HARD-BOILED IRONY:
THE INVERSION OF MEDIEVAL ROMANCE IN
20TH CENTURY AMERICAN DETECTIVE FICTION

A dissertation submitted to the Caspersen School of Graduate Studies

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ABSTRACT

Hard-boiled Irony:
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Doctorate of Philosophy Dissertation by

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This dissertation examines the reason why hard-boiled detective fiction owes a greater debt to medieval romance than to its immediate predecessors within the detective fiction genre. Through a comparative analysis of major works in each field, I identify the thematic relationship between medieval romance and hard-boiled detective fiction. By first examining the generic concerns of medieval authors, as well as the motivation for the nineteenth century's renewed interest in medieval culture, particularly romance, I establish the mode and movement (Romantic nationalism) to which hard-boiled detective writers are responding. This, compounded by the contemporary socio-political and cultural landscape of early twentieth-century America provides not only the basis for the stylistic shift in the detective fiction genre after World War I but also the deliberate inversion of medieval romance themes. Addressing why and how the themes established in medieval romance, which fulfill the romance genre's bi-partite functions of entertainment and instruction, also resonate in hard-boiled detective fiction, I classify the latter as a modern form of romance. By creating its own "exaggerated verisimilitude" and by reworking familiar romance themes of authority, identity, and gender relations, hard-boiled fiction, like medieval romance, speaks to contemporary cultural anxieties.

DEDICATION

To my son…

"Since it is so likely that children will meet cruel enemies,

let them at least have heard of brave knights and heroic courage."

- C.S. Lewis

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a comparative analysis of medieval and modern literature, in which I identify a thematic relationship between medieval romance and hard-boiled detective fiction of the early twentieth century. The project's central question is why and how do themes of authority and identity, as well as gender relations, established in medieval romance, arise in hard-boiled detective fiction, and to what extent does this twentieth-century re-visioning represent a modern interpretation of romance.

My goal is to identify and characterize the thematic relationship between medieval romance and American hard-boiled detective fiction of the early twentieth century. Through an examination of contributing cultural and literary factors, I seek to demonstrate how the romance genre's primary functions are both fulfilled by each sub-genre of romance. The effect of my comparative analysis will show how and why hard-boiled fiction is in conversation with medieval romance to a greater extent than its immediate predecessors within detective fiction. Despite their manipulation, the reintroduction of familiar romance themes demonstrates how hard-boiled fiction, like medieval romance, addresses contemporary cultural anxieties such as political corruption, the proliferation of organized crime, progressivism, and gender and class warfare.

Although hard-boiled detective fiction utilizes medieval romance themes such as authority and identity, it would be implausible to suggest that the two forms are in direct dialogue. The temporal gap alone would make such a claim difficult to establish. Instead, it is my contention that hard-boiled detective fiction is responding to, if not altogether rejecting, the medievalist movement of the nineteenth century in keeping with

other modernist developments following World War I. It is with this more relevant cultural agenda that hard-boiled detective fiction adopts its inverted perspective on traditional romance themes of authority, identity, and gender relations.

Romance, as a genre, is problematic because of its flexible and broadly defined nature, and as a result, centuries worth of literature attributed to the genre seems detached and removed from other texts commonly labeled as romance. However, the genre's central tenets of entertainment and instruction, as described by Christine Chism remain its core values, and consequently they are the most manageable means of comparative analysis. In addition to these fundamental qualities, I propose a third component to romance literature, which enhances intertextuality and critical analysis. Through the deliberate treatment or more accurately, manipulation of the setting, romance achieves literary transcendence. This essential element not only contributes to the cultural significance of these texts beyond its immediate and intended audiences but allows for the literary lineage between medieval romance and hard-boiled detective fiction to be established.

Understanding why and for whom medieval romances are created is an essential first step. It is necessary to identify the literary, as well as cultural influences that contributed to both the French and English traditions. Once the "who" portion is answered, we are left with the romance genre's tri-partite design to answer the question: "why?" I use the term "exaggerated verisimilitude" in my work to refer to the way in which medieval romance negotiates the boundaries and limits of reality to fulfill the genre's three functions. This term is also relevant to later discussions of hard-boiled detective fiction, whose authors also create an alternative reality with particular emphases

and enhancements. Regarding entertainment, the abilities and exploits of romance protagonists are heightened for dramatic effect. This deliberate exploitation on the author's part is largely aimed at representing the ideal medieval hero – one which could captivate and inspire aristocratic audiences. To this point, the influence of past heroic literature from classical epic poetry to the more contemporary *chansons de geste* on the heroic language and ideals portrayed in romance literature contribute to the construction and representation of the medieval chivalric knight. However, the verisimilitude that exists in medieval romance goes beyond making a connection to the primary world for recognition purposes. The manipulation of reality helps draw attention to qualities that serve as the foundation for romance's ability to instruct.

The attempt to portray the ideal medieval hero in the guise of the chivalric knight (e.g. Sir Gawain or Lancelot) is often nothing more than an exercise in futility. To put it succinctly, it fails because the hero is unable to complete the task at hand. This design is a conscious and purposeful move on the part of the author to identify and exploit tensions that exist in reality. As such, conflicting cultural dynamics emerge in medieval romance that includes chivalry versus Christianity, public duty versus private desire, and the masculine versus the feminine. While there are examples that represent each of these conflicts in isolation, in Chretien de Troyes' *The Knight of the Cart*, Lancelot's decision to ride willingly within the cart, a vehicle reserved for criminals, converges all of these tensions in a single moment. The conflict that is created by the hero's attempt to reconcile these dichotomous forces (or ignore them entirely), from a narrative perspective, results in the failure of the quest and tarnishes the hero. From an authorial perspective, it is an example of social criticism through the acknowledgement of cultural

inconsistencies (the incompatibility of social standards and ideals and the anxieties they create). It is my contention that this structure predicated on exaggerated verisimilitude is deliberate and allows the fundamental goals of romance to co-exist in medieval romance. Ultimately, if romance is a genre designed to entertain its audience via the superhuman and supernatural of its embellished reality, it is equally intent on instructing the same audience through social and cultural criticism. Finally, its ability to transcend time, that is, to resonate with other, non-medieval audiences is what truly defines a work as romance. In addition to *The Knight of the Cart*, I also evaluate *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale" and the thematic function of authority and identity, as well as how gender relations are founded.

The next part of my project surveys the importance of medievalism in the nineteenth century in conjunction with the influence of romantic nationalism leading up to the Great War. Hard-boiled detective fiction is not only a re-appropriation of medieval romance, but more importantly, it is a rejection of this nineteenth-century movement. I explore the idealization of the Middle Ages by the aristocracy and social activists, as well as the context for its reemergence. The emphasis on issues and themes including myth-building, heroic ideals, and social structures and relations are relevant and a point of comparison to the rise of Modernism following the Great War, where perspectives shift significantly. In fact, the idealization of medieval culture by Victorians, even on a superficial level, ignores, or at best, manipulates the inherent flaws illustrated by medieval romance for contemporary socio-political purposes. Where medieval romance's exaggerated verisimilitude seeks to highlight conflict, medievalism in the

nineteenth century tries to suppress or at least neglects comparable conflicts and tensions in contemporary society.

The failure of romantic nationalism following World War I is best illustrated by the rise of Modernism and the destruction of the romantic ideal where mythic and national pretense is dropped. The romantic ideals of the previous century are reexamined after World War I and ultimately abandoned. The way in which World War I brought about this shift is addressed in Paul Fusell's *The Great War and Modern Memory* and Barbara Tuchman's *The Guns of August*. Consequently, modernism reflects society's awareness of the manipulative forces of romantic nationalism and is focused primarily on social conflicts and their contexts. As a result, idealism gives way to cynicism.

My introduction to hard-boiled detective fiction includes the socio-political context in which it emerges. My comparative analysis to medieval romance is predicated on three issues. First, early twentieth-century hard-boiled fiction is, in fact, romance because like its medieval predecessor, it maintains the same three goals of romance. The same cannot be said of Victorian detective fiction. Secondly, hard-boiled detective fiction borrows themes commonly found in medieval literature that correspond to the conflict dynamics of romance. They include the hero's relationship to authority, his sense of self (issues of identity and self-preservation), and finally, the protagonists' female relationships (gender dynamics). However, there is a significant shift in the early twentieth-century American perspective on these romance themes. Hard-boiled detective fiction deliberately inverts these borrowed themes and the hero's position to each conflict. This is manifested through a rejection of traditional authority (such as the police or civic figures), a diminished regard for self that is often illustrated by alcohol abuse and

even masochistic tendencies, and guarded relationships with women. Finally, I argue that this inversion not only allows the author to embed contemporary social commentary and criticism, but also represents a conscious rejection of the idealism of nineteenth-century medievalism in the cynical spirit of Modernism. By doing so, it returns the genre to the same cultural anxieties and kinds of irreconcilable conflicts in society. Relevant primary texts include both the early short stories of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler and the first novel of Mickey Spillane, *I, the Jury*.

This dissertation represents more than the acknowledgment of medieval themes present in modern literature. The significance rests in accounting for their presence centuries after their introduction within the romance genre. A central question that I address is how and why authors such as Hammett, Chandler, and Spillane revisit the romance themes centering on conflicting cultural dynamics, particularly the medieval thematic perspective. By approaching the topic in this way, there is an opportunity to begin to close the gap between two periods of history by way of the popular forms of romance literature each produced. This project contributes to the ways in which medieval literature is studied, and to a larger extent, assess how and why medieval culture remains relevant in our modern world. By establishing a thematic relationship between medieval and modern romance, it continues to justify medieval scholarship in the twentieth and even twenty-first centuries. Furthermore, it demonstrates the way in which the romance literature remains more than an escapist genre, but a genre of expression, contrary to the position of many, including Dorothy Sayers. Furthermore, it illustrates how medieval themes and values still serve as an appropriate test to modern socio-cultural anxieties.

CHAPTER 1

THE MEDIEVAL MODEL

Medieval Background

The second half of the twelfth century saw the genesis of a new literary genre. Stemming from Celtic myth, hagiography, chanson de geste, and the performed works of the lyrical troubadours, medieval romance emerged as the quintessential form of literature during the Middle Ages. That romance was tailored specifically to a refined demographic within medieval society raised the form's profile, as well as its cultural status and significance. While the diversity of subject matter[1] also contributed to the audience reception and appreciation, its inherent idealism gave romance a cultural staying power until the 17th century and its satirizing at the hands of Miguel Cervantes.

Before delving into the specifics of the genre, it is important to recognize (and if possible, reduce) what exactly is meant by "romance" in the medieval sense. A broad definition remains just that and fails to identify the qualities of romance that are most often suggested by the term. Beyond something written in a language derived from Latin (*romanz)* such as French, later definitions that include stories of knightly activities and fictitious adventures, which often involve the supernatural or marvelous is a more appropriate or functional definition for this genre. Even with this narrowed definition, the breadth of literature that qualifies as medieval romance is too expansive and diverse to refer to casually as romance, admittedly. Furthermore, attempting to wade through the

[1] I am referring to Jehan de Bodel's accepted classification of romance into three "matters" (i.e. Rome, France, and Britain, which portray the Troy, Charlemagne, and Arthurian cycles, respectively). While romances are not limited to these topics, they establish a framework of intertextuality.

categorical classifications and literary taxonomies specific to the genre would not only delay my analysis seemingly indefinitely, but has been the subject of other critical texts. Instead, I have selected works for textual analysis that, on one hand, represent a sufficient cross-section of the genre and on the other, effectively represent the goals of the genre while also illustrating the themes that are central to the medieval romance. In their own ways, the goals and themes will serve as points of connection between my larger study of the relationship between medieval romance and 20th century American hard-boiled detective fiction.

Romance Genre Goals:

In Christine Chism's overview of romance literature, she proposes that the genre has two goals that account for authorial intention and audience reception. The genre's primary intention, according to Chism, is to entertain its audience. Performed predominantly for the privileged audiences of aristocratic courts and noble families, the subject of these chivalric adventures amused and engrossed their audiences with superhuman characters and often supernatural events. Moreover, most critics accept that the heightening of reality is a necessary byproduct of the implied idealism at work in almost all medieval romances.[2] The effect of which led some early twentieth-century critics to view the genre narrowly as merely escapist literature.[3] However, these post-Romantic sensibilities have been largely overthrown by more recent studies of the interplay of the ideal and the real in medieval romance. W.R.J. Barron argues against the traditional escapist characterization of romance specifically because of the explicit

[2] However, hardboiled detective fiction in the twentieth-century reverses or contradicts this relationship as the heightening of reality does not require the imposition of idealism in the text.
[3] For instance, in Dorothy Sayers' *Omnibus of Crime* she distinguishes between "literature of escapism" and "literature of expression," that is texts that inspire reflection and contemplation on the reader's part.

connections their authors draw between the real and ideal. Likewise, Yin Liu counters the escapist reading by identifying romance's "deep concern with medieval actuality" (Liu 346). While the fantastical elements of romance coupled with departures from the historical medieval world might suggest an escapist framework, this literature should not be so easily dismissed as such.

