fiction is drawn inexorably to the greed-maddened and ungovernable city. It is a setting that presents ample opportunities for the wild action that the genre glories in, but, as Shaw intuitively recognizes, it likewise removes mystery stories from the drawing room and disposes pulp literature to a new sense of "civic politics."

Much as in the case of hard-boiled fiction's pseudo-realistic emphasis on the physical labors of its protagonists, broad historical developments lay back of this new pulp-fiction urbanism. From Shaw on, commentators have linked hard-boiled fiction to public outrage at what seemed to be an explosion of urban crime and corruption during the Prohibition years. Perhaps more important, though, was a less dramatic but also oft-noted fact: the 1920 census revealed that the U.S. was a predominantly urban nation, with more people living in cities than on farms for the

first time in its history. To many critics, hard-boiled fiction has seemed like an appropriately urban popular fiction for a citifying nation, and the hard-boiled protagonist has represented the translation of the quintessentially American virtues and vices of the cowboy to a newly tricked up frontier.

A still more salient feature for hard-boiled fiction, though, may have been the particular forms inter-war urbanization took. For, the long-term economic growth that exploded into the Twenties boom and the rapid diffusion of the automobile resulted not simply in the expansion of cities, but in vast changes in the United State's social geography to which hard-boiled fiction often seems particularly sensitive. Most dramatic may have been the expansion of downtown central business districts and the sudden proliferation between 1920 and 1930 of skyscraper office buildings (Gordon 51-52, Schleier 69). Here, for many, was a physical manifestation of the new authority of cities (e.g, Allen, Only Yesterday 287, Bender). But even as urban power was assuming a striking new vertical form, the field of its influence was following a rapid horizontal spread. As David Gordon points out, the centralization of corporate power that encouraged the creation of downtown highrise districts was of a piece with the capacity of large complex firms to separate production and administration and to distribute factories along urban peripheries (51, 47-52).

The growing availability of automobiles and the expansion of roadways allowed manufacturing workers to follow jobs out of cities and simultaneously encouraged corporate employees to commute to downtown business districts. The result was not just a spurt in skyscrapers but steadily increasing suburban development. In fact, closer attention suggests that it was not so much cities as their satellites that were displacing rural society after World War I. In 1920, the growth of suburbs actually exceeded the growth of cities for the first time. By 1929, suburbs were growing twice as fast as central cities (Ashton 72-73; Glaab and Brown 281-85; Green 6, 105-08; Gordon 53; Wood 54-87).

Although the Depression would force a drastic slowdown in the growth of suburbs, it seems clear that hard-boiled fiction's development was contemporaneous not just with an urbanizing nation but with the making of a predominantly metropolitan society and with the growing tendency of the metropolis to give way to a decentered urban fabric. Indeed, the life of the genre can be seen to correspond not so much with the arrival of the American city as with its virtual disappearance as a discrete entity. At the height of the Black Mask era in 1933, one social scientist was already claiming that "[m]easured in time rather than linear space, the old boundaries of cities have shrunk and vast new areas have been brought within the city limits."¹² By 1950, as hard-boiled fiction was entering its last period of

invention, the Director of the Census announced that the urban population could no longer be located in cities alone, that there was no definite meaning to the complementary notion of rural, and that it was necessary to speak of "urbanized areas" (Susman 237). If hard-boiled fiction often seems both goaded and frustrated by the intractability and ineffability of the city and ultimately defeated by the tendency of a centered urban theater to give way to dispersed theatricality, perhaps that is in part because the genre accurately reflects the making of what one geographer calls "an urban civilization without cities." This is a situation where both the civil communication of the civitas and the spatial distribution of the urbs are vastly expanded, but where the possibility of bringing them together in the critical discourse of public life seems increasingly difficult. In a phrase still more resonant of Himes's amphitheater of ghosts, hard-boiled fiction could be said to follow the passage of the American city into what the urban planner Melvin Webber calls a "nonplace urban realm" (Sharpe and Wallock 11).

Only recently, of course, has the creation of sprawling urban areas lacking clearly defined centers become an unmistakable reality and a matter of serious social concern.¹³ But the direction, or lack thereof, was long apparent. A utopian novel of 1893 already imagined A City-less and a Country-less World (Susman 247), and, from a less

sanguine perspective, Lewis Mumford's 1938 explanation of the ideal virtues of the urban theater was prompted by dissatisfaction with the "non-plan of the non-city" in the contemporary U.S. Then, too, Mumford's complaints against aimless diffusion -- which in many ways seem better suited to the post-War realization of suburban society -- were already anticipated in the 1920s by a fear that the republican virtues traditionally associated with the city as civitas were being rendered unlikely by mass communication's expansion of social life. In titles that could easily sum up Coffin Ed's complaints -- The Phantom Public and The Public and Its Problems -- Walter Lippmann and John Dewey argued in 1927 over the very possibility of a responsible civil society.

3

There can be few more potent and, paradoxically, definite images of a phantom public than Hammett's "millions of upturned faces in the plaza, miles down" or Himes's "amphitheater of ghosts" and his hidden, "teeming people." And it seems clear that, in the focus they bring to "civic politics" and city living, hard-boiled writers are responding to widespread concerns over changes in the structure of civil society that are especially dramatic in the period between World War I and World War II.¹⁴ But

hard-boiled fiction signals its concern with public life and urban form in other ways as well. Most evident is the sheer richness and variety of its places. It is not enough to say that writers like Hammett, Chandler and Himes turn consistently to a generalized urban setting. In the best tradition of realist fiction they draw on the social meanings built into the form of the city, and in so doing they return a specifically spatial dimension to Lippmann's and Dewey's fears of an overtaxed and divided public. This is why The Heat's On emphasizes the fact that its opening scene takes place just outside Harlem's invisible borders. A similar moment occurs in A Rage in Harlem when the farcical volatility of Himes's Harlem momentarily impinges on white New York and is immediately turned back. Though a fleeting passage in a book of careening energy, the scene lends weight to the implication in the title that the novel's violence has much to do with the fact that it is contained in Harlem:

Jackson went along 95th Street to Fifth Avenue. When he saw the stone wall surrounding Central Park he realized he was out of Harlem. He was down in the white world with no place to go, no place to hide his woman's gold ore, no place to hide himself. He was going at seventy miles an hour and there was a stone wall ahead.

His mind began to think. Thought rolled
back on the lines of a spiritual:

Sometimes I feel like a motherless
child,

Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone. .

. .

[H]e turned sharply north on Fifth Avenue,
heading back toward Harlem (137).

Again, there is the implicit conflict between the pure movement of the city streets and the division of the civitas that constrains this freedom. But, like the opening of The Heat's On, this passage not only depicts the spatial division of the city as urbs, it dramatizes the social meanings built into urban form. In the association of white New York and the stone wall of Central Park and in the way Jackson's thoughts turn intuitively to a spiritual sense of homelessness, Himes's passage gives expression to a deep, ordinary knowledge of urban place and suggests the way its meanings are intimately bound up with personal development and identity. For Jackson the same thing is true as holds for Coffin Ed and Grave Digger when they wander Riverside Drive and think of themselves, atypically, as "spooks," or for Sister Berry when she stands defensively on her stoop and confronts the police who become sullen the moment they are forced to step from their car. For all these characters, who they are and how they are feeling are

matters inseparable from their physical location. Far more than a scenic background, Harlem is shown to be, in James deJongh's phrase, a powerful and often constraining "imaginative frame" (201).

Although this is a narrative emphasis that seems particularly well suited to novels published by an expatriate writer mostly on the eve of the civil rights movement, much the same thing occurs in Chandler's remarkable distillations of place. In Farewell, My Lovely, for example:

[T]he houses on the inland side were just nice houses, but on the canyon side they were great silent estates, with twelve foot walls and wrought iron gates and ornamental hedges; and inside, if you could get inside, a special brand of sunshine, very quiet, put up in noise-proof containers just for the upper classes (Farewell, My Lovely 72).

Where urban movement in Himes prompts an automatic shift in feeling and knowledge, the social import of Chandler's landscape issues in Marlowe's stark capsules and lyrical evocations. But there is a similar basis for both styles. Here, the spatial form of the city is so obviously meaningful that it seems, in Ross MacDonald's phrase "invested . . . with a romantic presence" (Marling 153).

Bunker Hill is old town, lost town, shabby town, crook town. Once very long ago, it was the choice residential district of the city, and there are still standing a few of the jigsaw Gothic mansions with wide porches and walls covered with round-end shingles They are all rooming houses now, their parquet floors are scratched and worn through the once glossy finish and the wide sweeping staircases are dark with time and with cheap varnish laid on over generations of dirt. In the tall rooms haggard landladies bicker with shifty tenants. On the wide cool front porches, reaching their cracked shoes into the sun, and staring at nothing, sit the old men with faces like lost battles. In and around the old houses there are flyblown restaurants and Italian fruit-stands and cheap apartment houses and little candy stores where you can buy even nastier things than their candy. And there are ratty hotels where nobody except people named Smith and Jones sign the register and where the nightclerk is half watchdog and half pander. Out of the apartment houses come women who should be young but have faces like stale

beer; men with pulled-down hats and quick eyes . . .; [and] worn intellectuals with cigarette coughs and no money in the bank" (42).

As in Himes's amphitheater of ghosts, this is a hyperbolic expression of lived terrain. The romance that Macdonald recognizes comes not simply from the social meanings of urban form, but from the emphasis Chandler characteristically places on the detective-narrator's capacity to recognize and give expression to the history embedded in L.A.'s cityscape. For Chandler especially, the authority of his protagonist and his freedom to negotiate the city -- and thus to avoid being trapped in amber like Bunker Hill's worn intellectuals -- is powerfully associated with Marlowe's ability to lend the city a personal legibility. This ability is what makes Bunker Hill's more obvious, nostalgic romance of picturesque decay important. That sentiment stems from the fact that the remnants of Bunker Hill's scarcely known past can be discerned just beneath the rising tide of time and cheap varnish. Even in the novel's present, this inheritance and the neighborhood's current residents are cast under the spell of imminent doom. The detective-narrator's special ability is to capture a historical legibility as it is about to disappear.