The inherent idealism that colors medieval romance accentuates the entertainment value of the literature. As Henry James said of romance, it is "experience liberated…experience disengaged, disembroiled, disencumbered, [and] exempt from the conditions that we normally know to attach to it."[4] The same kind of experiential idealism is at work in many forms in medieval romance. In courtly romances such as *The Romance of the Rose* and *The Knight of the Cart*, it can take the form of romantic love where despite physical frustration and emotional anguish, the experience raises the participants to a higher level of existence.[5] Idealism also pervades public life and displays the social virtues of chivalry and courtly behavior. Privately, ethical idealism, while often the site of conflict in romance, allows characters to explore and potentially expand their faith, valor, and moral integrity. Romantic idealism, in all its medieval forms, transforms the depiction of life from "what is" to "what ought to be." I would like to introduce the term exaggerated verisimilitude to describe the way in which romance re-imagines reality and in the case of medieval romance, employs idealism for didactic purposes. By acknowledging the historical and cultural disparity that exists between the

[4] From James' preface to *The American*.
[5] In Andreas Capellanus' twelfth-century text, De Amore, he provides a description of the effect of love: "Now it is the effect of love that a true lover cannot be degraded with any avarice. Love causes a rough and uncouth man to be distinguished for his handsomeness; it can endow a man even of the humblest birth with nobility of character; it blesses the proud with humility; and the man in love becomes accustomed to performing many services gracefully for everyone. O what a wonderful thing is love, which makes a man shine with so many virtues and teaches everyone, no matter who he is, so many good traits of character!" (Capellanus 31).

Primary world of the Middle Ages and the Secondary world of the literature, that is, the world of the romance, it becomes easier to see how the latter sub-creation relates, interacts, and functions in reality.[6]

The idealism at work in medieval romance serves a didactic function, which aligns with Christine Chism's second goal of the genre – instruction. She explains, "Often times romances will push their conventions, pacts, and promises to the point of complete incredulity in order to implicate readers in their own acceptance and provoke questions" (Chism 62). That these texts were written and performed for powerful and influential audiences is not something that should be overlooked or ignored.[7] The opportunity to sway their audiences' perspectives and by extension shape society (potentially) inspired authors to create romances that were, as Richard Kaeuper characterizes them, "active social force[s]." How was this accomplished? Ironically, the instructive quality of romance is achieved (in theory) by writing exactly what their audiences wanted and expected. By this I mean romance was the vogue form of literature in the Middle Ages, and its popularity expanded beyond French to German, English, and eventually Italian and Spanish audiences. The works were a sign of elite status, and the demand for these stories to be transcribed and translated was inspired by the hope of achieving cultural sophistication in the process. By the late Middle Ages, romance permeated medieval culture, and while the stories survive in historical chronicles and manuscript collections, they also were used in the private texts of noble families who sought to align themselves and their lineage with the stories themselves.[8]

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[6] For the meanings and functions of these terms, see J.R.R. Tolkien's essay "On Fairy Stories."
[7] While the audience for medieval romances certainly grew over time, it can be argued that this didactic function remained constant despite the expansion of readership.
[8] See Roberta L. Krueger's introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*.

I concur with Chism's dual function of medieval romance to describe the effect that the literature had, or at the very least, intended to have on its audience. The primary function of entertainment seems entirely believable and is almost unanimously accepted by modern critics. Likewise, medieval romance can be read as a form of instruction that gives a more dynamic social function to the texts – one which lends greater depth to their cultural meaning and literary significance. However, both of these goals are limited by design and intended readership. While modern readers may be entertained by these stories (probably in a different way than medieval audiences), the texts' instructive quality is diminished as we are not the intended audience and are displaced by a significant historical gap. My point is not that modern readers cannot read these romances didactically, but that their lessons are intended for more immediate readers, both chronologically and socially.

To account for the temporal limitations of Chism's theory, I suggest that there is yet another goal of romance, which applies to all forms and literary incarnations. Admittedly, it is a more macro-level view of the genre and an expansion of Chism's reading, accounting for unintended readers, as well as the literal and metaphorical issue of time. I propose that the third goal of romance is to bring the audience to a higher plane of awareness of the world – one that transcends the immediacy of the moment. In effect, medieval romance, although qualified as belonging to the Middle Ages, is not so constrained. It allows the text to transcend temporal limits, simultaneously looking beyond and being looked at from beyond the period in which it is written. This addition is as much a goal as it is an indirect effect of the literature that credits readership over authorship, admittedly. However, the matter of authorship should not be overlooked as

medieval writers hold a significant place in literary history. Modern critics credit Chaucer with the modern conception of authorship as writing was predominantly anonymous in the Anglo-Saxon period. With medieval authors such as Chaucer, we have self-recognition and the notion of legacy, attributing the identity of the author to his/her text. Therefore, to say that an author is thinking about reception beyond their immediate time and place is not beyond the realm of possibility.

The third goal of romance also resists the reductive view of the genre's being purely escapist fantasy. Thinking about romance and how romance is viewed over time provides the critics with another way to approach the genre, which largely comes from temporal distance. This distinguishes later readers of medieval romance from the contemporary audience, who may not be able to appreciate the full historical importance of a text or whose reading is limited to the values they see reflected in it. It offsets the critical dilemma of being too far in the forest to see the trees. Also, it also allows for comparative analyses such as this to examine the relevance of an incongruous literary form to its adaptations. Whether or not this value is an inherent aspect of the medieval romance or something that time imparts upon it is inconsequential; nevertheless, it remains a key feature of the genre. Finally, this third goal exists only because of the exaggerated verisimilitude that romance creates. If medieval romance merely reflected "medieval actuality" then little would be gained beyond the historical perspective, in which case the texts would be better suited for historians. However, those individual facets of medieval life (even in their idealized forms) can be read as central themes in the literature. Ultimately, exaggerating the verisimilitude is what provides the space for later re-visions of romance.

Romance Themes:

A central issue that I intend to draw attention to in the medieval romance is how authority is established, maintained, and regarded. Whether it is in the guise of political authority (monarchy), religious authority (Christianity), or cultural authority (chivalry), there is an inherent power struggle at the core of these narratives. I would go so far as to suggest that the contention of authority presupposes the quest narrative, which is to say that the struggle for authoritative power often sets in motion the action of the romance. This is illustrated explicitly in cases of *The Knight of the Cart* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* where a literal challenge is presented to King Arthur's court.

Another major theme that I will highlight in my analysis is identity – both projected and perceived. While this is, admittedly, a broad term, commonly understood in terms of physical presence, action, or speech, its prominence in medieval romance is undeniable. In the introduction to *The Matter of Romance*, Phillipa Hardman admits, "at a profound level the subject of identity is the matter of all romance" (Hardman 1). Her perspective on personal identity and the attainment of self-knowledge is taken to another level by Joanne A. Charbonneau, who understands identity as an educative process, something to be attained through the action of the quest. This narrower reading of identity as an indefinite element in romance texts (one "of possibility") is also held by Corinne Saunders who maintains that identity is not limited to the physical presence and action, but is related to intention and purpose. For Saunders, identity springs from the "realization of frailty and difficulty, and [the] need for God's help in order to finally achieve right" (Hardman 41), a lesson hard learned by Sir Gawain in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.*

In *Naming and Nameless in Medieval Romance*, Jane Bliss takes a literal approach to the concept of identity and claims that "one of the most notable characteristics of medieval romance is its obsession with names and naming" (Bliss 10). Her "catalogical" interest in identity and its acknowledgement in the public sphere lead her to the conclusion that the sheer density of names that the genre provides is one of its most noticeable and distinguishing features. Furthermore, Bliss's study is pertinent because it sheds insight on the public nature of identity and the way that it influences power and control within a community.

Indeed the way in which characters are presented and how they represent themselves is a central tenet of medieval romance. In my textual analysis, particularly of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, I will focus on the way in which the public domain can influence and manipulate a character's identity, in addition to personal choices. This begs the question, how does a character sustain his identity in the face of contention and conflict? Do the knight's efforts to represent chivalry or pursue courtly love define his identity or come at the cost of it? These issues will be addressed further in my analysis of the medieval romance texts.

The third preoccupation of medieval romance that I intend to trace is the representation of gender relations. While heterosexual interactions present yet another kind of power struggle within chivalric romance narratives, there clearly are identifiable gender biases that exist. The patriarchy that defines much of medieval society is given prominence within this form of literature. Male dominance is another example of exaggerated verisimilitude where the realities of the gender relations in the primary world are, to an extent, overstated in the secondary world of medieval romance.

For decades, critical debate has centered on sexual politics and their representation within medieval texts, romance in particular. In *Gender and Romance in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales,* Susan Crane addresses the central place that gender is afforded. However, she recognizes the suggestion of masculine dominance by authors for whom "the inconceivability of feminine authority" (Crane 131) points to the places of gender in social hierarchy. Masculine self-fashioning and the overall uneasy tension between the genders is also an issue addressed by Sheila Fisher. In "Women and Men in Late Medieval English Romance" she acknowledges the sustained presence of heterosexual conflict in the works of the *Gawain*-poet, Geoffrey Chaucer, and Sir Thomas Malory. Suggesting that relations between the sexes are governed often by masculine anxieties about women, she asks do "women pose a fearsome threat to the masculine status quo?" (Fisher 152)

The disproportionate representation of the sexes and their troubled relations in medieval romance is adequately outlined by authors such as Crane and Fisher. While the interactions of male and female characters in this genre certainly reflect anxieties about gender in medieval society, there is more to be said of the almost stubborn insistence on male dominance despite the tension. If such anxieties manifest themselves literarily by female-induced quests, then the obtuse entrenchment of male authors is best represented by the conclusions of these romances where power is returned to male figures. In the textual analysis that follows, this restoration takes many forms including individual, communal, and political restoration of masculine authority.

Medieval Romance Texts:

Just as I have traced the relevance of key themes that arise in most medieval romances, it is necessary to clarify why I have chosen Chretien de Troyes' *The Knight of the Cart, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale" from *The Canterbury Tales* to illustrate these themes. Despite the fact that they were written over the span of several centuries and in different geographic regions, they nevertheless represent a cross-section of texts that highlight the prevalence and centrality of these themes within the genre.

Beyond the thematic preoccupation of these three texts, they also characterize three distinct approaches to the genre, which affects not only the narratives' form, but their reception. *The Knight of the Cart* represents the physical romance where the knight's prowess drives the action of the story. It is Lancelot's chivalric competence and quality that are exhibited by the author(s) while his reason and good sense are often silenced.[9] On the other hand, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* represents the psychological romance as Gawain's chivalric fortitude is tested not in terms of physical strength but rather his in terms of his willpower. If the mark of Lancelot's romance can be described by the summation of his deeds, then Gawain's, conversely, is about restraint and controlling one's actions in the face of temptation and self-preservation. Finally, "The "Knight's Tale," a romance not in the Arthurian tradition, is a political romance. While the knights' chivalric and courtly actions are in the foreground and drive the story, the power of influence and authoritative control over others is what governs and defines the romance.

While my analytical approach to these texts will focus predominantly on the thematic representations of authority, identity, and gender relations, there is another

[9] And Love is exalted on the audience's behalf.

commonality that connects these and other medieval romances that deserves attention. The tenuous balance between public duty and private desire is a traditional conflict for the chivalric knight. In a sense, it is the conflict between external authority and personal identity: what is expected of the knight and what the knight wants. What comes to represent the public and the private in the romance is an issue of authorial discretion. In *The Knight of the Cart*, the public duty, that is, the duty of the knight to his king and kingdom, is to exercise reason. However, Lancelot, time and again, chooses the private desire of Love to direct his actions. It is the failure to uphold his public duty and the outright abandonment of this proper authority that puts the righteousness of his quest in doubt. For Chretien de Troyes and by extension, Lancelot, it is not an issue of balancing two conflicting motivations (Reason and Love); rather, it is about acknowledging which is the proper mode that should dictate the knight's actions. To complete the quest of rescuing Guinevere at all costs, which Lancelot achieves by championing Love, is ultimately a failure on the part of the knight. The romance goes so far as to provide a foil or proper moral compass in the form of Gawain. His actions, by comparison, represent the advisable and acceptable approach of Reason.

The struggle between public duty and private desire in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is an internal one for Gawain – one which puts the knight's reputation in jeopardy. His chivalric ideals and Christian imperatives, respectively speaking, create a no-win situation for Gawain and his ever-looming sense of mortality. Unlike Lancelot's dilemma that necessitates a choice between Reason and Love, Gawain attempts to balance the two conflicting motivations. This psychological romance poses the question of the compatibility of ideals; whether or not both can be maintained without giving

preference or priority to one over the other. Ultimately, Gawain's failure suggests that a knight cannot be wholly loyal to both; allegiance to or favoring of one forfeits the other.