The same quality is apparent in the opening scene of Farewell, My Lovely. As we noted in chapter two, that

passage features Moose Malloy, the ex-con, returning to "one of the mixed blocks . . . on Central Avenue, the blocks that are not yet all Negro" (3). And the drama begins because Molloy, unlike Marlowe, has only the historical referent. He fails to recognize that the social meanings of the neighborhood and the expectations of civil behavior have altered in the eight years he has been gone. Demanding that things conform to his memory and acting inappropriately for the surroundings, he soon provokes the violent disturbance that drags Marlowe into the plot and likewise establishes a major theme -- the difficulty of predicting and managing the rapid change that is continually transforming the urban landscape. At the conclusion, it is revealed that the chorus-girl who Moose searches for on Central Avenue, Velma Valento, has made the best of her beauty and talents and transformed herself into the Helen Grayle who lives in the luxurious Aster Drive described above. We learn, moreover, that she has engaged in intrigue and a series of vicious murders to keep herself from being dragged back into an unpleasant past. The static features of Aster Drive -- "great silent estates" with "twelve foot walls and wrought iron gates . . . noise-proof containers" -- thus bear an important inference. They are implicitly opposed to the historical memory of Central Avenue and the decay of Bunker Hill. Like Hammett's Couffignall and like Ignacio's "wall" they invoke the logic of suburbanization and are meant to

signal the way the wealthy use the very spatial form of the city to insulate themselves from public life and temporal change. But the series of events provoked by Moose's arrival, the sheer motion and continuous disturbance of hard-boiled narrative reveal the fragility of the illusion of stable wealth. Aster Drive is eventually made victim to the same impermanence as Central Avenue and Bunker Hill.

In the end, Moose Malloy and Helen Grayle -- the one tied to a lost past, the other determined to preserve a perfect present -- destroy each other. What remains is the same feature that floats over Bunker Hill -- the discerning voice, by turns acerbic and elegiac, of Philip Marlowe. This indicates a further sense in which hard-boiled fiction seems an intensely urban genre. The motions of the hard-boiled protagonist do not just map the city and portray the social meanings built into its landscape; they reveal the way those meanings are inherently unstable, the product of conflict and change and potentially open to the ceaseless "creative destruction" that characterizes the modern, capitalist city.¹⁵ Hard-boiled stories suggest that given the constant urban transformation apparent on Central Avenue and Bunker Hill, the wisest attitude is neither the rigid nostalgia of Moose Malloy nor Helen Grayle's brutal efforts to maintain the status quo, but the skeptical disposition and the adaptability and mobility of a modern picaro. (In The Long Goodbye, Marlowe says, "I was living that year in a

house on Yucca Avenue in the Laurel Canyon district" {6, emphasis added}.) And the genre is consistently drawn to settings like Central Avenue and Bunker Hill that are the opposite of Aster Drive -- less city monuments than urban locations, where the processes of historical change can be discerned in the landscape and the consistency of place is undermined by the indeterminate qualities of space.

In Red Harvest's dream sequence this attraction is already evident. In the first section of his dream, the Op finds himself in Baltimore searching for a woman who:

I knew well. But I had suddenly forgotten who she was. . . . I walked streets hunting for her, half the streets in the United States, Gay Street and Mount Royal Avenue in Baltimore, Colfax Avenue in Denver, Aetna Road and St. Clair Avenue in Cleveland, McKinney Avenue in Dallas, Lemartine and Cornell and Amory Streets in Boston, Berry Boulevard in Louisville, Lexington Avenue in New York, until I came to Victoria Street in Jacksonville, where I heard her voice again, though I still could not see her. . . . I could get no nearer her voice. It was the same distance from me in the street that runs past the Federal Building in El Paso as in Detroit's Grand Circus Park (163).

If Helen Grayle's Aster Drive looks like a truly concrete example of Ignacio's wall -- the physical expression of the urban power that Philip Marlowe traces through the city -- the Op's dream is the wandering interconnection of Ignacio's streets run rampant. It as though Hammett were seeking to give expression to the contemporary creation of a national metropolitan culture and memorializing the Twenties' rapid expansion of roadways and mass communication.¹⁶ But much as Walter Lippmann (in the same year as Red Harvest was first published) expresses fears that the growth of public life will produce its inevitable diffusion, the Op's dream renders a featureless, undistinguished national city. This is the civitas made centerless not so much by the division of the city as by its expansion. Confusion follows not from the stifling of communication but from the instability that accompanies its dizzying circulation. Like Central Avenue and Bunker Hill, the Op's nightmare megalopolis shows the particular marks of place and the signs of legibility disappearing under the force of urban migration and metropolitan growth.

In less hallucinatory but equally fraught ways, hard-boiled writers have always tended to focus on transitional, undetermined locations that render the city less as place than as the site of urban movement. The murder scenes in The Big Sleep and Farewell, My Lovely, for example, are, respectively, an abandoned oil field and a culvert at the

end of an undeveloped suburban street. Together they offer fragmentary glimpses of the city's past and its future. Then, too, there are the hard-boiled city's low-rent office buildings and its sleazy neighborhoods that seem important mainly for being uncertain and undetermined -- "a limbo of side streets," as Ross Macdonald put it. Like the genre's recurrent locales of anonymous public life -- night clubs, speakeasies, gambling parlors, lobbies, hotel rooms, diners and cafeterias -- these are places where the city exists less as setting than in the form of fleeting transactions. The same quality is apparent in the Glendale opening of James M. Cain's Mildred Pierce, newly developed from ranchland to tract housing, and in the Twin Oaks Tavern on the outskirts of L.A. that is the setting for The Postman Always Rings Twice ("a roadside sandwich joint, like a million others in California" {3}). Not so much in the city as defining its frazzled edge, these are the places where the monuments of public society and the static authority of Aster Drive are less apparent than the ceaseless activity of urban movement.¹⁷

As hard-boiled fiction evolves it follows Cain's lead and the suburban progress of national development. Writers like Macdonald, Jim Thompson, Charles Willeford, and Charles Williams create a thriller fiction that moves out of the city into territories that in most cases suggest a

nightmarish version of the suburbs' indeterminacy. Like Cain's luncheonette, these are places that are neither country nor city. Yet, one of the ways it is clear such stories belong to a hard-boiled tradition is that they continue to seem in basic ways paradoxically urban. In good measure, this is because, as with Cain and most hard-boiled writers, these later figures are drawn to locations that embody the transitory, and they weave them in a complementary narrative pattern that is integral to American urban thriller fiction from its earliest appearance. Lacking a better term, I will refer to this structure as metropolitan, for the movement described by this pattern mimics a basic feature of the metropolis -- the way that, more than simply a place, it is made up of the endlessly multiplied trivial communications and travels between margin and center.¹⁸

For an early example, consider the 1891 dime-novel story, "Nick Carter, Detective" (Clurman 2-64). The tale begins as a locked room mystery in patent imitation of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." Mademoiselle La Verde, a famed "danseuse," has been found murdered in her sealed room in her house on 47th Street, and while there is evidence of violent struggle, there is no sign that anyone but herself has entered the chamber. The police are unable to solve the crime, and the aid of Nick Carter is summoned. From that moment on, all attempts to imitate Poe's ratiocination are

abandoned. Rather, Nick Carter dons his many and various disguises to follow suspicious characters, overhears them admitting to their crimes, and violently subdues them. In the process, he takes a streetcar down Broadway and rows a boat across the East River to Brooklyn; rides the Hamilton Ferry back to Manhattan and takes the El uptown; takes the El back downtown and then grabs a streetcar to Houston Street; walks from 47th Street down to Goerck Street and over to Mott and then Bleeker; takes the ferry to Weehawken and then follows a buggy on horseback to a farmhouse in the Jersey woods. The story's denouement, in the chapter titled "Bringing the Threads Together," occurs back in the house on 47th Street.

In some basic ways, the patterns of hard-boiled fiction are already apparent in this Gilded-Age dime-novel story. "Classic"-type intellectual effort is referred to, but immediately replaced by action consisting of both physical conflict and pursuit through the labyrinthine territories of the city. Nick Carter seems truly compelled to escape the confines of the locked room, where he labors "without result," and to get out into the streets where pursuit can begin. (In this story, Nick characteristically stumbles onto the trail by overhearing a conversation in "a beer saloon" -- one of the semi-public spaces to which hard-boiled fiction will be powerfully attracted {12}.) And the point of the story often appears little more than to depict

travel by as many of the plebeian forms of urban transit and communication (including newspapers, telephones, telegraphs, and typewriters) as possible and to use that movement to encounter various social types and classes. In the words of Gary Hoppenstand, an historian of popular publishing, the result is "an allegory of the City in which the detective hero . . . protect[s] the benevolent sovereignty of the American capitalist's metropolis" (5).¹⁹ The city appears here mainly as multifarious threads of movement woven together in a temporary coherence.

What makes this allegory seem metropolitan long after pulp fiction has abandoned Nick Carter's stagey disguises and the dime novels' stilted diction is -- along with the stories' simple emphasis on almost constant movement -- the fact that this motion inevitably takes the protagonist outside the city and then returns him or her back to its metaphorical center. Nick goes first to Brooklyn and then more fruitfully to darkest Jersey, and it is only through that journey that he is able to solve the story's mystery and return to 47th Street for the denouement. I am unable to think of a single hard-boiled story that does not very definitely rely on the same pattern well into the 1950s and '60s. Consider Philip Marlowe's many trips to Bay City, the Op's journey to the roadhouse on the outskirts of Personville in Red Harvest or Sam Spade's wasted travel to the abandoned home in The Maltese Falcon, Coffin Ed and

Grave Digger's inevitable brief sojourns outside of Harlem, and Lou Ford's trip to Fort Worth in The Killer Inside Me. Again and again, hard-boiled stories follow in some measure this pattern. Doubtless that is a sign that the structure is far older than thriller fiction, that it represents a vestige of romance or older forms of storytelling. But in hard-boiled fiction, as in the dime-novel thriller, this narrative pattern is so closely adapted to the forms of the city and so bound up with the immediate features of urban life -- streetcars and automobiles, buggies and telephones -- that it becomes inseparable from a kind of metropolitan experience. As the urban expands to take in further reaches of undetermined territory and experience, the question becomes the way in which this "limbo" will be integrated into the legibility of a metropolis. Race Williams exclaims: "Murder was to be done out there in the wilderness -- yes, the wilderness, on the very edge of New York City" (Snarl 206).

Charles Williams's thriller of gothically complex intrigue, The Hot Spot, published in 1953 as a Fawcett Gold Medal paperback original, gives an excellent example of the way hard-boiled fiction adapts to post-WWII suburbanization and yet remains an urban genre, continuing to rely on the patterns already apparent in "Nick Carter, Detective." Indeed, the story, set in and around a small southern city, can be read as noir genealogy of suburban domesticity,

revealing the way tree-lined streets lay a thin veneer of placidity over the city's corruption and violence. The story concerns an obnoxious ex-sailor named Harry Madox who arrives in town after being forced to leave Houston over a barroom brawl. He takes a job as a car salesman, and his cocky aggression allows him to prosper, encouraging the belief that his worldly sophistication will enable him to outpace the town's innocent rubes. This hubris, combined with complacent self-interest, soon prods Madox to rob the town's nearly unguarded bank, and from that moment on he discovers that he has underestimated nearly everything about his environment. He quickly falls under the capable and aggressive surveillance of the police and stumbles into a nest of intrigue that snares him in desperate and futile efforts at survival. But, unlike earlier hard-boiled stories such as Cain's Postman or Double Indemnity, which it so clearly resembles, The Hot Spot makes failure mean neither death nor jail, but middle-class success. At the close, Harry Madox looks akin to a Fifties Babbitt:

We're married now, and I go to work every morning at nine, and sell cars, and lend money, and make more than I know what to do with. I belong to the Chamber of Commerce, and the service clubs and even the Volunteer Fire Department. I like to think that some day I might be a director of the bank,

because that would be the final, supreme laugh of them all when I'm lying awake at night (187).

In a sense, Williams merely magnifies in this portrait a feature already implicit in Cain's stories. The heroines of Postman and Indemnity combine a deadly sexuality with a repressive, petty bourgeois respectability. (Cora in Postman refuses to become "a bum. I want to be something" {91}. Phyllis lives in the "House of Death," a standardized middle-class home "like all the rest of them in California" {3}.) Madox is likewise trapped by an overwhelming wife. The novel's close finds him married to the widow of his former employer at the car lot. This woman, Dolores Harshaw, is like Madox, an import to the small town from Houston, and she is a femme fatale of absurd dimensions -- a woman so ripe with ominous sexuality that she seems to the protagonist constantly on the verge of rot. (He thinks of her as "a full and slightly bruised peach beginning to spoil a little. She was somewhere between luscious and full-bloom. . . . You could no more halfway kiss her than you could fall part way down an elevator shaft and then change your mind" {37, 109}.) In the course of the novel, the aptly named Dolores manipulates her first husband into a fatal heart-attack, and, through her knowledge of Madox's bank robbery and a murder he commits, she blackmails the protagonist into marriage and sexual peonage. "She was in a

position of strength. As lawyers say, and she wouldn't tolerate work stoppage or breach of contract" (188). The result is a silly but magnificently paranoid, macho fantasy of domesticity. The hero is rich man, sex pet, and wage slave rolled into one, reduced to triviality by a woman who seems little more than pure and undifferentiated desire. "I'm the one who couldn't make it. I had a try out in the big leagues, but I didn't have the stuff, and they sent me back. I've found my own level again, and I'm living with it" (190).

What gives this novel an urban flavor, however, is not simply that it finds corruption beneath every suburban idyll, but the emphasis the story places, like Nick Carter, on constant movement. In addition to Madox and Harshaw, the story has two other major characters: the sweet, uncomplicated country girl, Gloria Harper, who Madox loves (she is the Lola to Harshaw's version of Double Indemnity's Phyllis Nirdlinger) and a rapacious country farmer named Sutton who blackmails Gloria over a presumed lesbian past. It is impossible to summarize the byzantine turns of Williams' plot, but they readily divide the actions among these characters into passage through three kinds of location. There is the downtown where Madox works and lives and where, since his suspected but unproven bank robbery, he is under constant surveillance. "[T]hree or four blocks beyond the edge of town" are the tree-lined, picket-fenced

streets where both Dolores Harshaw and Gloria Harper live and where Madox is eventually forced to settle (27). Beyond these streets are unpopulated country regions where Sutton lives and where Madox is occasionally able to escape for adulterous trysts with Dolores and hand-holding dates with Gloria. Most importantly, this backwoods terrain is where Madox has buried the cash from his bank robbery. Through the course of the novel, the characters shuttle among these three regions, and Madox's final destination comes to seem suburban not least because he is ultimately locked in a circuit between the downtown and the tree-lined streets ("I go to work every morning at nine"), cut off from access to the dangerous, liberatory territory beyond.

As in many hard-boiled stories, then, the narrative consists of countless auto journeys, and many of its important scenes actually take place in cars. Beyond the characters' constant travels, though, Williams emphasizes this pattern of movement by making his story concern the possession and, more dramatically, circulation of money. The novel ends with a picture of middle-class abundance, but it makes that wealth a product of robbery, blackmail, murder, circular intrigue, and sexual traffic. Madox originally robs the bank after being inspired by lust for Harshaw; he develops a chaster love for Gloria who is being blackmailed by Sutton; Sutton trysts and deals with Harshaw, who in turn blackmails Madox into marriage. From the

outset, the story stresses this associated movement of funds and bodies. In an offhand gesture of sexual harassment made coincidentally just before the bank robbery, Madox claims, "When I see something being passed around I like to get my share. I'm just a pig that way" (11). And at the conclusion, Madox's personal immobility (he "is doing life") is associated with the fact that his stolen capital, his "share" is frozen (190). Because Dolores holds crucial evidence against him, Madox is unable to touch his stealings, and he is no longer sexual aggressor but victim. He cannot move because his money cannot. Musing about becoming a bank director, Madox thinks he would probably be:

the only bank director in the world who started at bottom by robbing the bank and worked his way up by being indispensable to a bitch, and the only one anywhere who has twelve thousand three hundred dollars of his bank's assets buried under six inches of slowly rotting manure in a collapsing barn on a sandhill and who intends to let it stay there until the barn rots and the money rots and he rots himself (187).

Lack of transferable funds, in other words, locks Madox into small-town life. In contrast to this rotting money, though, the novel uses an image of floating capital as a crucial element of the plot. Gloria, who as a small-town

innocent represents all that seems attractive about rural America, has a distinctive piece of jewelry that never leaves her possession, a silver money clasp in the shape of a dollar sign. A gift from Gloria's mother, the clasp is made to seem like Gloria herself -- unique, intimate, the kind of epithetical identification of character well suited to a small town. At a critical moment, however, Madox discovers the clasp in Sutton's home and assumes that the transfer of this image of money indicates as well a sexual transaction between Gloria and her blackmailer. At first, Madox attempts to deny the significance of the clasp by refusing its personal meaning: "It was crazy. There must be more than one of them in the world. It was a coincidence. But even as I was telling myself it was, I knew it wasn't" (159). Coming to believe instead that the money clasp is unique and non-coincidental and so closely tied to Gloria that it could not have passed into Sutton's possession without her doing the same, Madox kills Sutton in a rage. Doing so, he sets himself up for Dolores' blackmail and effectively renders himself a prisoner of suburbia.

The novel's ultimate irony is that, just as he has been about nearly everything throughout the story, Madox is mistaken about the clasp. The jewelry proves far less intimate to Gloria than to Madox. She has given it freely as cash to Sutton who in turn transfers it to Dolores, and the clasp thus makes the novel's basic point. As in

Hammett's "Second-story Angel," women first seem little more than a form of capital, and here the ease with which it appears that they can be "passed around" suggests something to Madox about the ease with which small-town life presumably can be controlled. In the end, though, money remains the symbolic property of women. They retain autonomy and control over the protagonist, who himself becomes indistinguishable from his rotting money. (Gloria is significantly the car-dealership's accountant and, at the novel's close, Dolores not only owns the silver clasp, she is keeping an eye on the books to maintain full control over Madox.) Beyond this point, though, the money clasp bears an important implication about the way Williams follows Nick Carter and offers an "allegory" of suburbia. When the clasp looks like a metonym for Gloria -- so uniquely hers that it is her -- it seems, like her, to be a sign of village virtues: intimacy, knowability, manageability. In this mode, Gloria and her environs seem to Madox like the ideal of suburbia, a place that would combine the communal intimacy of the country with the personal freedom and mobility of the city.

In fact, the opposite turns out to be true of Williams's Hot Spot; its vision of suburbia combines the oppressiveness of small-town life with the anonymity and surveillance of the city. In this mode, the fact that Gloria's clasp is literally in the form of a dollar sign

turns out to be decisive. Rather than the individual, non-coincidental symbol Madox sees, the clasp turns out to have all the qualities of money. As with so many of the objects of crossed desire in hard-boiled fiction -- the Maltese Falcon itself, the doubloon in Chandler's High Window, the emeralds in Whitfield's Green Ice, the gold ore in A Rage in Harlem and the "treasure map" in The Heat's On, and, above all, the photographs and negatives that are the capital for blackmail throughout the genre -- the silver clasp is ultimately anonymous, abstract, ubiquitous, circulating, the very opposite of rural intimacy. Its unpredictable movement, like the novel's setting itself, rebukes Madox with the impossibility of submitting the manifold dealings and motions of urban or suburban life to sufficient control. And the clasp becomes an apt sign for the fact that life in Williams's hot spot resembles country simplicity less than it extends urban sociality. As exemplified by the circular dealings of Madox, Dolores, Gloria, and Sutton, Williams's town is made up of the same associations that define the geographer David Harvey's account of city life: it is a "community of money" (19). Phrased differently, Williams's Hot Spot offers an "allegory" of suburbanization that comports well both with Madox's job as a car salesman and Marx's description of modern history: it reflects "the urbanization of the countryside."²⁰

The passage from "Nick Carter, Detective" to The Hot Spot, then, indicates the development of a fundamental motif in hard-boiled fiction. These are stories that are largely about traffic, in the two linked senses of commercial transaction and the randomly associated movement of people through an urban environment. And perhaps the reason the genre seems so well suited to the city is partly that, in the emphasis it places as adventure fiction on "dropping out" of the ordinary world -- on a "screaming disruption of civil life" -- hard-boiled fiction captures something important about the effects of these dimensions of urban experience. Both the heightened freedom of movement offered by city streets and the capacity that an urban economy creates for extensive and unpredictable forms of dealing (Harvey's "community of money") contribute to a sense of unrootedness akin to the dreamlike autonomy of the adventure. This is the quality that the sociologist Anthony Giddens refers to as "disembeddedness" or what Henri Lefebvre indicates when he claims that the city "is the place of the unexpected" (Consequences 21-29; Harvey xv). It is also the source of the caloric metaphor in titles like The Heat's on and The Hot Spot; temperature in hard-boiled fiction is generated by the breathless travels, the almost screwball antics, and the rushed dealings engaged in by characters as they race through the city, often in desperate pursuit of the same commodities. Like the city itself, it

indicates life raised to a more intense pitch, to more rapid and unpredictable movement, verging always on the anarchic pace evident, for example, as Jackson in Himes's Rage in Harlem speeds toward the walls of Central Park.