Being a political romance, Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale" takes a more literal approach to the conflict of public duty and private desire. Ironically, the central figure of the story, Theseus, less the traditional knight and more a scheming politician, suppresses or attempts to contain and control the narrative's chivalric elements. Conflicts within the romance involving other characters threaten to divert attention and admiration away from Theseus. Therefore, the quest (the term, admittedly, used broadly) focuses on manipulating these occasions and drawing the focus back inward, that is, back to the political center. The wailing of the bereaved ladies, the fraternal duel in the glade, and the arena melee's outcome – each of these events are about other people, but for Theseus, they are opportunities to exact and demonstrate his political supremacy. His public duty to the communal good, on whose behalf he proclaims to act, aligns with a private desire to flaunt his greatness. As a result, the traditional conflict between the public and the private becomes a matter of perspective. On one end, there are the players within the political theater that see Theseus' actions as benevolent and ever-aimed at maintaining the good of the kingdom. On the other, there is the braggadocio of Theseus, self-concerned, self-aggrandizing, and always acting on his own behalf.

The Physical Romance of *The Knight of the Cart*:

Chretien begins his tale with an extended introduction to and acknowledgement of the story's inspiration, specifically, the request of lady Marie of Champagne. Many critics and historians have implied that this deliberate identification is a way for the author to distance himself from the material, its content, and the romance's reception

preemptively.[10] The multiple references to Chretien's "service" to the lady of Champagne suggests this performance is one of "command" rather than desire on the author's part, and it is she who is responsible for the subject and direction of the material, while he only controls the artistry.

The opening description of King Arthur's court during the Ascension feast, is a familiar one. In the brief description of the setting, Chretien notes the "splendid" nature of the event and that all the important members of the court are present to celebrate together at Camelot. As will also be noted in the discussion of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, all is not as it would appear in Arthur's kingdom. The festivities are halted suddenly by the entrance of a threatening visitor, who proclaims that he holds other members (individuals of seemingly lesser importance, as their absence is not missed or mentioned prior to the announcement) of Arthur's kingdom prisoner. This hostage situation becomes a catalyst for unrest in Arthur's court beginning with the king resigning himself (all too easily, perhaps) to a submissive position. However, it should be noted that the sudden end to the celebration at Camelot is not uncommon in the Arthurian tradition, which in and of itself speaks to the all-too tenuous state of the kingdom under Arthur's rule. This tenuous balance is a macrocosm for the balance that exists on an individual level for the knight, namely, the way he attempts to control the often conflicting demands of the chivalric code.

Disruption also exists within Arthur's ranks as Kay, the king's seneschal, suddenly requests dismissal from the court. He claims, "I take my leave; I shall go away and serve you no more; I've neither the will nor the desire to serve you any longer"

[10] This technique is formalized during the Renaissance by Shakespeare and his contemporaries who employ an epilogue not only to summarize but to add clarifications and amendments to their texts.

(Kibler 208).[11] Kay's unexpected and unprovoked attempt to depart from the court is another inexplicable issue that Arthur is unable to resolve. In desperation he turns to his Queen to aid him in the matter. Speaking to Guinevere, Arthur begs, "Go to him (Kay), my dear lady; though he deign not stay for my sake, pray him to stay for yours and fall at his feet if necessary, for I would never again be happy if I were to lose his company" (Kibler 208). The implication of this digression is striking – why does Kay accept the Queen's request but not the king's? From a familial perspective, Kay has brotherly (albeit foster-brotherly) ties to Arthur, which should give precedence to the appeal. Compounding this is the fact that Kay is in the "king's service" (Kibler 209) as seneschal.

The fact that Guinevere's plea to Kay proves successful, while Arthur's does not, reinforces a problematic dynamic within the romance genre: the female gender's manipulative influence undermines and effectively sabotages the ideals of the chivalric knight. Verbally, the Queen admits that she thinks less of Kay as a knight without even knowing what prompts his departure. Her diminished regard is coupled with a juvenile act where she "fell down at his feet…[and] would never again rise until he had granted her wish" (Kibler 209). Although this act would appear desperate and petulant, it nevertheless proves successful. In addition to ambushing Kay physically, she has shamed the knight's identity in her passively aggressive subservience. Now knowing that Kay's conditional agreement allows the knight to take the Queen to meet Meleagant, it certainly could be argued that Kay's actions are deliberate and premeditated. Knowing that Arthur would send the Queen to change the knight's mind would give him the advantage and favor to take the Queen to the negotiation. However, this alternative reading of the

[11] All references to *The Knight of the Cart* come from William W. Kibler's translation in *Arthurian Romances* London: Penguin Group, 1991.

conflict does not change the fact that the king defers to the queen's ability to retain his knight. The ability of the female gender to influence and manipulate the knight is consistently and continually illustrated within the romance genre, particularly in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

The pursuit of Guinevere after she has been captured presents several critical instances where the themes of authority and identity are tested in the romance. A very brief incident occurs during the first appearance of an "unknown knight" who will later be identified as Lancelot, a revered knight of King Arthur's court and lover to the Queen. In an attempt to pursue Meleagant and the abducted queen, he courteously requests one of the two spare horses that Gawain brings while searching for Kay and Guinevere. However, the unexpected manner in which the knight chooses his mount is particularly noteworthy as he "did not take the time to choose the better, or more handsome, or the larger, rather, he leapt upon the one that was nearest him, and rode off full speed" (Kibler 11). The curious lack of discernment on the knight's part speaks to his "desperate need" admittedly, but it also acknowledges the disregard for his own identity as a knight. In Lancelot's decision making, haste matters more than suitability, let alone image or ego.

When Gawain catches up to the unknown knight, a central conflict, which despite being a single relatively isolated event (in contrast to some of the larger more influential events of the romance) occurs that provides Lancelot with his undesired moniker, as well as the title of the romance. Gawain watches as Lancelot, having dispensed with his borrowed horse, approaches a cart or pillory. Chretien departs from the action of the story to provide the audience with a lengthy history including the cultural significance of the cart. Certainly, the fact that the author deviates from his narrative duties, in favor of

this explanatory segment, is unconventional and striking, to be sure. If nothing else, from a narrative perspective it establishes the devastating consequences that befall an individual, let alone a knight of Lancelot's standing, as if to say: this is important, this means something.

However, the importance of this highlighted scene is heightened ironically by Lancelot's brief hesitation before he enters the cart. The knight previously was not willing to lose time in pursuit of the queen; however, now when confronted with an arguably more substantial sacrifice to his character and reputation, he falters. Again, comparatively speaking, the momentary pause punctuates the significance of this event in comparison to the previous one where the implications associated with choosing his mount did not hinder or delay the knight. The fleeting moment also represents the shift of the knight from his chivalric duties to one devoted to the object of his affection, where Love prevails over Reason.

Regardless of Lancelot's brief moment of doubt, the choice he makes represents a truly unimaginable sacrifice on the knight's part, far greater than inviting physical pain or even death. He consciously and willingly is inviting shame upon himself. If a knight's actions are, by extension, the physical representation of the knight or the manifestation of and adherence to some form of the chivalric code, then to act willingly in contradiction to this code is monumental and would be recognized by audiences as such. Further reinforcement of this sacrifice is provided in the form of contrast; namely, Gawain's reluctance to mount the cart as Lancelot does. To this offer, Gawain claims, "…that he would not get in because it would be a very poor bargain to trade a horse for a cart" (Kibler 212). Admittedly, the soundness of Gawain's logic cannot be faulted, and yet it

seems like a very convenient excuse for the knight not to enter and save face once Lancelot has done so. This comparative moment raises the possibility for Gawain to be read as a foil to Lancelot throughout the romance. While both knights are held in high esteem (superlatives within the text are not scarce), their approaches to the story's central conflict are markedly dissimilar, both literally and figuratively speaking.

Of course, the question of how Lancelot would allow himself to be so debased and "reproached" (and why Gawain comes to a very different decision) is explained by the favoring of Love over Reason. The latter, responsible for Lancelot's hesitation (as it is connected to self-preservation and duty), warns the knight of the consequences of such an act and the detrimental effects to his identity. However, because Lancelot loves Guinevere, Love "holds sway within his heart" and he disregards the warnings of Reason in favor of Love's command. Gawain maintains Reason as his personal authority and thus rejects the dwarf's offer to enter the cart and resigns himself to follow after. The divergent motivations of these knights (Love versus Reason) remain largely responsible for the different actions not only in this instance but others over the course of the romance.

I would also like to note that at this point in the text Lancelot has yet to be named by the author; he remains the "unknown knight." He is alone in this regard as the names of all other central and relevant characters have been provided by Chretien. Even the dwarf will not feign to name him when they enter the town and the knight is subjected to "many a vile and scornful word at his expense" (Kibler 12). Whether it is recognition of Lancelot's sacrifice on the part of the dwarf, or Chretien's authorial protection of

Lancelot's legacy (thus mitigating the knight's sacrifice), it remains unclear and unresolved at the conclusion of the story.[12]

Lancelot's favoring of Love over Reason is not only a point of distinction between himself and Gawain, but is the source of great emotional distress and physical pain for the former. It can be argued that Love becomes an active agent in the story – one which controls and maintains mastery over Lancelot. Continually, we are reminded of Lancelot's diminished capacities because of his overwhelming preoccupation with Love. Lancelot's detachment from reality is detailed in length by Chretien:

> …his thoughts were so deep that he forgot who he was; he was uncertain whether or not he truly existed; he was unable to recall his own name; he did not know if he were armed or not, not where he was going nor whence he came. (Kibler 216).

Despite the loss of identity, some degree of authorial cover is given to Lancelot, which is to say that the knight is helpless to resist such power: "Love esteemed this knight's heart and ruled it above all others…that I [narrator] would not wish to fault with him here for rejecting what Love forbids to have and for setting his purpose by Love's command" (Kibler 223). While Lancelot's helplessness certainly engenders some degree of sympathy from the audience, it nevertheless is a reminder of a dereliction in duty to the chivalric code. The obligations to help others particularly those he has sworn to aid are at best a nuisance, something that derails him from his primary interests. In fact, Lancelot is outright contemptuous as he bemoans his knightly responsibilities. Regarding the girl

[12] I would lean towards the former as the latter is less likely given the fact that the title of the romance associates Lancelot solely with this particular incident. If Chretien was so concerned with the legacy and reputation of his protagonist, he would have elected to name the romance something that did not dwell upon Lancelot's shame.

he swore to aid, he grumbles, "And still I hear this miserable girl constantly begging me for help, reminding me of my promise and reproaching me most bitterly" (Kibler 221) This outburst is not only a reminder of the inappropriate motivations that drive Lancelot in his quest for Guinevere, but it illustrates the misguided and even corrupted sense of duty from the knight. As Chretien reminds his audience, "[a knight] would as soon cut his own throat as treat [a damsel – be she lady or maidservant] dishonorably" (Kibler 223). Apparently, dishonorable conduct is limited to external actions and not internal judgments for Lancelot.

Truly, Love's all-consuming nature comes at the cost of Lancelot's chivalric identity in this romance. The incident with the cart continues to haunt the knight as he continues to be reminded of the choice he made. During an encounter with a group of knights, the mere sight of someone who had ridden in a cart ends the merriment of the group. They proclaim, "Let no one continue to play while he's among us. Damned be anyone who seeks to amuse himself or dares to play as long as he is here!" (Kibler 228). Here we see how the social order is disturbed by Lancelot's presence. He is permanently marked by his Love-driven choice and is met with spite and hatred. This issue of reputation, as it pertains to the cart ride, does not escape Lancelot who refuses to give his name after lifting the magical slab. When pressed he says, "I am a knight, as you see…I think that is enough" (Kibler 231). Again, there is some acknowledgement on Lancelot's part that he must maintain distance, however small, from this incident. This avoidance is short-lived; upon being identified as the knight who rode in the cart, he is condemned: "You acted boldly, yet like a naïve fool, in coming to this land. A man who has ridden in a cart should never enter here. And may God never reward you for it" (Kibler 235).

Again, Lancelot's reputation precedes him and he is ostracized for his earlier transgression.

The matter of the cart is raised again when Lancelot attempts to cross the Sword Bridge. The arduous task is imagined as a kind of futile penance – one which is not worth a knight's efforts after having ridden in a cart. Once more Lancelot is rebuked, "…you should have recalled the cart you climbed into. I don't know whether you feel ashamed for having ridden in it, but no one with good sense would have undertaken such a great task having first been shamed in this manner" (Kibler 239). Firstly, the mention of "good sense" is problematic as Lancelot is driven by Love which seems to be in conflict with the knight's better judgment and as a result, Reason is disregarded. Secondly, the simple fact that Lancelot rode in the cart negates the merits of his objective. Whatever his motivations are for crossing the Sword Bridge, they are rendered meaningless by this preceding act. The issue is compounded in the reaction of the men and women present who lament the existence and meaning of the cart. "Damned be the hour when a cart was first conceived and constructed, for it is a vile and despicable thing" (Kibler 240). The audience sees, vis-à-vis this proclamation, the extent to which Lancelot has debased himself. While his greatness and peerless qualities as a knight are acknowledged, they are juxtaposed with the inevitable shame of and permanent mark against his character. Ends do not justify the means in idealized romance.

As if this point needed further delineation, Chretien provides the illustration of another knight, faced with death who pleads for mercy. In a desperate attempt to save his life, he blindly accepts any outcome but death at the hands of his opponent. However,

when the prospect of riding in a cart is suggested, the conceding knight has a radical change of heart. He exclaims,

> "'May it never please God that I ride in a cart!…Sir, my life is in your hands. But in God's name I beg mercy, only don't make me climb into a cart! Except for this, there is nothing I wouldn't do no matter how painful or difficult. But I believe I'd rather be dead than suffer this disgrace. No matter what else you could ask of me, however difficult, I'd do it to obtain your mercy and pardon." (Kibler 241)

The defeated knight's tone is desperate as he seeks to avoid the cart at all costs. He even evokes the name of "God" to defend his position. By doing so he infers that it could not be God's will for such a punishment to be given. Because of Lancelot's submission to Love, his own cart ride was not a matter of pleasing or displeasing God. Instead, his sole focus was the object of his affection; all other concerns or duties are irrelevant. The comparative nature of this encounter is emphasized by Lancelot's being identified by the author as "the Knight of the Cart" (Kibler 242).[13]

The issue of self-awareness, which lies at the center of Lancelot's failure in *The Knight of the Cart,* becomes the focal point of his Sword Bridge crossing. Doubling as both a warning to the knight and prompting the recognition of the audience, Lancelot's companions exclaim, "…be forewarned by what you see before you (the Sword Bridge)…If you don't turn back now, it will be too late to repent. There are many things that should only be undertaken with great foresight" (Kibler 245). While the connection

[13] I would also like to make note of what occurs following Lancelot's judgment of the defeated knight. When a young girl approaches asking for the head of the Lancelot's foe, the Knight of the Cart deliberates for an extended period of time as if to further emphasize that lack of deliberation that he exhibited when he was offered the dwarf's cart ride.

to the immediate danger is clear enough, the accompanying knights' counsel alludes to the absence of Reason in Lancelot's decision-making throughout the romance. It is a warning against reckless and impulsive behavior and even suggests the unnatural nature of such an endeavor (likened to "contain(ing) the winds or forbid(ding) them to blow, or prevent(ing) the birds from singing their songs"). The warning contains a seemingly excessive series of such metaphors to reveal the folly of Lancelot's plan.

Furthermore, the permanence of such a course of action is linked incontrovertibly to the enduring shame of Lancelot's cart ride. When it came to the cart, Lancelot momentarily hesitated, which can represent the amount of time he gave to consider the consequences of his actions. Here again, he is presented with similar circumstances where physical pain, as opposed to mental anguish and public reproach, is at stake. Lancelot's immediate response in this particular scene requires a division between internal and external reasoning. To put his companions at ease, he heartily maintains, "I have such faith and such conviction in God and in his enduring protection" (Kibler 245). Despite this public display of devotion, his true impetus is derived from his private love for Guinevere.[14]

The lack of protection that Love offers is manifested physically in Lancelot's decision to remove his armor to ensure a better grip on the Sword Bridge. Once across, Lancelot immediately perceives the pain as pleasure and urges King Bademagu to allow him to confront Guinevere's abductor. He pleads, "But I'm wasting too much time here – time I don't want to waste or lose. I'm not hurt at all, and none of my wounds is causing me pain. Take me to where I can find him (Meleagant), for I'm ready to do battle with him now in such armor as I'm wearing" (Kibler 249). Here Lancelot displays

[14] In his crossing, it is noted that it is not God, "But Love, who guided him" (Kibler 246).

an absence of self-awareness; he is in no physical condition to fight a battle. In spite of the king's warnings, Lancelot soon begins to succumb to his wounds. "Yet it was inevitable that the knight who had crossed the bridge would begin to lose strength in his wounded hands" (Kibler 252). The pain that Lancelot perceived as pleasure illustrates the lack of self-preservation in his actions.[15]

Love's power over Lancelot is absolute. He is totally and utterly obedient to Love, and as a result, he relinquishes his own will and desire, as well as his knightly duties. The initial duel with Meleagant concludes not from the physical defeat of a knight but from the bidding of the queen. Lancelot – "One who loves totally is ever obedient and willingly and completely does whatever might please his sweetheart" (Kibler 254) immediately acquiesces to her command and restrains himself despite the subsequent onslaught of his opponent. Love effectively mutes any sense of self-preservation and renders the knight paralyzed in the face of Meleagant's retaliation. The aftermath of the conflict also reflects Lancelot's singular focus. The knight is indifferent to the imprisoned masses of Arthur's court "who had been freed," as well as the other abductee of King Arthur's court: Kay. Being so preoccupied with his reunion with Queen Guinevere, the obliging king seems reticent at the prospect of reuniting the victorious knight with Arthur's seneschal ("If you wish, I'll show you the seneschal Kay as well") as Lancelot seems oblivious to Kay's condition. The seneschal and the nameless freed prisoners are a (distant) secondary interest, an afterthought to Lancelot, whose only concern seems to be the queen.

[15] It is only a clever maiden's strategy, to position the enemy between Lancelot and Guinevere, which allows the beleaguered knight to regain the advantage. Because of this manipulation of circumstances, "Lancelot's strength and courage grew because Love aided him" (Kibler 253).

Lancelot and Guinevere's awkward reunion after the duel illustrates the way in which Chretien uses the romance to acknowledge the irreconcilability of public duties and private desires. On one hand, Lancelot, "overjoyed" and taken with desire to be reunited with the Queen is overwhelmed in the moment and forgets himself or rather forgets the circumstances of this reunion and the public role he must play. To contrast and even compensate for Lancelot's eagerness, Guinevere remains cold and hostile; she is aware of the public nature of this reunion. The queen will not allow her true emotions and desires to be expressed in the presence of the king who accompanies the knight. Fittingly, Bademagu, the intermediary through which the audience's disappointment and confusion is conveyed, is taken aback by the queen's demeanor and even questions her behavior towards Lancelot. He asks, "What makes you feel this way? This is certainly no way to behave to a man who has served you well, who has often risked his life for you on this journey, and who rescued you and defended you against my son" (Kibler 256). These questions reflect the unexpectedness and seemingly inappropriate nature of Guinevere's initial reaction. However, it is at this point that the audience should recognize what Guinevere is attempting to negotiate in this awkward scene. She cannot allow her private desires to be manifested physically (in the way that Lancelot does initially). Perhaps the extent to which she rejects Lancelot ("I shall always deny that I feel any gratitude towards him") is what returns the knight to a submissive position despite his enduring confusion and disappointment.

As if to make the conflict between public duty and private desire even more pronounced, Chretien designs Lancelot's reunion with Kay in such a way that Lancelot's adulterous love for the Queen now supersedes the conflict between Meleagant and

Arthur's kingdom. The latter now functions as a means of bringing the former and all immediate implications into forefront of the romance. The issue of "shame" becomes the way in which duty and desire are negotiated silently between the two knights. Kay admits, "…an enormous shame, because you [Lancelot] have completed what I was unable to complete and have done what I was unable to do" (Kibler 256). This distinction is a reminder of the relationship between Love and Reason and the role they play for the knights. In other words, Love is the reason that Lancelot succeeds where Kay fails. Love compels Lancelot to ride in the cart. Love forces Lancelot to cross the Sword Bridge. Love empowers Lancelot to overcome Meleagant in battle. Without Love or rather, with Reason (or simply duty) as his guiding strength, Lancelot would have failed as Kay did (and ultimately as Gawain does).

When given the opportunity to reflect upon his disappointing encounter with Guinevere, Lancelot experiences a crisis of conscience. Rather than recognizing that their reunion was public in nature (with King Bademagu in attendance), Lancelot dwells upon his ride in the cart instead. Clearly, this recurring fixation points to both the unbecomingness of this act, but also that the knight has yet to reconcile this personal choice. The fact that the queen rejected him only compounds his feelings of guilt and his "undoing" as a chivalric knight. Instead of accepting this truth, Lancelot defiantly argues, "Anyone who would hold this against me never truly knew Love…whatever one might do for one's sweetheart shouldn't be considered an act of love and courtliness…since it seemed to me honourable to do anything for her that love required, even to climb into the cart" (Kibler 261). By resorting to expressions of what "should be" and "seemed" (rather than what "is"), Lancelot inadvertently touches upon the

difference between intention and actuality or even perception and reality. The outcome of this internal debate serves only to clarify his intentions as a lover, but certainly does not justify the actions of a knight. The irreconcilable differences between knight and lover mirror the differences between Love and Reason for Lancelot. He concludes "there is no doubt that he who obeys love's command is uplifted, and all should be forgiven him. He who dares not follow Love's command errs greatly" (261). These statements represent a new code of behavior that Lancelot attempts to write – one which supersedes chivalry. This desperate notion is, at best, a hope that he clings to in order to justify the transgression. It allows the knight to put his cart ride in the past and validate actions predicated on Love (which would otherwise conflict with knightly duties). The new conception of Lancelot's identity altogether ignores the irreconcilability of public duty and private desire, as well as the incompatibility of Reason and Love. While a knight cannot serve two masters, chivalry cannot be reduced to secondary concern when issues of love arise.

For the chivalric knight like Lancelot, duty cannot be a negotiable concept as authority is not a matter of convenience. In fact, the central conflict in most romances arguably centers on the knight's attempt (whether it is conscious or unconscious) to redesign the essential nature of chivalric knighthood, that is, when matters of authority and identity are compromised. Certainly it remains consistent throughout the romances discussed in this chapter that female figures, and the effect that they have on the knight, represent that compromising factor. Lancelot epitomizes the idea of the knight who concedes to the will of Love and female influence. He effectively sacrifices his chivalry by privatizing his knightly duties to serve "her alone." Guinevere is now his central

figure of authority ("…it was for her alone that her lover performed this deed for which he has often been shamed, reproached, and falsely blamed"). Likewise, the righteousness of actions no longer reflects commonly held principles or ideals; instead, they are now subject to his personal review. Honor is now a matter of personal designation ("it seemed to me honorable"). Imagining his identity in this way gives Lancelot greater flexibility to his sense of duty and ultimately, debasement of his knighthood.

Lancelot's next encounters with Guinevere are far more favorable for the knight. In private, he receives the kind of exoneration that he desires and that his new sense of self allows. The ride in the cart, which should have irreversible consequences to a knight, is resolved in the space of a few lines by Lancelot's new highest authority. His hesitation before entering the cart, which lasts only momentarily, is a source of praise and admiration, reflecting his "great unwillingness" to enter the cart. Apparently to know and acknowledge that something is wrong is the same as not doing that which is wrong to Guinevere. This perspective is advantageous for Lancelot, and Guinevere "absolves [him] most willingly" (Kibler 262). The subsequent reunions also illustrate the effect that Love has on Lancelot's identity. At the promise of seeing Guinevere again in private, "Lancelot was so full of bliss that he did not recall a single one of his many cares" (Kibler 263). Under ordinary circumstances, it would be dangerous for a knight to lose himself so completely, but for Lancelot, we see the degradation of his new code of behavior take effect. Love's numbing is not limited to the mental, but also has physical manifestations. When attempting to unbar the window of Guinevere's room, Lancelot severs part of his finger. This injury should concern the knight as conflict will arise from the evidence of his incursion, "yet his mind was so intent on other matter he felt neither

the wounds nor the blood dripping from them" (Kibler 264). Lancelot's wounding, like those suffered when crossing the Sword Bridge, is one of many he endures for Love. The physical injury he incurs and the manner in which he accepts it suggests a kind of muted masochism on the knight's part. If we understand this behavior as what the individual will allow or even invite to happen to the physical body when other concerns or interests are given precedent, then those wounds suffered by Lancelot while rescuing Guinevere certainly qualify as such. While the knight might not derive physical pleasure from the physical pain, as traditional definitions of masochism imply, he does not show any resistance to or any attempt to defend against them. There is the simple and reserved acceptance of them.

The illustration of Lancelot's masochism transforms and adopts a religious form when he begins to worship Guinevere as a deity in the romance. Thus his muted masochism becomes a kind of martyrdom in reverence to the Queen, replacing traditional Christian figures. To honor her, "Lancelot bowed low and adored her, for in no holy relic did he place such faith" (Kibler 264). Likewise, upon departing from the room and her presence, "Lancelot bowed low before the bedchamber, as if he were before an altar. Then in great anguish he left" (Kibler 265). These passages go beyond the mere suggestion of religious adoration and instead convey actual worship where the queen is the object of affection and veneration. This serves as yet another example of Lancelot's overindulgent favoring of Love over Reason, the inappropriate reordering of authority, and the manipulation of his own identity as a knight.