It seems significant, then, that the first conclusive sign that the Continental Op sees in Red Harvest that Personville is a city out of control occurs when he encounters a series of derelict cops: "[t]he first . . . needed a shave. The second had a couple of buttons off his shabby uniform. The third stood in the center of the city's main intersection -- Broadway and Union Street -- directing traffic, with a cigar in one corner of his mouth" (4). The furthest extension of this image are the riots that break out in Himes's Harlem and the violent efforts that Coffin Ed and Grave Digger make to keep "the mob herded" (Cotton 116).²¹ For if, as I suggested above, hard-boiled fiction is a genre concerned with the possibility for civility and public life in an urbanizing society, the emphasis the genre places on the city as traffic makes that question hinge on the way the circulation of money and people will be managed. The hard-boiled protagonist, as a figure characteristically on the border of the law, doesn't just take part in that traffic, he or she illuminates the place where the pure motion of the city meets the forces that intend to channel it. Both Hammett's derelict traffic cop and the efforts of Himes's heroes to direct the parades of rioting marchers

indicate a terrible problem with this relationship, and their stories suggest the impossibility of resolving the elements into a "decent peaceful city."

Knowing that hard-boiled fiction generally makes this into a double-sided problem should help us to avoid some of the one-dimensional interpretations that the hard-boiled city usually prompts. The pulp metropolis is neither solely anonymous, corrupt, and restrictive, nor an open frontier for the exercise of the protagonist's freedom and agency. Depending on the emphasis of a particular story, it is more or less both, and the two sides in their most extreme and problematic form are already apparent in the Op's two-part dream in Red Harvest. Initially, as the Op wanders from town to town, the dream suggests a hyper-city of illegible movement, a traffic that exceeds the bounds of any management -- much as Personville becomes for the Op a gangster's polity of unconstrained lawlessness. In the second part of the dream, as if in response to this aimless circulation, the Op imagines the opposite difficulty -- the pursuit of a kind of monumental civic order (the Op fights his opponent atop a tall building before a plaza filled with millions of upturned faces). The two parts of the Op's dream, then, show us the city seen two ways: first, temporally, as the undetermined movement and communication of a civitas; and, second, spatially, as urbs, seen from the aerial perspective of a mapmaker. Here the dream evokes the

Op's attempts to heroically found a legitimate civil life in Personville. But, as in the narrative proper, this vision crumbles under the sheer brutality and theatricality necessary to establish it.

From these two perspectives, hard-boiled fiction develops two opposed senses of the city and public life. The first of these -- evident in the second part of the Op's dream as well as in Mumford's description of urban theater -- resembles the ancient practice of civic display, the desire to make authority known and visible and to create monumental tableaux of social order. This is the kind of urban melodrama most evident with a character like Race Williams (appropriately enough, since Daly, along with his heir Spillane, is often said to reveal the proto-fascistic elements of thriller fiction). When Williams in The Snarl of the Beast refers to "Oscar Merrill Davison, the villain of the piece, who had never appeared upon the stage," he both indicates the way the city has become the setting for a public theater and targets the enemy of this sense of civic display -- the disappearance or diffusion of power (192).²² Writers like Mumford and Lippmann suggest that such diffusion may have been a matter of broad concern in the interwar years. The hard-boiled protagonist, in any case, addresses this danger by becoming a public figure, a character whose heroic stature is immediately known throughout his fictional world and who moves through a kind

of court society, making the intrigues of power a matter of public melodrama.

But even as the Op attempts to create this kind of public life in Personville, both his dream and the effects of his actions suggest that the effort is doomed to collapse into corruption and confusion. This kind of heroic civic legibility not only no longer seems fully possible, it hints at repression and autocracy. And Personville, though ostensibly cleansed of its worst criminals, remains at the conclusion, as the Op well knows, a feudal and closed city.²³ The difficulty is nicely sketched in a brief moment in "Couffignall" when, guarding the pile of presents before the robbery begins, the Op passes the time with an adventure tale:

The book was called The Lord of the Sea, and had to do with a strong, tough, and violent fellow named Hogarth, whose modest plan was to hold the world in one hand. There were plots and counterplots, kidnappings, murders, prisonbreakings, forgeries and burglaries, diamonds large as hats and floating forts larger than Couffignall. It sounds dizzy here, but in the book it was real as a dime (6).

The joke is obviously aimed at the Zhukovskis, for, like Hogarth and like Red Harvest's Elihu Willson, they pursue

outlandish plots to create a fiefdom subject to royal control. The story suggests that their hopes, like their aristocratic sense of entitlement, are as outmoded as the conventions of the sea tale. Yet the irony extends further, since the adventure conventions the Op ironically describes could apply almost directly to his own stories. Both "Couffignall" and Red Harvest create the sense that these conventions, and their picture of a world controlled by "plots and counterplots" are ultimately unreal. Thus, if the "dizzy" qualities of the adventure seem well suited to the anarchic features of urbanized life, the associated legibility of the thriller -- the dream of a world submitted to "one hand" -- appears antique.

Yet the ultimate victory of the "capitalists" in "Couffignall" and of Red Harvest's Elihu Willson undermines even this suggestion. There is a way in which, at the same time as the heroic individualism of the hard-boiled protagonist comes to seem unlikely, the hard-boiled city still appears feudal terrain, ruled, as the title of one Race Williams story has it, by a "hidden hand." As the Op suggests, there is after all something naggingly realistic about hard-boiled fiction's vision of public authority submitted to the court intrigues of Jacobean drama. In this light, all authority, whether the institutional power of the police or the suburban domesticity of Dolores Harshaw, comes to seem empty, stifling, and repressive.

Against this tendency, hard-boiled fiction develops its second sense of the city and public life -- that is, the disruptive movement of traffic, the dizzying communication of Sennett's civitas. The enemy of this ideal of the public is both the static authority of a frozen civil government and the surveillance that the Op confesses to at the end of Red Harvest or that Harry Madox attempts to escape in The Hot Spot. Hard-boiled fiction counters this threat by making the movement of the city streets exceed any control. When, as in Red Harvest or "Nick Carter, Detective" or The Hot Spot, a protagonist enters into the traffic of the city, he or she is accompanied by an intimation of personal freedom and mobility. Nick Carter steps in the street and is able to use disguise to assume the identities of a plumber, a harbor-broker, an old man, and a black man.²⁴ Velma Valento in Farewell, My Lovely is similarly able to use the anonymity and freedom of the city to turn herself at least temporarily into Helen Grayle. And Harry Madox turns out ironically to be correct when he assumes that he will be able to move through his small southern town, abandon his blue-collar past, and achieve wealth and stature. In all these cases, what is at least momentarily celebrated is the freedom that the city offers simply by virtue of the fact that its ceaseless movement cannot be submitted to any "one hand."

Hard-boiled fiction flips back and forth between these two senses of public life, and its protagonists trade in both almost simultaneously, assuming whatever public power they can, but also taking every opportunity to slip into the unwatched, anonymous reaches of the city. But, much as in the case of Sennett's civitas and urbs, the hard-boiled thriller finds it impossible to merge these two ideals of the public into a single vision of civil society. Instead, the gist of its affections tends to run toward the latter dream of the city. The result is the fragmentary portraits of social dealing special to the genre -- the backroom negotiations and barroom conversations, crap games and poker matches, betting arrangements and trivial exchanges of information. All of these, like the incoherent catalog that closes the "Walpurgisnacht" of Blind Man with a Pistol are spontaneous and anonymous forms of public association, outside of institutional sanction, each of which approximates hard-boiled fiction's favorite metaphor for city life -- the "game." The last hope for public freedom in the hard-boiled universe is a temporary and unregulated form of play. Moreover, as with the scene from The Heat's On, these are games where "combatants and spectators" are all but indistinguishable. Indeed, what occurs in the recurring motif of the fixed boxing match is a blurring of the game's boundaries, where competing spectators take a hand in prodding fortune. In this allegory of public life,

everyone is a player seeking to manipulate a desirable outcome. The city is temporarily reduced to a betting free-for-all.

The spontaneous dealings implicit in these pursuits, like the mundane labors of the hard-boiled protagonist, are also the trivial associations of pulp publishing, and perhaps one reason hard-boiled fiction leans so heavily on the liberty implicit in the city's petty trafficking is because it accords so well with the kind of sociality built into the pulp world. In his memoir of "the pulp jungle," Frank Gruber describes a self-contained universe of petty entrepreneurship strikingly akin to the urban terrain of hard-boiled fiction. It is a world of cafeterias, diners, and cheap hotels; of "literary agents" who share second rate office space and a telephone with a private detective, a button broker, a dressmaker, and a collection agent; and of magazine editors who are responsible for 13 magazines and make \$65 a week. Harold Hersey, describing the role of the letters column in the pulp magazines, actually turns the journals into one of the classic semi-public spaces of hard-boiled fiction. To his mind, the pulps function for their readers "just as a lobby . . . in a hotel. If they want to sit around and talk, instead of going about their business, very well then, they have a place to do it in and they can't complain because it isn't there. . . . [I]t must have a local club-house atmosphere where the 'glad hand' is

extended to friend and stranger alike, and where the 'jiner' is made to feel at home with the 'boys'" (93-94).