With a reordered sense of authority, Lancelot proves willing to debase himself further in an effort to appease his beloved Guinevere. After arranging for his escape from

Meleagant's imprisonment, Lancelot works to hide his identity in an effort to compete in the queen's tournament. However, he will not attend as himself but instead hides who he truly is. As part of this ruse, Lancelot takes quarter in a place unbecoming of a knight of his stature.[16] More than comfort, the desire for anonymity proves to be most important to the knight, but why? Is he embarrassed that someone might know and shame him for staying in such meager accommodations? Truly, one does not have to read too far into the infatuated knight's "undressing" behind barred doors to recognize the symbolic undressing of the chivalric knight. Does he wish to protect the seneschal's wife, who freed him for this excursion?[17] Or does he hide his identity because the true intent of this journey, to see and honor the queen, would be transparent? Any and/or all of these possibilities is likely; however, what remains constant is that Lancelot proves willing to abandon his identity and sacrifice his own honor in the name of Love.

The fact that Lancelot is prepared to lower himself physically, psychologically, and spiritually points to the nobility of his actions and the motivations behind them. In many ways, he has sacrificed his chivalry in the service of Love. Perhaps the best example of this in the romance is Lancelot's performance in the tournament. Despite a peerless showing initially, at the request of the Queen to "do his worst," Lancelot proceeds to embarrass himself on the field of battle: "He would rather die than do anything unless he were sure that it would bring him shame, disgrace, and dishonor, and he pretended to be afraid of all those who approached him" (Kibler 277). As a result, Lancelot endures public shaming in addition to physical pain. What should discomfort

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[16] "Never had such a noble knight chosen such lodgings, for they were cramped and poor; but he did so because he did not wish to stay anywhere he might be recognized" (Kibler 275).

[17] He only swore an oath to "all that he has," but not the "love" she wanted (he signals his "disinterest" by addressing the lady as "dear friend"). This is one in a series of encounters where Lancelot obfuscates or circumvents the intentions of a female admirer.

the audience is that suffering that Lancelot endures serves no other purpose than it allows the queen to know who he truly is. To make matters worse, she takes pleasure in his suffering; his performance is for her amusement and his abilities are subject to her whim. In acquiescing to her selfish and irresponsible demands and ignoring instincts of self-preservation (let alone pride as an exalted knight), however, the audience now recognizes Lancelot as a debased knight; the supreme knight is now but a distant memory. Lancelot's identity is compromised completely; he demonstrates no individual discretion ("he accepts the good and the bad with equal pleasure") and actively surrenders his conscience to Guinevere's will because of Love.

However, the effect of Lancelot's performance is not isolated to the shamed knight and the Queen. Rather, his debasement disrupts the social order of the tournament. When he is finally instructed to "do his best," Lancelot demonstrates the prowess for which he is known. Landing exaggerated blows and striking down his enemies with unnatural ease, the knight's feats have an unsettling effect on his female spectators. On account of his overachievement, "[Lancelot] was destroying their chances of marriage" (Kibler 281). Lancelot is too good for their empty aspirations to "possess" him, and while the ladies desire no other, they feel unworthy of a knight of Lancelot's physical prowess. Instead, they resign themselves "to take no other…if they could not have the one they wanted" (Kibler 281). The inclusion of this seemingly superfluous element of the tournament has substantial implications. From a narrative perspective, it demonstrates the impact of Lancelot's sacrifice beyond the individual and illustrates the detrimental social effects that his allegiance to Love has. Furthermore, it inflates or rather extends the individual turmoil of a single knight to the rest of the community.

While this is certainly not Lancelot's intention (in fact, he arguably is unaware of his affect on the female spectators despite a pattern of such influence), it nevertheless translates what is private to the public. In other words, the private desires held by Lancelot have very real public implications not only to his knightly duties but to those who are affected by him.[18]

The suffering that Lancelot endures after his promised return to imprisonment is both tangible and existential in nature. While the physical isolation and separation from his beloved contributes to his emotional ruin, the new tower that Meleagant constructs serves as a purgatorial setting for the disgraced knight. However, Lancelot is unable or unwilling to identify the root cause of his suffering and resorts to the familiar medieval trope of Fortune's Wheel to account for his situation.[19] The problem with this logic is that his agony is temporal in nature, that is, simply an unsolicited and inconvenient matter of timing, rather than correlating to any specific behavior or action on his part. To illustrate this anything-or-anyone-but-me mentality, Lancelot attempts to blame his companion, Gawain. The digression from desperate hope to outright condemnation is unfounded and pathetic as Lancelot soon concedes. Nevertheless, the tirade functions as condemnable criticism of Lancelot, ultimately. Even if the imprisoned knight cannot pinpoint specific actions that would account for his current predicament, Lancelot's failure to acknowledge his fall from chivalric knighthood suggests a complete absence of awareness on his part. Over the course of the romance, he has supplanted traditional figures of authority (both secular and non-secular) and sacrificed his chivalric identity in

[18] Initially, Lancelot is aware of this effect (e.g. the lady he must escort begrudgingly or the lives of the accompanying brothers he endangers on his quest), but in this instance, he is completely ignorant of his influence.

[19] For a more in depth study of the Boethian image see Adrian Papahagi's *Boethiana mediaevalia* (2010) and John Marenbon's *Boethius* (2003).

favor of submission to Love. Both of these digressions are the direct result of his improper relationship with Queen Guinevere.

When Lancelot is rescued and returns to Arthur's court to seek vengeance against his captor, the lines between Reason (and by extension, duty) and Love are clearly laid out for the audience. While the knight is met with rousing cheers and admiration, it is Guinevere's perspective that proves most telling. Indeed, the Queen's unexpected reaction is stymied instinctively by the public nature of the reunion. Rather than expressing joy or anger, she exhibits restraint:

> …she hesitated because the others present – the king and his entourage, who could see everything – would immediately perceive her love if, in sight of all, she were to do everything her heart desired. And if Reason had not subdued these foolish thoughts and this love-madness, everyone present would have understood her feelings. (Kibler 291)

In this moment of self-preservation, Guinevere's duty to her king and husband supersede her emotional desire to confront Lancelot and express her true feelings. Similar to her initial encounter with Lancelot in the presence of King Bademagu, the Queen's awareness of the circumstances of this reunion ultimately dictate her behavior. This awareness is predicated on the fact that Reason dictates her actions. Reason is paramount to Love in this scene as it prevents the Queen from acting in accordance with her "foolish heart and thoughts." In this way, Reason is aligned with duty and requires that she must remain wife and Queen, rather than lover.[20]

[20] It is worth noting that the author (at this point in the text it may be Godefroy de Lagny, not Chretein de Troyes) gives the Queen the presence of mind to act prudently. It is reasonable to assume that Lancelot, empowered by Love not Reason, demonstrated such situational awareness.

Upon his return to King Arthur's court, Lancelot is entirely focused on and committed to exacting revenge upon Meleagant.[21] His resolve in the matter might explain why the author chooses Guinevere to represent the issue of Reason and Love at the end of the romance, rather than the protagonist, Lancelot. The knight's vengeful ambition is ambiguously depicted as neither entirely inspired by Reason or Love. Instead, it seems he operates in the gray area between these motivations; in other words, his actions are simply of personal interest and importance to him. Evidence for this reading rests in the fact that the story ends abruptly at the fulfillment of Lancelot's vengeance upon Meleagant. The death of Meleagant at the hands of Lancelot effectively and literally ends the romance. There is no further development of the adulterous relationship between the knight and the Queen, nor is there closure on the state of Lancelot's knighthood. Perhaps this reflects Chretien's distance from and interest in the material, in addition to the strict fulfillment of the "command" of the Lady of Champagne.

The Knight of the Cart illustrates the difficulty of fulfilling the often conflicting duties of a knight. Ultimately, Lancelot struggles to maintain the ideals upon which his reputation is founded. Whose interests does he ultimately serve by rescuing the Queen? The manner in which he attempts his rescue puts more doubt on the nobility of his actions and interests. The hard-boiled detective's resolve will be similarly tested. However,

[21] Lancelot exclaims: "Now without further delay, I wish to repay the man for whom I have no love. He has long hounded and pursued me, and has treated me with shame and cruelty. He has come here to court to seek his payment, and he shall have it! He need wait no longer for it, because it is ready. I myself am prepared for battle, as is he – and may God never again give him cause to boast!" (Kibler 291) Rather than acknowledge the actual crisis in the romance, the knight projects all his aggression against the one who he believes is responsible for all of this troubles and pain. Lancelot has yet to acknowledge his part or take responsibility for his own transgressions (both physical and psychological) that account for his plight in the romance.

significant changes to the male/female gender dynamic become the determining factor for the detectives' motivation, as well as their judgment.

The Psychological Romance of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*:

Like Chretien's work in *The Knight of the Cart*, the anonymous poet of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* presents the failure of a well-reputed and respected member of Arthur's court. In this more psychologically conceived romance, the failure of the knight is the result of his inability to reconcile the conflicting demands of his identity, both private and public. Instead of Love and Reason, Sir Gawain futilely appeals to Christianity's moral imperatives and the courtly ideals of chivalry. The romance demonstrates that it is impossible for Gawain to honor both codes. His inability to meet the challenges set by his formidable opponent at the Green Chapel suggest a setback, a breakdown of chivalry, courtesy, and courage (for which Arthur's knights are known) and instead, a victory for paganism, magic, and materialism. How can one reconcile this outcome in a mode of literature that seeks to elevate and heighten the quality and character of its heroes? If we read the poem as didactic, then it becomes possible to read the knight's failure on a human level, that which operates beneath the protective shield of chivalry and the idealism of romance. Simply put, although the individual hero fails, the poem nevertheless succeeds in further establishing the code of heroism consistent with the emerging traditions of medieval literature by identifying its place within the sphere of Christianity.

From the onset, it should be made clear that I am not adopting an exegetical approach to the text like M. Mills in "Christian Significance and Romance Tradition" or to some extent J.R.R. Tolkien in his analysis of the poem in *The Monsters and the*

Critics. Rather, recognizing the ironic tension between chivalry and Christianity helps to isolate issues of authority, identity, and gender relations in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.* To this end, it is important to note that although the ideals of chivalry are based, in large part, upon Christian morals in the world of Arthurian romance, it does not necessarily mean that the two sets of values should be read as consistent or even compatible. In fact, I intend to demonstrate how the conclusion to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, as set forth by the poet, himself, clearly illustrates just how incongruous the two are.

From the opening stanzas of Fitt I, the poet provides the context for *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* as well as the primer by which it should be read. With regard to the former, the historical and generic framework (its familiar epic ancestry) establishes King Arthur's realm as having descended from the "heroes" of antiquity and their labors. In other words, the identity of the present still maintains a connection to its past. However, within this retelling of Britain's long and storied history from Aeneas to Brutus, the poet does not feign to gloss over the falsehood, treachery, and turbulence that marked the path to Camelot. Despite the fact that Arthur is praised as "King noblest famed of will," the kingdom's questionable history and by extension, his own origins should cast doubt on the deservedness of the praise. It is with a certain degree of suspicion that we read about the heights of glory under Arthur and the renown of his realm in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

The word "renown" itself, is complicated and ultimately troublesome in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.* The term carries both public and private connotations. On one level, we must understand the poet's use of "renoun" to mean the quality, praise, and

notoriety surrounding an individual's reputation. On another level, it is necessary to be aware of the character's self-awareness of their "renoun." While not entirely synonymous with identity, the two are closely associated. If we understand identity as one's internal consciousness of self (his true nature) then "renoun" or reputation is the external consciousness of that individual by others. To further complicate the matter, it is unclear to what extent characters in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* are motivated by their "renoun." During the Green Knight's sudden and unexpected entrance into Arthur's hall, he makes mention of the King's reputation as both an inspiration for his visit and a preamble to his challenge. He ominously claims, "Bot for the los of the, lede, is lyft up so hyghe, / And thy burgh and thy burnes best ar holden…" (ll.258-259).[22] The Green Knight plays upon the court's "renoun," deliberately so as to provoke a response from those considered "best." Admittedly, the relationship between identity, renown, and action within the text initially remains unclear. Do they respond to the knight's "Crystemas gomen" because their renown is legitimate and their reaction is rightly substantiated or even inevitable? Or do they respond because of expectations and the fear of losing such "renoun?" While it is reasonable to assume it is the poet's intent to be ambiguous on the matter initially, I admit an argument can be made for either side. I will refrain from taking sides at this point until further analysis is offered.

The Green Knight's sweeping praise of King Arthur and his celebrated knights follows the poet's own acclaim in the description of "Krystmasse" at Camelot:

> This kyng lay at Camylot upon Krystmasse
>
> With mony luflych lorde, ledes of the best,

[22] All references come from Simon Armitage's new verse translation *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2007.

Rekenly of the Rounde Table alle tho rich brether

With rych revel oryght and rechles merthe.

…Al was hap upon heghe in halles and chambers. (ll. 37-40,48)

Like the opening scene of *The Knight of the Cart,* a good time, to be certain, is had by all present. Although the revelry and celebration derive from the holiday season, "Such glaum ande gle glorious" (l. 46) is displayed disproportionately. Everything is taken to the extreme that "men couthe avyse" (l. 45). There is an abuse of authority as even Arthur's juvenile behavior at the feast seems misguided. Refusing to eat until he hears a tale that will entertain him or some violent display of arms, he hovers authoritatively over his dining guests ("of face so fere / he stightles stif in stalle") as though he is responsible for their "mirthe." Furthermore, the excess of "mirthe" culminating in the King's "countenaunce" denigrates the spiritual and physical quality of the festivities, so much so that the entrance of the Green Knight, which fits the criteria of the King's appetites, is quite timely! The Christmas celebration digresses from a celebration of life, namely, the birth of Christ, who is counted the highest among knights, to a mindless spectacle for mere amusement.

Following Arthur's self-indulgent request at the Christmas feast,[23] the entrance of the Green Knight and the outpouring of courtesy he bestows upon the court are troublesome when read at face value. Certainly, the suddenness of his entrance, after the call for combat, is remarkable, and should not be mistaken for coincidence. More importantly, the manner in which the Green Knight addresses the court is important. He states the nature of his business with Camelot in an overtly forthright manner:

[23] King Arthur has an appetite for "justyng, in joparde to lay, / Lede lif for lyf, leve uchon other, / As fortune wolde fulsum hom, the fayrer to have" (ll. 97-99). An exhibition or simple display of arms will not suffice; instead he wants blood spilled for sport (e.g. the reality of Theseus' melee in "The Knight's Tale").

Bot for the los of the, lede, is lyft vp so hyghe,
And thy burgh and thy burnes best ar holden,
Stifest under stel-gere on stedes to ryde,
The wyghtest and þe worthyest of the worldes kynde,
Preve for to play wyth in other pure laykes,
And here is kydde cortaysye, as I haf herd carp,
And that has wayned me hider, iwyis, at this tyme. (ll. 258-264)

His early praise of Arthur and the court would be sincere enough if not for the manner in which Camelot's "renoun" has been handled by the poet thus far. Indeed, there is more to the Green Knight's apparent admiration. The fact that the state of Arthur's honor is "up so hyghe" suggests that it may, in fact, be too high. There is an implied teasing of Arthur's court. The way in which Arthur's caste and brotherhood are accounted the "best" alludes to their renown, which may not reflect their true quality. The Knight does not say that they *are* the best only that they are "holden" as best and even that remains heresay ("haf herd carp"). Thus, the presence of the Green Knight and the impending "gomen" can be perceived as a kind of corrective action – one that puts the chivalry of Camelot on trial.

From subtle tongue-in-cheek praise, the nature of the Green Knight's discourse quickly shifts to dismissive when futilely challenged. The Green Knight is resolute and no level of provocation will deter him from his actual task. Also, he provides another indication that his earlier praise of Arthur and his "peerless" knights was unwarranted and untrue. He spurns in response, "Here is no mon me to mach, for myghtes so wayke" (l. 282). The intruding knight's attitude reflects the incongruity between the "renoun" of

Arthur's court and the reality.[24] The gap between reality and renown reaches its own zenith in *Sir Gawain* immediately after the Green Knight presents his "Crystemas gomen." The subsequent failure of the Round Table to respond to and accept the challenge, in keeping with their "renoun," calls their chivalry into question – a point that the Green Knight does not hesitate to criticize. He pushes and probes further:

> 'What, is this Arthures hous,' quoth the hathel thenne,
> 'That al the rous rennes of thurgh ryalmes so mony?
> Where is now your sourquydrye and your conquestes,
> Your gryndellayk and your greme, and your grete wordes?
> Now is the revel and the renoun of the Rounde Table
> Overwalt wyth a worde of on wythes speche,
> For al dares for drede withoute dynt schewed! (ll. 309-315)

Until this point in the text, all skepticism of the honor and acclaim bestowed upon King Arthur and his knights has been, admittedly, suggestive on the poet's part. However, with these direct and scathing questions, the Green Knight brings the issue to the forefront and openly challenges the validity of their "renoun."

While Arthur scrambles to clarify and denounce the Green Knight's challenge as mere "foly," the truth of the matter is that all who are in ear and eyeshot of the Green Knight are "gast of thy grete words"(l. 235) Although Arthur accepts the challenge of the Green Knight (if only to defend the now "bismotered" honor of his court), the damage

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[24] E. Talbot Donaldson also reads the idyllic presentation of Camelot with skepticism in light of the Green Knight's exchange: "The court of King Arthur is presented…as the place where the ideal of chivalry has reached its zenith, where all is courtesy and martial prowess in defense of the right. The praise…may seem excessive, and…the author made it so intentionally. For when the court is invaded by the Green Knight...it suddenly seems to become slightly unreal, as if, the Green Knight insultingly implies, its reputation were founded more on fiction than on fact" (Donaldson 183).

has been done, and the king's delayed response appears desperate. He is moved out of frustration and anger as he "Lyghtly lepes he hym to, and laght at his honed" (l.328). Suddenly, as if sensing the danger and folly of the impending act, the titular knight of the poem emerges from the crowd to rescue the King.[25]

Gawain's interruption, in which he proposes to take the King's place, is delivered in such a way that it graciously paints its speaker as a humble knight whose motivation for intervening serves the greater good of the Table.[26] From Gawain's perspective, it would be better for him to die than any of the more "worthy" and able knights beside him. Although I acknowledge the merit of Gawain's offer, I would be amiss not to ask why he (or for that matter, anyone) did not answer the Green Knight's call earlier (prior to Arthur's reluctant acceptance). Did the life of the king need to be threatened to break the audience from their "stowned" state? If so, that certainly does not excuse their silence or their lack of courage. Consequently, if courage is questioned, should Gawain's humility be equally scrutinized?

As Gawain replaces Arthur in the "gomen," the King offers a few brief words to the knight, a blessing that serves as the most clear and succinct definition of heroism articulated in the poem. After passing the axe to his nephew, he pronouces, "And gef hym Goddes blessing, and gladly hym bides / That his hert and his honde schulde hardi be bothe" (ll. 370-371). The combination of physical ("honde") and inner, spiritual ("hert") strength introduces the complex dynamic that a virtuous knight must assume and more importantly, balance. These are not special instructions for Gawain or any new

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[25] While Lancelot's approach in *The Knight of the Cart* can be qualified as proactive, Gawain's by comparison, is markedly reactive.

[26] See ll. 351-355. Furthermore, he is the only voice to defend the King. None of the other "bolde bodyes" engage themselves in the exchange. This speaks to the quality of Gawain as a knight of the Round Table, and by extension, the humility he displays by counting himself "wakkest" among them.

condition conferred upon him by God or the King. They are, or should be constant; they are a reminder of how to conduct himself properly as he enters into this trial with the Green Knight. How can Gawain have both "firmness in heart and fist?" (l.371). The way in which Gawain attempts to accomplish and sustain both of these conditions is by adhering (by his "seker traweth") to the chivalric ideals of the Round Table, to demonstrate the five points so aptly depicted on the outside of his shield. Unfortunately, in his futile attempt (by the nature of the conflicting pledges he makes) to balance and demonstrate these virtues, he loses sight of and faith in that other code of behavior – the Christian principles from which his chivalric code is derived.

Another way to understand the Arthurian knight's dilemma in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is to read the stoutness of sinew ("hardi honde") as focusing on or concern for the sustainability of the physical body. Thus, Gawain's failure at the Green Chapel stems from his inability to maintain the proper balance between the physical (chivalry) and spiritual (Christianity) sides of his identity. Mortality gets the better of the knight as he places too much value on his body and not enough faith in the spiritual part of his identity. Admittedly, the fear that grows from the Green Knight's impending blow, as well as the unnerving encounters with Bertilak's wife, not only compromises his chivalric identity, but also his Christian ethics.

The imminent confrontation between Christian imperatives and chivalric ideals is introduced to the audience in Fitt II as Gawain prepares to depart on All Saints Day. The clear and logical tension between acknowledging the need to preserve his honor by seeking out the Green Knight and yet, that his own mortality hangs in the balance is disconcerting (even to a hero). The mood in the hall is morose as many "Knyghtes ful

cortys and comlych ladies / Mony joyless for that jentyle japes ther maden" (ll. 539, 542). Their attempts to lift his spirits, as well as their own, are unsuccessful. Despite the fact that they fear that they will never see Gawain again, and that such a loss of life is wasteful, the "worthe" Gawain embraces the disheartening reality ahead of him. He proclaims, "…Quat schuld I wonde? / Of destines derf and dere / What may mon do bot fonde?" (ll. 563-565). Clearly, we can read past the veil of optimism and find dejection in his words, which mirrors the "doel" of the crowd. Although sadness and regret (from the crowd's perspective for an adventure rashly taken) pervade the departure scene, the knight, nevertheless, retains their respect and sympathy. He is still unfallen; he remains "As tulk of tale most trwe / And gentylest knight of lote" (ll. 638-639) in their eyes.

The critical analysis of Gawain's armor as a representation of his projected identity, in particular his shield, has never been in short supply. However, many critics struggle with the apparent inconsistency in Gawain's symbol of perfection and his actions within the poem. In "The Pentangle Knight" Stephanie J. Hollis questions the label too often ascribed to Gawain: perfect. She asks that if Gawain is "an apparently perfect hero, one whose virtues are so preeminent and so tightly integrated that it appears impossible for evil to find entry…How, then does it *happen* that Gawain has fallen short of perfection?" (Hollis 267). It is a perfectly fair question she proposes, and she seeks its answer in the way in which the fallen knight judges himself after receiving the Green Knight's blow and his "implicit conception of himself and his action." Hollis also recognizes the relationship between identity and reputation and equates the two in the case of Gawain ("To Gawain, his identity is his reputation"). Not to put too fine a point on it, but this is wishful thinking on Gawain's part. It is my contention that reputation

("renoun") and identity are one in the same in Gawain's case; the apparent disconnect between his reputation of perfection (symbolized in the pentangle) and his actions once he departs from Camelot prove as much. The poet posits clues in the arming scene by purposefully qualifying statements regarding Gawain's character. For example, in line 633, the poet does not declare that Gawain is good, but rather, "Gawain was for gode *knawen.*" It is a subtle distinction, admittedly; however, it is one in a series of qualifications of Gawain's character that acknowledge the perspective of others and not necessarily an objective truth. Compliments to his moral and knightly disposition are accredited to his reputation, which is not the same as his true identity.

One aspect of Gawain's shield that is almost entirely overlooked by critics relates to the form of the poet's detailed description. I imagine that it derives from extensive "micro-analysis." A numerical breakdown of the poet's description reveals a favoring of one side of the shield over the other, which readily corresponds to the fact that Gawain, himself, favors the virtue of the same privileged side of the shield.[27] By my count, the poet spends only three lines out of the total forty-seven lines (ll. 619-665) describing the inner half of the shield – the image of "quen" Mary. In fact the poetic disregard for her image in favor of the "endeles knot" illustrates the favoring of chivalric values over Christian ones in the poem. William A. Paris reminds readers in "Heroic Struggle" that Mary is "the deity from whom Gawain derives his internal fortitude… [and] presumably the source of all power in the universe" (Paris 149). Furthermore, the all-too-brief

[27] Even the obvious juxtaposition of the images on either side of the shield supports the conjecture that the two sets of ideals are incompatible, or more accurately, they cannot work in conjunction with one another on this mission. Gawain must make a choice – he cannot appeal to both sides or appease both masters. "Sir Gauan, on Godes halve," (l. 692) rides on his presumed death march to the Green Chapel, and should be looking inward for spiritual strength rather than concerning himself with his external presentation – the demonstration of virtues that reinforce his renown. The end result of such a course of action reduces the pentangle on the outside of his shield to an outward sign of his inward failure.

description is conveyed as merely as an extension of the "fyve joyes" symbolized on the front of the shield. Despite the glossing of the Marian reference, the poet's description holds the key to Gawain's success on his quest: "…That quen he blusched therto his belde never payred" (l. 650). Ironically, it is precisely the fact that Gawain's courage cracks, his heart fails, and he falters for fear of death, all of which guarantee his failure. Because of Gawain's obsession with the ideals depicted on the outer half of the shield (illustrated by the poet's own preoccupation with the pentangle's meaning), he neglects the inner image, which offers the fundamental answer to the Green Knight's challenge: *faith*.

Thus far, I have openly placed the blame for Gawain's failure squarely on the knight's shoulders. I would like to step back for a brief moment and assume the apologist role for Gawain, if only to demonstrate my objectivity in criticizing the knight in such a severe way. Admittedly, Gawain is only a "representative"[28] of Arthur's court, and although he is regarded as the most worthy among the Knights of the Round Table, it is reasonable to presume that any other knight in his place would also fail the trial at the Green Chapel. For if the most highly renowned can only "fonde," at such a test, what can anyone else hope to achieve?