As we saw in chapter four, the very form of pulp publishing and authorship encourages such an atmosphere, making its literary activity into a type of game where readers are encouraged to believe they are but a step away from becoming writers and where the sheer energy of the magazines' endlessly multiplying narrative creates the illusion, in Peter Brooks's phrase, of "a prelapsarian age of unlimited storytelling." As chapter three argued, the most important creators of hard-boiled fiction feel themselves divided between this simultaneously utopian and degraded territory and the alluring but finally impossible fields of literary respectability. Their fiction likewise remains divided between what it construes as a monumental but arid and repressive authority and the hectic but ephemeral energy of a kind of underground public. Perhaps hard-boiled writers are unable to bring together the ideals of public theater and public freedom to create an imaginary peaceful, decent city because, unlike many of their contemporaries, they are unable to conceive a harmonious republic of letters. The literary world, like their cities, is left sundered between intractable and ultimately mysterious power and a ceaseless anarchic energy that seeks always to undermine it.

* * *

NOTES

1. Benjamin, "Surrealism," Illuminations 182, 183; Sennett, The Conscience of the Eye 89.
2. That Pinky is motivated by what he has been led to believe is a map to buried African treasure -- in fact, a plan for a drug smuggling operation -- illustrates nicely Himes's withering scorn for Garveyite nationalism. The association of Africanism with more definite opiates and the intimation of their shared destructiveness is clear. In fact, Pinky has set the novel's plot in motion by angrily killing his adoptive father, Gus, after Gus warns Pinky that he will be unable to emigrate because "all them black Africans wouldn't like colored people white as I is . . ." (173). Cotton Comes to Harlem is still more emphatic, featuring a fraudulent back-to-Africa movement and concluding with Grave Digger's public warning: "If you go back to this Africa you got to go by way of the grave" (157). Indeed, the Harlem domestic series disdains every utopian dream for liberation from racism and poverty, and much of Himes' wild comic invention comes in imaginative debunkings of imaginary solutions. Cotton Comes to Harlem's Garveyism is paralleled by an equally fraudulent and parotic "back-to-the-southland-movement" -- a white-sponsored encouragement of nostalgic Uncle-Tomming. The Real Cool Killers and Blind Man with a Pistol mock the Black Muslim movement. The villain of The Crazy Kill is an evangelical priest, and all of the novels suggest in some way or another that Harlem's fervent religious feeling is a racket or a sham. Most pessimistic of the series is the final novel, Blind Man with a Pistol, where movements for Black Power and racial harmony are portrayed as fraudulent or hopelessly starry-eyed and likely to issue in the apocalyptic violence suggested by the novel's title. This last book, published in 1969, is some ways the most interesting, for here Himes's pessimism and intimations of doom finally overcome all but completely the limiting form of the police novel. By the conclusion, the narrative has descended into a chaos that mirrors an uncontrollable violence ravaging Harlem. The final two lines of the book are:
 'That don't make sense.'
 'Sure don't' (191).
3. "The briefest of readings of For love of Imabelle [retitled A Rage in Harlem] reveals that the story could have been written without them. Although Himes gives the two detectives a greater part in his next book [The Crazy Kill], the main emphasis was still on the relationship of Johnny and Dulcy Perry and the secrets kept by the half-mad Reverend Short" (Skinner 29).

4. Himes is not, though, the first black American to publish detective fiction. According to Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Bernard W. Bell, the first detective novel written by an African American is J. E. Bruce's 1907 serial Black Sleuth (Bell 362, n. 61). Himes is also preceded by Rudolph Fisher's social comedy in the "classic" detection mold, The Conjure-Man Dies: A Mystery Tale of Dark Harlem (1932). Himes's first story featuring a detective is published shortly thereafter in the December 2, 1933 issue of Abbott's Monthly. Although the naturalistic aims of this tale distinguish it from the pop entertainment of the detective story, it already shows an interest in the conflict between the institutional demands of work and personal loyalties that the working-class black policeman experiences (Skinner 25). Perhaps because of this interest, when Himes begins writing detective fiction in earnest for Serie Noire in France in the fifties, he does not, even though he is friendly with Fisher, imitate the earlier writer's "classic" emphasis on erudition. He turns rather to the hard-boiled tradition for a model, in the process, according to Ishmael Reed, teaching him "the essential difference between a black detective and Sherlock Holmes" that would be important to Reed novels like Mumbo Jumbo (Bell 172-73).
5. For a brief comparison between the detective story generally and the trauerspiel as Benjamin describes it, focusing on the allegorical construction central to both, see Frisby, p. 20. The comparison seems particularly apposite in the case of hard-boiled crime fiction not just because it shares the Saturnalian atmosphere of the mourning-drama, but because in its recurring focus on corrupt local government and the machinations of civil servants, gangsters, gamblers, etc., hard-boiled fiction follows the emphasis the trauerspiel, like Jacobean drama, places on court intrigue.
6. On this last point, see especially Kendrick and Freedman.
7. The most compelling argument that hard-boiled fiction is driven by a fundamental anti-urbanism is Marcus Klein's. Of the city Personville that is the setting for Hammett's Red Harvest, he notes: "We know within the first half-dozen words of the novel that the more appropriate name for the place is Poisonville. Persons in community are, per se, poison. That, within a half-dozen words, is the whole premise of the novel" (115). This is an accurate picture, but it is only half-true and misses the pleasure and excitement in hard-boiled fiction that comes from specifically urban interaction. In The Long Goodbye Philip Marlowe apostrophizes the glamour of city life by mocking a suburban pastoral vision in a way that could speak for all the hard-boiled writers. His emphasis on a fundamental ambivalence is a good corrective to Klein's singular

perspective and is especially striking insofar as Chandler's late novels are the weariest and most cynical visions of urbanity the genre produces: "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 programs they could have on the radio or 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 Reader's 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. I'll take the big sordid dirty crooked city" (249).

8. Simmel's philosophical investigation of the ideal type of the adventurer, in its emphasis on the boundedness and dream-like autonomy of the adventure -- the way the adventure "is a foreign body in our existence which is yet somehow connected with the center" -- and in his comparison of the adventure both to gambling and erotic escapades, especially insofar as they all stress the "uncertain" and "mortal danger," makes the essay look like a startling anticipation of Goffman's much more concrete description of the mundane arrangements involved in "action," discussed in chapter 4 (188, 197).
9. It may also situate the genre within a broader public discourse. Warren Susman argues, against the assumption of a persistent anti-urbanism, that "American thought, at least from 1830 to 1930, was built in large part on a structure that assumed the growth of the ideal of a great city" (251, 237-251). From 1890 through 1930 especially (approximately the period from the peak of the urban dime-novel detectives who lay the ground for hard-boiled fiction and the genre's assumption of prominence in the pulp magazines), Susman claims, the city is at the focus of American political, sociological, and cultural thought (246-248). David Harvey sees the role of this intellectual and social work in much the same terms as I have described the hard-boiled detective's efforts, i.e., the search for an urban legibility. "[U]rban reformers (like Charles Booth, Octavia Hill, and Jane Addams) and sociologists (particularly of the Chicago School) set out to explore the fragments and try to identify or impose some sense of 'moral order' across them. And there arose a whole host of professionals -- engineers, architects, urban planners, and designers -- whose entire mission was to rationalize the fragments and impose coherence on the spatial system as a whole" (14). The

notion of "legibility," of course, is from Kevin Lynch's classic text on urban design The Image of the City.

10. Quoting The Philosophy of Right, section 93.
11. Black Mask 10.9 (November 1927) 9. The first installment of Hammett's serial was originally called "The Cleansing of Poisonville."
12. R. D. McKenzie, "The Rise of Metropolitan Communities," Recent Social Trends (New York:McGraw-Hill, 1933), 492-93, n. 30, quoted at Marquis 122.
13. Though, according to Robert Fogleson's famous analysis, Los Angeles as Fragmented Metropolis anticipates in the interwar period most of the features of suburbanization and decentralization that would be fully discovered by the remainder of the country only after the war. As important as Los Angeles is to the making of hard-boiled fiction, however, I think it would be a mistake to take the particular form of that city as the determining force for the genre's urban qualities. Many of the characteristics of L.A. in hard-boiled fiction can be just as easily seen in stories set in other locations. (Compare, for example, Raoul Whitfield's Death in a Bowl, set in L.A., and his Green Ice, which takes place in New York and Pittsburgh.) In a writer like Chandler, L.A. provides an opportunity to give radical expression to features that appear at least vestigially in other hard-boiled city settings.
14. The title of Henry Green's history of the U.S. between 1915 and 1945 makes this point nicely. He sums the period under the phrase, The Uncertainty of Everyday Life. See also Roderick Nash's classic intellectual and cultural history of the Twenties, The Age of Anxiety.
15. See Marshall Berman, All That is Solid Melts Into Air and David Harvey, Consciousness and the Urban experience.
16. On the "dizzying speed" of road, highway, bridge and tunnel construction during the interwar period, see Henry Green, 106-107, Jackson, 166.
17. In Fredric Jameson's accurate description, such places offer "the dimension of the interchangeable, the inauthentic . . ." ("Chandler" 128). They lack the deep social meaning, the civic purpose, and monumental legibility of the city at its most attractive and render instead the urban as the scene of commercial transaction and ceaseless transformation. This is the city as the developer or the revolutionary sees it. Compare Walter Benjamin's description of the surrealists who "perceive the revolutionary energies that appear in the

'outmoded' No one before these visionaries perceived how destitution --not only social but architectonic, the poverty of interiors, enslaved and enslaving objects -- can be suddenly transformed into revolutionary nihilism. . . . They bring the immense forces of 'atmosphere' concealed in these things to the point of explosion" (181-82). The connection between decay and revolution, of course, is the same as between decay and development -- the undetermined time of transition.

18. In 1949 the Census Bureau defined a metropolis as a city with a population greater than 50,000 and functioning as an "integrated economic unit with a large volume of daily travel and communication between the central city and outlying parts of the area" (Sharpe and Wallock 31). By 1933, half of the U.S. population lived within a half-hour drive of a city of 100,000 or more (Henry Green 6).
19. On the central place of this type of urban detective story in dime novels from the early 1880s, see Hoppenstand 4-6.
20. Page 479; quoted at Giddens, "Time, Labour and the City," A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism 148.
21. The first appearance of this motif occurs in A Rage in Harlem, and it seems clearly intended to give a hyperbolic, but almost plausible account of the two cops brutal efficiency. They stand on either side of a line at the Savoy Ballroom with their guns drawn and promise to shoot anyone who steps out of the queue. "Folks in Harlem believed that Grave Digger Jones and Coffin Ed Johnson would shoot a man stone dead for not standing straight in a line" (44). By a late novel like Cotton Comes to Harlem, both the occasions for disorder and the cops violence approaches the apocalyptic and the plainly allegorical. Here two opposed marches, one of the Black Muslims, the other of a fraudulent movement called Back-to-the Southland threaten to come to a head-on collision, and Himes's cops use their guns to herd the mobs away from confrontation (114-17). In the last of the Harlem domestic series, Blind Man with a Pistol, this scenario is repeated, only now there are three separate marches -- one for Brotherly Love, the other for the Black Jesus movement, the third for Black Power. This time the parades do collide into riot, and the methods of Himes's heroes are helpless to bring order, thus fulfilling the implicit promise in The Heat's On of civil society collapsed into pure war (98-108). At the same time, the crime fiction structure of Himes's plots also breaks down, and the novel makes use of pastiche and juxtaposition to suggest that its kind of order has become impossible.

22. To get a sense of how emphatic Daly's stress on his fiction as a kind of public theater is, see also Snarl pp. 32, 107, 114, 177. At the novel's conclusion, the ominously invisible source of power is appropriately dispatched in a way that calls attention to the ability of the modern city's modes of communication to render power opaque: "A girl had called Oscar Merrill Davison on the telephone before the police reached his hotel. Who she was or what she said can only be guessed at -- but Davison has put a bullet behind his ear. . . . So died the unseen actor in the tragedy; the last of the Davisons went out by his own hand" (226).

23. The Op leaves Personville with the city about to be turned over to martial law and knowing that Elihu Willson, its corrupt autocrat, will have "his city back, all nice and clean and ready to go to the dogs again" (203).

24. For an excellent discussion of the centrality of disguise to dime-novel narrative, of its use for representing class, and its implications of freedom and social mobility within an urban environment, see Denning, Mechanic Accents, 146-148. In this reading, the dime-novel detective's crucial attribute, beyond even skill or strength, is a fluid social identity. Although Denning does not make this argument, I think it's clear that even though the mechanics and metaphorical significance of disguise lose credibility in the pulp era, hard-boiled fiction preserves an emphasis on the protagonist's ability to use the city as a stage for the theatrical assumption of various kinds of identity. Part of what makes the genre interesting, though, is precisely the fact that this freedom -- nearly magical for Nick Carter -- has been significantly impaired and its potency as a means of problem solving drastically reduced.

CONCLUSION

The penultimate chapter of The Maltese Falcon follows what at first seems an unlikely strategy for building up the tension to be resolved in the novel's dramatic conclusion. Having reached a fever-pitch of melodramatic conflict and angry conversation, the novel suddenly slams into low gear, and Hammett offers his reader an interval of narrative aimlessness and a startling portrait of boredom. The scene takes place in Sam Spade's apartment as the private eye and the novel's competing band of thieves wait for the delivery of the counterfeit bird. Brigid has prepared a meal, but:

[t]he boy would not eat. Cairo took a cup of coffee. The girl, Gutman, and Spade ate the scrambled eggs, bacon, toast, and marmalade she had prepared, and drank two cups of coffee apiece. Then they settled down to wait the rest of the night through.

Gutman smoked a cigar and read Celebrated Criminal Cases of America, now and then chuckling over or commenting on the parts of its contents that amused him. Cairo nursed his mouth and sulked on his end of the sofa. The boy sat with his head in his hands until a little after four o'clock. Then he lay down with his feet towards Cairo, turned his face to the window, and went to sleep.

Brigid O'Shaughnessy, in the armchair, dozed, listened to the fat man's comments, and carried on wide-spaced desultory conversations with Spade.

Spade rolled and smoked cigarettes and moved, without fidgeting or nervousness, around the room. He sat sometimes on an arm of the girl's chair, on the table-corner, on the floor at her feet, on a straight-backed chair (199-200).

The narrative continues in this manner for another two paragraphs or so, rendering the empty night its characters spend with a wide-spaced, desultory form of its own and offering, like many another passage in the novel, an example of Hammett's deft manipulation of the lineaments of the crime thriller. It is not unusual and was not unusual in the late twenties for a writer of adventure fiction to build drama by withholding information or to ratchet up suspense by shifting tempo and slowing the course of the narrative's conclusion. But it seems unlikely that many writers were able to practice these methods quite so drastically as Hammett does here. In the process, he reminds us of that tendency, shared by so many of the best hard-boiled writers, to drive the sleek engine of thriller narrative off the rails -- to be tempted by the prospect of leaving their characters and stories in the slough of ennui that Geoffrey

O'Brien aptly describes as "a zero state of silence, solitude and immobility".¹

Hammett's passage, though, differs from this familiar aspect of hard-boiled narrative in two ways. First, the imminent arrival of the falcon makes the entire scene fraught with an anticipation that prevents the passage from being a matter of sheer boredom. More strikingly, the dead moments in most hard-boiled stories, as O'Brien suggests, typically dramatize the experience of loneliness and isolation. It is as though the hard-boiled protagonist is so completely a social creature that, removed from the vitality of public theater, the round of verbal combat and mundane interaction that makes up the bulk of most hard-boiled stories, the hero is sapped of energy and reduced to the wooden immobility of a mannikin. The down-time of hard-boiled narrative, where the solitary protagonist sits poised before a bottle and an ashtray or stands looking blankly out the window of an empty, low-rent office, is, then, the complement to the furious social action that fills out the greater part of the stories. The excruciating mixture of boredom and tension that colors Hammett's scene, however, is the result not of the protagonist's isolation but of the fact that he is constrained to spend an evening with characters who would all like desperately to escape each other. What pushes the scene toward entropy, therefore, and consequently gives the wide-spaced, desultory passage

emotional force is not so much the typical problem -- that the hero is cut off from interaction -- but the more pathetic fact that Hammett's characters have run out of drama. Arriving at a temporary settlement to their conflicts and apparently exhausting the source of any verbal interaction, they settle naturally into a silence whose occasional interruptions, the narrator discovers, are not worth reporting.

Like Sam Spade's Flitcraft anecdote, then, this passage from The Maltese Falcon exploits hard-boiled fiction's familiar tension between the pathological emptiness of everyday life and the sheer vitality of its disruption. It is a theme reinforced by the scenes that immediately precede Hammett's portrait of ennui. Just before Spade returns to his apartment for the novel's final confrontations and the passage with which we began, he is sent on a fool's errand for his only journey outside of San Francisco. Telephoned by Brigid that she is in danger, Spade arrives at the Alexandria hotel only to find Caspar Gutman's teenage daughter. The young woman has been drugged and she struggles to break her stupor to inform Spade that Brigid is being held captive at 26 Ancho Avenue in Burlingame, a newly developing suburb outside of San Francisco. When Spade arrives at the address, he finds a neighborhood like the Purissima Canyon of Chandler's Farewell, My Lovely or the exurban location of Cain's Postman. On the hazy edge of

town, the street is neither country nor city and seems more ominous than either for its partial development.

Far ahead a lone street-light burned. Warmer lights dotted the night on the either side where houses were spaced half a dozen to a block. A high thin moon was cold and feeble as the distant street-light. A radio droned through the open windows of a house on the other side of the street.

In front of the second house from the corner Spade halted. On one of the gateposts that were massive out of all proportion to the fence flanking them a 2 and a 6 of pale metal caught what light there was. . . . He stood still on the walk at the foot of the porch-steps for a long moment. No sound came from the house. . . .

Spade went up to the door and listened. He could hear nothing. He tried to look through the glass of the door. There was no curtain to keep his gaze out, but inner darkness (166-67).

The house, of course, is empty. This hard-boiled analogue to the maiden's imprisoning tower turns out to have been part of a dodge to buy Gutman and Brigid time. And, if the phrase "inner darkness" does not make the underlying

point clear enough, it is further emphasized when Spade goes to the caretaker's home to get the key for number twenty-six. He is greeted there by glowing lights and a girl of fourteen or fifteen (the same age as Gutman's daughter) who cheerfully runs to bring her "Papa" from his evening paper (167-68). Much as with Lola Nirdlinger in Cain's Double Indemnity, this brief scene offers a glimpse of a kind of traditional, wholesome middle-class normality that sets off the disappointment and depravity of the remainder of the story. The other aspects of the novel -- the tale of Flitcraft, Gutman's strategic use and abuse of his daughter, Brigid's fraudulent portrayal of lady-in-distress and devoted helpmeet -- combine in a vision of skeletal, nightmarish domesticity whose concrete embodiment is the abandoned suburban home. Like many of Hammett's earlier stories, then, a tale that at first seems to be concerned with crime and work and the public world of municipal government turns out to be about the dissolution of the patriarchal family. The latent and often patent anxiety appears to be that the comforting embrace of the bourgeois home is more accurately described, in a phrase from an early Race Williams story, as "a house of terror."