In many ways, Gawain is a victim of circumstance. That he is unaware of the circumstances or that they conform against him in an elaborate plot devised by Morgan le Fay, does not excuse the knight for his transgressions, nor does it diminish the narrative quality of the text and the failure of chivalric ideals. In fact, it serves to highlight and amplify the gross nature of his failure and reveals the proper mode of behavior that he

[28] In "Patience and the Gawain-poet," A.C. Spearing calls Gawain "The chosen representative of the Arthurian civilization."

should demonstrate. Consistent with the genre, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* engenders an image of the ideal knight through the inabilities and inadequacies of the knight presented. Didactically, it conveys the conflicting dynamics at work in both the text and the society that creates it. The designs of Morgan play against an expected attitude or manner on Gawain's part because of the strict adherence to those chivalric ambitions. Specifically, the vehicle for this entrapment is a pair of verbal contracts, which Gawain accepts willing, binding him figuratively and physically. The (attempted) devotion to chivalric ideals swells into a futile and dizzying obsession to demonstrate those virtues consistently. The effect of which is desperation on Gawain's part and the eventual acceptance of that special gift: the magic girdle.

The second verbal contract (and its effects) corresponds to all three of the highlighted themes of medieval romance. Whether his acceptance of Bertilak's "forwarde" is the result of the beleaguered knight's exhaustion, his trustfulness (sprung from gratefulness), or even apathy, Gawain must "sware with trawthe" to another "bargayn" that will test the mettle of his knighthood when it is his spiritual fortitude that should concern him. Like the contract to trade blows with the Green Knight in Camelot, the nature of the exchange seems innocuous enough[29] – specifically because Gawain assumes he will spend most of his time at rest, per Bertilak's command: "Ye schal lenge in your lofte and lyye in your ese" (l. 1096). Yet again, the gap rapidly expands between Gawain's expectations and reality, courtesy of Bertilak's sinfully-motivated wife. Because the entire "bargayn" with Bertilak is predicated upon the honesty and integrity of the two knights to "swete, swap" what they "wynne," Gawain's chivalric sensibility,

[29] I qualify the preliminary exchange as "innocuous" insofar as Gawain did not believe he would have to receive a blow after the decapitating one that he dealt to the Green Knight.

specifically those detailed traits depicted on his shield, rises to the surface in yet another attempt to prove his identity equates to his "renoun." However, a trio of compromising positions and the confluence of circumstances make the proper demonstration of chivalric ideals impossible. It is the medieval equivalent to a catch-22. In "The Lessons of Sir Gawain," Jan Solomon surmises:

> Conflicting demands on Gawain's courtesy create a situation wherein it is impossible for his courtesy to be preserved on all counts…The cards are stacked against Gawain, and they are so stacked not to test any one virtue, but to teach that even so dazzling an array of virtues as those for which Gawain was so renowned are not proof in themselves against all temptations. (Solomon 270-271)

Although some credit is deserved for handling the situation "as-well-as-can-be-expected," it does not hide the fact that Gawain, admittedly conflicted, preferences the letter of the law, rather than its spirit when making his exchanges with Bertilak. Gawain tactfully and tactically "…hasppes his fayre hals his armes wythinne, / And hisses hym (Bertilak) as comlyly as he couthe awyse / 'Tas yow there my chevicaunce, I cheved no more'" (ll. 1388-1390). Gawain's verbal tip-toeing fulfills his promise to Bertilak, technically; however, when further pressed the "high-wire act" becomes indictment of his character. Appealing to semantics is merely an indication that his whole means of hiding the truth is, actually, an abuse of "trawthe."

The final day's exchange proves the most problematic for Gawain and ultimately results in his undoing. Gawain willfully yet surreptitiously takes the wife's gift of the green girdle and by that "courteous" act, sacrifices his more than precious "renoun." The

acceptance of the gift is meaningful on a number of levels. First, authority is taken from Mary when he trusts in the girdle's magical ability to save his life at the Green Chapel. J.R.R. Tolkien admits as much in his reading of the poem, "Gawain does not accept the Girdle solely out of courtesy, and is tempted by the hope of magic aid" (Tolkien "Monsters" 103). In addition Solomon notes, "Gawain's courage falters, for Gawain is led to accept the last (gift) partly because it is said to contain the power of protecting the wearer from death" (Solomon 269). William A. Paris properly sums up Gawain's dilemma and why he takes the wife's talisman: "He feels helpless to save his life, but is determined to do so…He [is] not prepared to sacrifice his ego nor to give up the material for the spiritual world" (Paris 149, 151). What happened to the Gawain that left Camelot in "god chere" and was willing to take what "destines" await him? Truly, he has lost sight of the true nature of his quest: it is a confrontation with mortality. To avoid such an encounter with death, Gawain hides the girdle from his host and wears it to the Green Chapel in a desperate attempt to save his life. In effect, though ineffective, he places his faith, not in God's grace, but in material things.

Secondly, Gawain's transgression, stemming from the sash, also causes the knight to break his "forwarde" with Bertilak. For the first time, it is Gawain who initiates the exchange ("I schal fylle upon fyrst oure forwards, nouthe"), perhaps in an attempt to expedite the process and conceal his treachery. By hiding his "prys" on the third day, he forfeits the courtesy of his host and the virtue he has struggled to maintain during his stay at Bertilak's castle. All his futile attempts to preserve his renown through demonstrations of his virtues are wasted and forgotten by this single deliberate act. As if to punctuate Gawain's infraction, Bertilak sends the knight to the Green Chapel and assures him, "'In

god faythe,' quoth the godmon, 'wyth a goud wylle / Al that ever I yow hyght, halde schal I rede" (ll.1969-1970). With the distinction evident to the audience, it is clear that Gawain's fall is inevitable.[30]

In preparation for his short journey to the Green Chapel, Gawain proceeds to arm himself in a manner unlike the one detailed by the poet in Fitt II. In Fitt IV the description is much shorter, less ornate as if to mirror the apprehension that consumes Gawain. One aspect of the knight's attire that is not abbreviated is the green girdle – Gawain's new authority. The wrapping of the magic lace is given a central position in the scene, and the poet, who devotes more lines to the sash than any other piece of equipment, clearly addresses its worth to its wearer. To not wear the girdle is unthinkable to Gawain:

> Yet laft he not the lace, the ladies gifte;
> That forgat not Gawayn, for gode of hymselven.
> …The gordel of the grene silke that gay wel bisemed,
> …Bot wered not this ilk wyye for wele this gordel,
> Bot for to saven hymself when suffer hym byhoved,
> To byde bale withoute dabate of bronde hym to were
> other knyffe. (ll. 2030-2031, 2035, 2037, 2040-2042)

The knight is consumed by the potential life-saving power of the talisman, and his trust in it distracts and corrupts a proper state of mind. However, it is not a confident reliance in

[30] Despite the fact that prior to the third exchange, Gawain confesses to a holy man, and receives "absolucion" (l. 1882), we can presume that one of two things happened. Either Gawain failed to mention the girdle and his intentions with the gift (thus nullifying the priest's declaration of a clean spirit), or he told the priest of the girdle with the intent of concealing it from Bertilak. This is a point upon which J.R.R. Tolkien criticizes Sir Israel Gollancz's interpretation. I find my reading falls somewhere between these critics' extreme positions. Tolkien's dismissal of Gollancz's characterization of a "sacrilegious" confession is not without merit; however, the fact that Gawain ends up hiding the girdle from his host diminishes the "great solemnity" of the sacrament.

its magic, but instead, it is pathetic desperation. Rather than remembering and embodying the Christian principles that will protect his eternal soul in the upcoming test, he is satisfied with a delusion that "drurye double hym aboute" (l. 2033) will save his mortal body. Moreover, his shield (with the image of Mary), the one tangible reminder of the essential spiritual fortitude needed at this time, dismissively, the poet tells us: "on schulder he hit laght" (l. 2061).

Although the Green Knight declared in his initial encounter with Gawain that the return blow must, like the "strok" he received, go unchecked, there is no practical use for the shield at the Green Chapel. By "practical," I am, of course, referring to a knight's primary use of a shield, to fend off an attacking blow. However, there is another need for Gawain's shield, which the poet explains in his initial description in Fitt II: "That quen he blusched therto his belde never payred" (l. 650). Not since his desperate wanderings north after All Saints Day has Gawain needed the image in his shield more. In fact, it is that episode – one of "peryl and payne and plytes ful harde, (l. 733) that ultimately emphasizes the poets explicit moral purpose – to favor Christian values over those chivalric ideals that entangled Gawain and sunk him into despair.[31] When Gawain, lost and dejected, sought refuge, he turned to a proper aid: "To Mary made his mone, / That ho hym red to ryde, / And wyse hym to sum wone" (ll. 737-739). And as Tolkien so eloquently conveys: "How does Gawain find the castle? *In answer to prayer*" (Tolkien 77). The knight is rewarded for this faith and granted asylum in the Christian hall of Bertilak – where his reputation precedes him. Again, on his way to the Green Chapel, Gawain should perform a similar act of faith. Although he rejects his guide's suggestion

[31] Ann Derrickson comes to a similar conclusion in "The Pentangle: Guiding Star for the Gawain-poet." She claims that by not trusting in God's power to protect Gawain, the knight commits the spiritual sin of despair manifesting itself by his dependence on the magical, life preserving green belt.

to abandon his journey (perhaps the last public demonstration of his steadfast knightly virtue), he continues on to meet his "destine."

Following the Green Knight's feigned blow and learning the Knight's true identity, Gawain is both "never in this worlde wyye half so blithe" and "So agreved for greme he gryed withinne" (ll. 2321,2370). His relief is short-lived as the combination of unbridled happiness and shame leads to an unexpected loss of composure on Gawain's part. His fury is the inevitable outcome of hearing the nature of the test he has failed ("he lufed hys lyf") and the machinery of magic ("the ilke woven girdel") that unraveled his "endeles knot," the impenetrable pentangle of virtue. Although the Green Knight mitigates the fallen knight's blame, Gawain finds little consolation in the outcome. He admits, "Now am I fawty and falce, and ferde haf ben ever; / Of trecherye and untrawthe both bityde sorwe / and care" (ll. 2382-2384). But how does he actually comprehend his failure? In his "confessional self-analysis,"[32] Gawain acknowledges his fault and "presents himself, in fairly rapid succession, as a perfect knight subverted by evil; the blameless victim of a scheming woman; a fallible human being prone to evil; and, finally, as a knight who has been tarnished by his dealings with the world" (Hollis 271). Hollis accurately outlines the different psychological and verbal identities that Gawain assumes in Fitt IV. However, the second to last posture ("a fallible human being prone to evil") proves most productive and prolific from a literary perspective.

The outcome of the episode at the Green Chapel, as well as Gawain's misguided approach to the Green Knight's trial from the start, ultimately, demonstrates the fallibility of the knight. He is not the perfect knight of the pentangle, nor does his identity measure

[32] This term is taken from Burrow's analysis of Gawain's blame in *A Reading of "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight."*

up to his renown. From his initial hesitation following the announcement of the "Crystemas gomen" to concealing the green girdle from his host, the chivalric ideals that Gawain so readily prizes do not obscure the simple fact that Gawain, though heroic, is nevertheless, only human. His failure is the direct result of his favoring the virtuous practices of knighthood over the moral laws of Christianity. The former, being earthly and temporal, poorly serve the needs of the knight who must confront his own mortality. Furthermore, Gawain's obsession with his renown deludes him into equating his reputation with his actual identity. As a result, he constantly must make a concentrated effort to demonstrate and uphold such "renoun." The nature of the verbal contracts into which he enters conflicts him, and the desire to save his own life (remaining stout of sinew) supersedes his moral obligations to Christ (remaining strong in faith).

Gawain's recognition of his fallibility and moreover his humanity is a striking feature of Fitt IV. Certainly, the inequality of blame ascribed by the Green Knight to Gawain's actions and Gawain's own condemnation of self is noteworthy. Laughingly, the Green Knight excuses Gawain's behavior and still counts him highest among knights. He is impressed with Gawain's display of fortitude and conduct in the face of impossible odds. However, it is to Gawain's credit that he is not willing to put the episode behind him or accept the penance that he has already received by the Green Knight's third "strok." Instead he remains contrite and pledges to wear the lady's gift as a reminder of his failure. Gawain now claims to wear the girdle, "Bot in syngne of my surfet I schal se hit ofte / The faut and the fayntyse of the flesche crabbed / How tender hit is to entyse teches of fylthe" (ll. 2433, 2435-2436). While he is ashamed for having to wear the sash, he embraces its necessity and the virtue of such a penitent act. The green girdle is now a

symbol of humility – an ironic contrast to the proud emblem of perfection on his shield. By carrying the shield, Gawain remains a hero, but by brandishing the sash, he also acknowledges his humanity.