It seems fitting, then, that having discovered the Burlingame home to be a ruse, Sam Spade returns to his own "home" only to find that it has been taken over by Brigid, Gutman, Cairo, and the boyish gunslinger Wilmer (170). Seen

in this context, the passage of boredom that precedes The Maltese Falcon's conclusion takes on some unmistakable overtones; it becomes a portrait of a stultifying family dinner and of the agonizing boredom in "settl[ing] down to wait . . . [a] night through" at home (200). Like much else in the novel, Spade's apartment and the empty evening spent in it seem a devilish inversion of domesticity. And as with the impression of boredom itself, it is a situation that initially feels strangely misplaced. The hard-boiled hero, who at first appears fundamentally anti-domestic -- a man, as Steven Marcus's description of the Continental Op puts it, who has "no personal existence apart from his work" (xxv) -- finds himself literally in a battle for possession of his home.²

Spade will win that battle in good measure by relying on the methods used by his adversaries, acting out a parody of domesticity and patriarchal authority. In the scene immediately preceding the meal Brigid prepares, in what will become easily the most disturbing passage in the novel, Spade takes Brigid in the bathroom and forces her to consent to a strip search. What is especially shocking about this abuse, though, is not so much its plain brutality, but the crueler fact that Spade seems to know in advance the results it will produce and thus performs it not for what it will tell him about Brigid but for the effect it will produce on the waiting audience of Gutman and Cairo. The strip search,

in other words, is domestic violence as theater. It comes as little surprise, therefore, that Brigid emerges from the bathroom, takes "a step towards the living-room, turn[s] around, . . . [goes] to the kitchen and turn[s] on the light" (197). She presumably is either cowed by Spade's performance into accepting the wifely duties of making dinner or, as her stutter step perhaps suggests, continues her own charade of domesticity in the hope that it will save her neck. In any case, it is partly because of the thick atmosphere of theatricality set up in these scenes that Spade's ultimate performance, the long speech in which he assumes public responsibility and denounces Brigid, comes to many readers to seem all too much a performance -- play-acting whose sincerity and conviction cannot be gauged.

Seen in this manner, as a competitive parody of domesticity, the final chapters of The Maltese Falcon anticipate a criticism often leveled at hard-boiled crime fiction: that what seems at first like a form of broad social analysis and satire is in fact a concealed family romance. The type of public theater that opens The Maltese Falcon -- where the scene of Miles Archer's murder becomes a public stage crossed by figures of institutional authority and witnessed by strangers -- gives way to a private drama. Action thus moves indoors, away from its implications about urban life and city government and toward the hero's efforts

to save his "home" from the failures of domesticity. This pattern will become especially galling to some readers as it gets more fully elaborated in Raymond Chandler's novels. Philip Marlowe, a number of commentators have pointed out, goes to great length to trace the patterns of corruption and power through the landscape of the city only to discover that the root crime is not, as it appeared, political, but domestic. To a good number of readers that seems a bad-faith naturalization of proto-populist social criticism into family melodrama; the source of evil almost inevitably becomes not money or class or abusive political power but the frighteningly amoral desire of a corrupt woman. In this way the domestication of corruption in the hard-boiled world comes to seem a parallel to the domestication of the genre itself -- both the crime and the social criticism are reduced to the small, safe, familiar and confined.

This complaint, however, is much like the nearly tautological argument that often accompanies it: that detective fiction tends to uphold the liberal ideology of law as an ultimately just framework for civil society. Accurate in its elements, the charge still seems essentially unfair or misplaced. To begin with, for all its idiosyncracies and virtues, hard-boiled crime fiction remains a form of popular entertainment produced for sale to a largely male audience in a capitalist economy. It is hardly a shock, then, that reduced to its fundamentals the

genre is a conservative, even reactionary type of fiction. But pop culture criticism has been reducing things to their fundamentals for long enough now, and as any reader of the fiction can explain, it is not the givens of the genre that are important or most interesting but what gets done within that framework. In these particulars, hard-boiled fiction tends to become a more complicated affair.

More damagingly, I think, those critics who point indignantly to crime fiction's disappearance into the private tend to rely themselves on a pointlessly conservative separation between public and private life. Surely the issue in the best hard-boiled stories is that domestic intimacy and institutional, political, and economic power get mixed up in all sorts of confusing and inextricable ways. This is the implication of both Chandler's Big Sleep, where Carmen Sternwood's depravity leads naturally into networks of corruption and power that spread through the furthest reaches of L.A. society, and the conclusion of The Maltese Falcon, where Spade uses the demands of the law and the police to back up his abandonment of Brigid. In a way, writers like Hammett and Chandler, as distant cousins of the realist tradition, suggest that the personal is political long before the phrase is coined (though, of course, with sentiments and to ends diametrically opposed to the aims of feminism).

Critics of the genre are not wrong, then, to note that the fiction is given force by a strain of social protest that aims for a hopeless ideal of public authority even as it is tangled up with and often drowned out by other aspects of the stories. The striking feature of the fiction, though, is precisely the way these matters become intertwined. The development of hard-boiled fiction accompanies the initial definition of several genres of pulp fiction and of specialized publications aimed at particular audiences, the divisions of which tend to take place along strictly gendered lines. Slick magazines and the romance and confession pulps are generally agreed to address domestic concerns and a feminine audience, while adventure and western pulps, "turning from the family circle to that more specialized audience, men" make the paradoxical discovery that their "fictional arena was the world and its subject, all the human conflicts that could be imagined upon that agreeably wide stage" (Sampson, v. 4, 207). Even as it participates in this schematization, though, hard-boiled fiction appears often to question or complain at it. Largely because its writers are ambitious enough to bridle at any confines, I suspect, as well as perceptive enough to recognize the bizarre illogic of the situation Sampson describes, hard-boiled fiction continually portrays a world where the notions of the public and the domestic have lost stature and authority.

In fact, one way to describe hard-boiled fiction would be to call it an ongoing popular meditation on the hazy boundaries between public and private worlds. Neither side of the equation is meaningful or entirely attractive in its own right. The intimate sphere of the hard-boiled protagonist's private life is characteristically empty and bitter, and removed from contact with an outside world it settles quickly into the zero state described by O'Brien. A still more unattractive possibility is suggested in the Flitcraft anecdote and in Sam Spade's parody of the family dinner -- of domesticity as sham and swaddling boredom. The public world of sharp dealing, passing money, and verbal battle, on the other hand, is invigorating, but it also tends inveterately toward the tawdry, corrupt, and intrusive. The displaced center of these stories -- displaced because it is seen only in the rarest moments, but central because it is the ground on which these two worlds meet -- becomes, therefore, the unstable terrain of the protagonist's home. The places where hard-boiled figures find these homes -- a word that in the mouths of Spade and Philip Marlowe always seems to have quotation marks around it -- make the point perfectly. Hotel rooms, kitchenette flats with murphy beds, bungalows kept for a year and then traded for another temporary address, they are, as the always invading police seem to know, either semi-private or aspects of an ephemeral demi-public.

The plots of hard-boiled stories, then, often proffer what look like partial resolutions of the problem of public and private life. These tend to be solutions where the forces of law and of the various forms of urban power are returned to their proper concerns and convinced to leave off harassing the protagonist and, most typically, where a threateningly mobile and ambitious or hungry woman is banished from public life. The Big Sleep offers perhaps the paradigmatic case. At its conclusion, Philip Marlowe returns the nymphomaniacal Carmen Sternwood, who has led him on a chase through the heights and depths of L.A., to the care of her aging father. The Maltese Falcon likewise concludes with Brigid O'Shaughnessy turned over to the finally satisfied police. In both cases, though, we are left with the clear impression that the solution is at best temporary. There is no reason why the impotent patriarch General Sternwood should be expected to keep his wayward daughters in rein. Similarly, the shaky finale to Hammett's novel is emphasized not only by the fact that Spade needs the police to enforce it but in a coda that places Spade at the mercy of two women who share between them the most threatening aspects of Brigid's character. Effie Perrine, Spade's secretary, the "boyish" career girl and the reader of Time magazine, resembles Brigid as androgynous New Woman: independent, intelligent, tough and savvy (201). Miles Archer's widow Iva is the clinging and insatiable sex-

kitten, and the novel's final sentences depict an unlikely alliance. The angry and unsympathetic Effie announces the grasping and determined Iva. "[Effie] said in a small flat voice: 'Iva is here.' Spade, looking down at his desk, nodded almost imperceptibly. 'Yes,' he said, and shivered. 'Well, send her in'" (217).

If hard-boiled fiction suggests some kind of ideological solution to the complications of public and private worlds, then, it has difficulty rendering that answer in convincing terms. Here, I think there is a parallel to be drawn between the content of the fiction and the place the genre and its creators occupied in American cultural life. I have argued throughout this dissertation that that place was unusual for the extent to which it was uncertain -- uncertain both in the way that any writer's career is uncertain, but also for the more pressing difficulty that the best hard-boiled writers felt themselves to have fallen between worlds. Stranded between the realms of pulp publishing and literary culture and fundamentally hostile to the middlebrow world of slick magazines and The-Book-of-the-Month-Club, they could neither be content with popular success nor, however much recognition they achieved, could they imagine gaining the authority and eminence we habitually grant to established writers.

In their troubled accounts of public and private life, hard-boiled stories render these difficulties in sharply

gendered terms, but, partially because writers like Hammett and Chandler can find no secure ground from which to speak, they also make the traditional associations between femininity and domesticity and masculinity and public life uncertain. Harold Hersey's denunciations of the slick magazines suggest good reasons why both things should be true. Drawing on the familiar opposition between those publications and the pulps, Hersey boosts his achievements with an exaggerated but accurate description of slicks that feature "half-dressed ladies in their bedrooms and bathrooms":

In the smooth-paper magazines women are . . . shown working in their kitchens, presiding over the table, lolling in the living room and compelling their children to stare uncomfortably at disguised heating appliances, radios and linoleum-covered floors.

The complaint is the same as that which echoes through Chandler's tirades about the vulgarities of American civilization, James M. Cain's disdain for the tacky department-store world of Phyllis Nirdlinger, and even Dashiell Hammett's allusions to the world B.C. -- before credit (Johnson xviii). In all cases, a feminized threat is attributed to the power of consumer culture (Hersey's picture of a monstrous temptress/mommy who forces her

children to enjoy the discomfoting fruits of consumerism is representative). The consequence, as Hersey claims, is that pulp "customers, to put it bluntly, are bored with the family circle and the even more vicious circle of sex" (84). Not only are pulp readers disaffected from sex and home, but Hersey attaches to this claim an important implication about public voice:

There is a great show made about the independence of the editorial from the advertising department in a smooth-paper sheet. It is freedom in name only. Imagine any professional editor daring to speak all the truth about his space buyers. The pulp, on the contrary, has little or nothing to worry about in this regard (84-85).

In Hersey's self-promotion, as in hard-boiled narrative, the freedom of public life and an honest public voice are both premised on alienation from an engulfing and vicious domestic world. The irony in this sentiment, though, is apparent in the over-protesting claim that pulp magazines have "little or nothing to worry about." Indeed, the freedom enjoyed by the pulps stems from the fact that, like the hard-boiled hero, they truly have no public voice and are compelled to adopt a kind of cynical neutrality so as to make a virtue of necessity. That is, pulp magazines fill a special niche in the entertainment market between the

wars partly by eschewing almost any explicit editorial content. More importantly, saying that the pulps are independent -- that they have nothing to fear from coercive advertisers -- is another way of saying that advertisers are uninterested in the pulps because they are such a marginal form of publishing. In a world where the public is defined largely as a consumer market, the pulps have almost no public role, and their virtues, as Hersey's phrasing suggests, are thus entirely negative. If they avoid the dishonesty of slick advertising and consumer manipulation, they do so largely by being too small for anyone much to care about. Implicit in this situation, moreover, is a bewildering confusion of terms; in Hersey's universe, the domestic has become the dominant form of public culture, and it threatens always to swallow the intimate and personal instances of the pulp's public freedom.

Perhaps these anxieties about public and private life would not have been such pressing and disturbing matters for hard-boiled writers had they been able to adopt the attitude toward consumerism and middle-brow culture adopted by most intellectuals during the first half of the twentieth-century -- mandarin disregard for kitsch and allegiance to the autonomous realm of authentic art.³ Recognizing a de facto kinship with legitimate literary culture, pulp writers like Hammett, Chandler, and Cain do share with America's

intellectual authority a desire to search out and represent the authentic experience that they fear is always threatened by encroaching banality. But, as popular writers, they are unable to root that desire in the ascetic, or dissenting, or subversive world of pure Culture as so many American intellectuals do. The result is a conflicted, ultimately despairing sense of their own positions and an uncertain feeling about the forms and boundaries of public and private life.

An early moment in The Maltese Falcon shows how deeply this uncertainty runs by indicating both the impulse to police and reinforce those boundaries and the suspicion that the effort is ultimately hopeless. The scene takes place in the fourth chapter of the novel, and concerns Spade's second meeting with Brigid. Spade's partner Miles Archer has been killed (we will learn at the novel's close that Brigid is the murderer), Spade has been interrogated by the police, and he arrives at Brigid's apartment after discovering that she has hurriedly checked out of her hotel. Here Spade also learns Brigid's real name after finding out that both the first and second he has heard -- Miss Wonderly and Miss LeBlanc -- are aliases. What may be most interesting about this passage, however, is that it ends with Spade taking nearly all of Brigid's money. Agreeing against his better instincts to accept Brigid as a client, Spade asks how much

money she has. When he finds that it is four hundred dollars, he leaves with all but twenty-five.

Since we have already learned that the two-hundred dollars Brigid offered during her first meeting with Spade was far too much money for honest detective work, we can presume that Spade wants the cash for something more than his services. That reason is made apparent when Spade leaves, saying "I'll be back as soon as I can" (40). The aim is clearly to immobilize a character who has shown a disturbing freedom both in location and identity. In a novel that in one sense is little more than a competitive shopping spree in which everyone wants to buy the same commodity, Spade's seizure of Brigid's money removes her power to act, places it in his hands, and implies that this is where economic power belongs. At the same time, the minor sum he leaves her and his suggestion that she hock her jewelry, prods Brigid away from the luxury of consumption toward thriftiness and confines her to her apartment.

But, if Spade's confiscation makes money signify the power to act and move, it stands as well for the luxury of a further kind of mobility -- the power to act in a theatrical sense. Spade takes away Brigid's cash just after she confesses that her name is not Wonderly and that she was only pretending to be searching for a missing sister. He confesses mocking admiration for her acting skills: "[y]ou're very good. It's chiefly your eyes, I think, and

that throb you get into your voice . . ." (35). But his attitude shifts when Brigid suggests that her acting is not deception but just bad performance, that she can replay her part and make it more convincing. His declaration, "[n]ow you are dangerous," follows the passage in which Brigid claims that "'the lie was in the way I said it, and not at all in what I said.'" She turned away, no longer holding herself erect. 'It is my own fault that you can't believe me now'" (36).

Brigid's danger here is her refusal to acknowledge falsehood and to surrender to the definition that such an acknowledgment would mean. Instead, she continues to act, altering her part from concerned sister to naughty girl to contrite daughter, suggesting that whenever confronted she will simply slip into performing another of pop culture's various images of femininity, and demonstrating a remarkable ability to mimic the genteel diction of the stories in slick magazines ("You've been patient. You've tried to help me. It is hopeless and useless, I suppose. . . I thank you for what you have done {39}). It is at this juncture that Spade "redde[n]" and alters his own manner from genial observation to interrogation, eventually demanding Brigid's money (36). Seizing control of her cash and plucking her from the realm of the consumer to the disappearing values of thrift, he demands at the same time control over the multiplying identities associated with consumer culture.

Denying her the power to spend means confining her power to move and to change.

In short, the meeting between the detective and the femme fatale is a confrontation between the patriarch and the New Woman, between the worker and the consumer, and between differing ideals of public freedom. Brigid's manifold self-presentations and recreations confront the detective's more old-fashioned forms of social mobility -- his capacity to cross the regions and classes of the city -- with the dizzying ability to race through a limitless number of identities, each more disposable than the last. In a sense, we see in the conflict between Spade and Brigid something like a clash between the conventions of realism and postmodernism. The realist perspective represented by Spade -- the one that emphasizes public life as a stage where the demands of justice and social convention can be mediated -- wins out. It is, however, a hollow and uncertain victory, partly because it seems that Spade must resort to the same methods of violence and deception used by Brigid in order to secure it. More important, though, is the implication of what occurs after Spade leaves Brigid's apartment at the end of chapter four and of what happens at the end of the novel. If Spade hopes to confine Brigid in the earlier instance by taking her money, he is woefully unsuccessful. As she will throughout the novel, she soon disappears (relying, it seems, on a form of credit), only to

resurface where and how Spade least expects. She is like the Maltese falcon itself, seemingly everywhere at once, and, as Spade's trip to Burlingame suggests, no place in particular. And, as the novel's conclusion suggests, when she is effectively resurrected in the combined persons of Effie and Iva, she is, in fact, much like Hersey's vision of slick culture: an illusory version of domesticity that appears to surround the pitifully small authority of manly public life.

In recent years a number of writers have expanded the forms of hard-boiled writing by introducing some marvelous ingenuity to the genre's familiar schemes of characterization. There are now black detectives, gay detectives, women gumshoes aplenty, and even lesbian private-eyes. In the process, these writers have brought fresh meaning to the genre's exploration of the tension between private and public life. In many ways, the needs of gay characters, for example, to establish multiple identities, to escape official surveillance, to carve out an alternative realm of public freedom makes for far more poignant material than the original hard-boiled writers could have imagined. Likewise, hard-boiled fiction's anti-institutionalism and distrust of the police makes more sense for black characters than it ever did for the original protagonists, as Chester Himes was already discovering in

the fifties. Then, too, the desire to make a home apart from domesticity suggests the possibilities for a populist, proto-feminism that has offered ripe material for the creators of female hard-boiled protagonists. In all these cases, there has been, as well, a delightful sense of cheeky revisionism, in which the stock figures and the cardboard machismo of much hard-boiled writing is subjected to a knowing citation. But this last po-mo quality also suggests some of what can be lost from hard-boiled writing as the genre becomes more familiar as a rule-ridden genre and, as a consequence, some of what made for its original power.

What happens to Sam Spade when he denounces Brigid in The Maltese Falcon's notorious denouement is, I think, the result of an attempt to achieve a kind of public authority and popular authenticity that would escape the power of consumerism and middle-brow culture. As Spade suggests in his fierce, repetitive, almost incantatory account of what one is "supposed to do" and as he implies in his refusal to give in "because all of me wants to -- wants to say to hell with the consequences and do it -- and because -- God damn you -- you've counted on that . . . ," his renunciation is an effort to get back to some forgotten authority, perhaps to the world as he imagined it before credit changed the landscape (213, 215). Hammett, like Chandler, and Cain, and all the best hard-boiled writers, leaves us with the impression that the effort is a failure. Spade's speech is

ultimately an inadequate justification. But the pathos of these writers' individual careers and the compelling quality of their fiction depends, I think, on that failure being something more than an ironic reference to the absurdities of heroism and machismo. The hard-boiled writers strive to escape both the cloistered imitations of pulp culture and the gentility of the slick magazines. In the effort, they create a vision of predatory feminism of absurd dimensions, but they also develop a kind of popular fiction whose implicit vision of a liberatory public culture continues to inspire the genre's experimenters.

* * *

NOTES

1. See chapter 3, n. 9.
2. Both Hammett's earlier story, "The House in Turk Street" and Chandler's The Big Sleep offer similar cases. At a pivotal moment in the latter, Marlowe kicks Carmen Sternwood out of his bed and apartment with the sentiment: "I didn't mind what she called me, what anybody called me. But this was the room I had to live in. It was all I had in the way of a home. In it was everything that was mine, that had any association for me, any past, anything that took the place of a family" (96). Hammett's "Turk Street" likewise finds the protagonist in a struggle to retain control over a home, although it is not his own. The Billy Wilder/Raymond Chandler film version of Double Indemnity underscores this theme nicely by having the protagonist shot by his lover in her living room and then showing him crawling "home" to his office to die. That the domestic is in fact a central concern of hard-boiled narrative can also be seen in the fact that the false problem with which the novel begins -- the missing daughter/sister runs throughout the genre and is only rivaled by tales of missing brothers and sons.
3. See Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other," After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism and Miles Orvell, The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940.

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