By keeping the girdle and accepting it as part of his new identity, Gawain experiences growth as a character and more specifically, as a knight. The fact that he is not satisfied with the Green Knight's pardon, but instead, embraces his guilt by accepting responsibility for his actions, elevates Gawain's quality of character. Although flawed, he should be regarded, as William Paris put it, as "a man among men and hero among heroes" (Paris 152). This accolade is most appropriately demonstrated when Gawain returns to Camelot and reports his story. In yet another confession scene – one more worthy of Tolkien's "great solemnity," Gawain bares his soul to his fellow knights and the King. It is in this final act that he proves that "Byfore alle men upon molde his mensk is the most" (l. 914). Sadly, the court fails to identify the true significance of the accessory and they are all-too-willing to display it. Arthur directs his knights to wear the girdle with honor as a sign of renown. It is public spectacle for the court rather than the private reminder of Gawain's failure. It is a lesson that Gawain painfully learns over the course of the romance. The girdle he wears is a mark of shame, not pride. Alan Lupack properly addresses this issue in his analysis of the poem and admits that Gawain, "has come to the realization that virtue is not a matter of public recognition and that knowledge of his own deeds is more important that the regards of others" (Lupack 304). The girdle that Gawain bears carries a very different meaning than the "bauderyk" the Round Table displays.

As a heroic figure, Gawain arguably stands in higher regard at the end of the poem than in the beginning. The irony that his fall actually enhances his identity (and by misinterpretation his "renoun") is easy to overlook. When heralded as a perfect knight, he is distant from his audience (both contemporary and modern). In fact, his perfect reputation at the onset has led many critics to interpret his character as superhuman or even supernatural. But as the Green Knight's trial undoubtedly proves, he is only human - the effect of which is two-fold. First, it closes the distance between himself and his audience. Gawain is relatable and relevant as a model moral figure (rather than an "other" figure). He, like his medieval audience, is fallible and audiences would take comfort in the fact that even the greatest among them is, nevertheless, like them. The second effect builds upon the first. Gawain's response to his failure provides a moral standard that all sinners may try and imitate. For this reason, Gawain's humble distinction from other Knights of the Round Table, stemming from his proper penitence, is critical to understanding the poet's greater moral purpose. Gawain, despite his renown, functions as a morality player, a Christian everyman, who succumbs to the evils of the world, when faced with his own mortality.

Just as *The Knight of the Cart* presents a knight in conflict, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* portrays Gawain's struggle between internal and external interests. The juxtaposition and layering of competing forces puts Gawain's "renoun" in jeopardy. His inability to distinguish and differentiate between ideals, ultimately leads to the failure of his quest. It is because he values his "renoun" so highly that prevents him from acting appropriately. This issue is revisited by authors of hard-boiled detective fiction whose protagonists are not so constrained by their identity. Consequently, the impressions they

make, as well as their own self-preservation, are handled accordingly. Likewise, identity also affects the private detective's relationships with females in the hyper-masculine, hard-boiled world; they do not have the knight's delicate sensibilities or a concern for courtly behavior.

The Political Romance of "The Knight's Tale":

While *The Knight of the Cart* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* follow a more traditional structure as quest romances, Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale," the first of *The Canterbury Tales*, falls within a frame narrative of the larger text. From a content perspective, the romance does not include a quest and instead adopts a non-traditional format, while maintaining the major themes of medieval romance.

Scholarly criticism of Chaucer's "The Knight's Tale" can readily be divided into two specific approaches: those that focus on the story's teller and those that focus on the tale he tells.[33] Critics who fall into the former category dedicate themselves to a thorough historical analysis of the character of the Knight, attempting to identify who he was, where he had been, and when he had been there. The latter direct their criticism to the narrative structure, techniques, and patterns, as well as the characters who are contained within the Knight's story. Although these critics have succeeded in dividing the task of analyzing this first tale of *The Canterbury Tales*, there has been no conquering, in an interpretive sense, of the text. The division itself may be contributing to the lack of consensus that has been engendered by critics. Few, if any, deny that the tales told by Chaucer's pilgrims are not greatly influenced by those who tell them (and retell them, in Chaucer's case). Thus, it is essential to examine the stories with the tellers in mind.

[33] E.g. Thomas J. Hatton's "Chaucer's Crusading Knight, A Slanted Ideal" and Douglas Brooks and Alastair Fowler's "The Meaning of Chaucer's Knight's Tale," respectively.

Therefore, rather than separating the Knight from the "Tale," my analysis will attempt to bridge this critical gap; to examine, if only speculatively, Chaucer's Knight through a literary analysis of the tale he tells. Also, in light of the critical approach that author takes with "The Knight's Tale," the same familiar romance themes will also emerge within the text.

The question of the Knight's identity has been answered in many, often conflicting ways. At one end of the spectrum are those including A.S. Cook, critics who exalt the figure of the Knight as the epitome of the chivalric ideal, and yet others are determined to undermine his credibility and denigrate the Knight to the status of mercenary, an opportunistic solider-of-fortune.[34] While I will reserve the right not to commit myself to either side of this debate at this point, it is nonetheless, difficult to ignore the merits of each position, as Chaucer's text certainly provides ample support for each.

The primary source of this disagreement comes from the author's "General Prologue" and the description of the Knight presented therein. In his essay, "Chaucer's Crusading Knight, A Slanted Ideal", Thomas J. Hatton reminds readers that, "Chaucer's Knight is not simply a miscellaneous collection of nebulous virtues; his portrait seems carefully constructed to accord with the aims of a specific political and social program" (Hatton 77).[35] Nevertheless, the initial portrayal of the Knight is not short on praise:

> A Knyght ther was, and that a worthy man,
>
> That fro the tyme that he first bigan

[34] See Terry Jones' *Chaucer's Knight: The Portrait of a Medieval Mercenary*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980.

[35] Hatton suggests that Chaucer constructed his Knight as "the embodiment of the program (Philip de Mezieres' Order of the Passion) regarded by its advocates as the one chance for the rehabilitation of Christian chivalry and the salvation of European society.

To riden out, he loved chivalrie,

Trougthe and honour, fredom and curteisie.

Ful worthy was he in his lordes were,

And therto hadde he ride, no man ferre,

An evere honoured for his wothynesse; ("General Prologue" 43-50)

At face value, the description thus far seems to favor an idealized reading of the Knight's character. These first lines identify a significant quality that will be repeated throughout the Knight's description: worthiness. Understood as competency, that is his ability to perform his professional duties, his worthiness is coupled with other laudable chivalric traits, "trougthe, and honour, fredom, and curteisie" to demonstrate the depth in which it is ingrained.[36] The repetition of the Knight as a "worthy man" not only suggests importance but also it infers that it was a dominant quality in his character.

Another such dominant quality that resonates with readers is the Knight's wisdom. While the glossaries of many texts liken "wys" to prudence, there is a deeper meaning, which connects these two chivalric characteristics: the wise Knight is prudent, but he is also the knight who understands the philosophic and social ideals which inform the order of chivalry, and thus he restrains and shapes his worthiness in accordance with these ideals (Hatton 79). However, this reading develops a rigid connection between the Knight's moral ideals and their manifestation in his actions, as a knight, which have been identified before in both Lancelot and Gawain. In other words, these qualities are the guided principles that govern the knight's actions. What this interpretation fails to acknowledge is that, although he is a knight who has an elevated position in society, he

[36] To the concept of "worthiness" D.W. Robertson adds, "The idea of worth probably implied fortitude, or strength of spirit." To this definition, Hatton adds, "In the fourteenth-century sense, 'worthiness' includes not only the concept of bravery but also 'skill, ability, and experience in warfare" (Hatton78).

nonetheless has superiors, who may or may not share these heightened chivalric qualities, and thus, the knight would find himself in a precarious position to maintain or sacrifice his principles in their service.

Before delving into the potential crises of conscience, an examination of the Knight's demonstration of virtues can be related to the catalogue of battles in which he fought. The list provided in the "General Prologue" is extensive, and it is the size of the Knight's military career that often marks a divide among scholars. Was the lengthy list meant to be a flattering compliment to the qualities laid out in the "Prologue," or was it an indication of the military adventurism in which the Knight took part? To begin to answer this question, a more detailed look at the battles themselves is needed.

Most critics and medieval historians break down the military campaigns of the Knight into three distinct categories based upon the enemy and, as a subcategory, the location of the military action. The Knight fought against the Moors,[37] the Saracens,[38] and against Eastern European pagans, all enemies of the Church in the fourteenth century.[39] Certainly, one could interpret this common thread as a justification for the Knight's participation as it was the Knight's duty (by small extension), as a member of the chivalric order to protect the rights of the Church.[40] However, when the fact that the Knight fought for (not merely against) the Turks is considered, his loyalties are called into question. The notion of the common enemy of the Church is upended and

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[37] "Grenade" ("General Prologue" 56), "Algezir" ("General Prologue" 57), "Belmarye" ("General Prologue" 57), and "Tramyssene" ("General Prologue" 62).
[38] "Alisaundre" ("General Prologue" 51), "Lyeys" ("General Prologue" 58), and "Satalye" ("General Prologue" 58).
[39] "Pruce" ("General Prologue" 53), "Ruce" ("General Prologue" 54), "Lettow" ("General Prologue" 54).
[40] Maurice Keen outlines the obligations of the knight in *Chivalry* (1984). The contemporary commentaries of the chivalric order that are identified include John Gower's *Vox Clamantis, Etienne* de Fougeres, and Bishop of Lisieux, who wrote in his *Le Livre des manieres* that it was "the knight's business to be the strong right arm of the Church" (Keen 49).

can just as easily be replaced by a much simpler theme: the Knight would fight for anyone, anywhere. The motivation for the Knight's participation in these battles, provided in the "General Prologue," offers little in the way of clarification. In fact, the Knight's description in the "General Prologue," again, presents conflicting information. At Tlemcen, the Knight is said to have "foughten for oure faith" ("General Prologue" 62) and yet against the Turks the text mentions that "everemoore he hadde a sovereyn prys" ("General Prologue" *67).* Does this 'prys' refer to his worthiness as a knight, or does it denote his monetary compensation (his price)? This creates ambiguity between his motivations: was he fighting for the Christian faith or for his own reputation and reward? The gap between these selfless and selfish motivations is yet another place that divides Chaucerians over the quality and merit of the Knight.

The last issue raised within the Knight's description in the "General Prologue" revolves around his physical appearance, and it is his "array," which is most often overlooked by critics that may provide the most critical insight into the current state (physically, to be sure, but more importantly mentally and spiritually) of this pilgrim. If Chaucer had intended to portray his Knight as the idealized defender of the faith, a man wholly committed to Chivalry, one would also expect his form to follow suit. Strangely, unlike the authors of *The Knight of the Cart* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Chaucer's physical description of the knight seems ill-suited for a "parfit gentil knight:"

> But for to tellen yow of his array,
> His hors were goode but he was nat gay.
> Of fustian he wered a gypon
> Al bismotered with his habergeon,

For he was late ycome from his viage,

And wente for to doon his pilgrimage. ("General Prologue" 73-78).

Throughout the "General Prologue," Chaucer's attention to physical details, including attire and "array," serve as indicators of the pilgrims' true character. The Knight is no exception. While one could certainly interpret the modesty of his "array" as a sign of his humbleness, a lack of vanity consistent with the portrait of the ideal Knight, it is more likely that the text is offering something entirely different in this section. The Knight's shoddy and "worn" appearance suggests a lack of concern for worldly, superficial vanity. The fact that he has joined the pilgrimage immediately following his most recent "viage" suggests a need for renewal. The Knight's moral and spiritual state, like his armor, may also be "bismotered." If paralyzed by this new and wholly unfamiliar frame of mind, the reader can imagine the Knight's having simply walked away from the battlefield of his most recent campaign, and now finds himself on the road to Canterbury. Truly, his physical appearance is a window that allows readers to see into the Knight's "condicioun" on his journey of renewal. Chaucer makes deliberate and delicate insinuations, which taint the knight's image, without committing to his condemnation.

Reading the Knight's portrait in this way may shed greater light and clarity upon the descriptions provided in the "General Prologue." It also is in keeping of reading the medieval romance genre as problematic, that is, largely focused on the problems of the knights and knighthood, themselves. If the Knight is suffering from the kind of "spiritual decay" (Hatton 83) that plagued Europe during the latter half of the fourteenth century, it lessens the importance of what role he played in the battles leading up to his

pilgrimage.[41] Both readings of the Knight are superseded by the possibility that his "condicioun" is one of disillusionment. His place in the conflicts is rendered less important than the nature of the conflicts, themselves. As the ideal knight or as a mercenary, his disillusionment is the result of external factors, namely the diminishing value, status, and quality of the chivalric campaigns. To this point, John H. Pratt describes the Knight's problem in "Was Chaucer's Knight Really A Mercenary?" as such: "Chaucer's Knight, trained to pursue the ultimate *raison d'etre* of the medieval knight – to perform feats of arms in battle – finds himself out of place in his own time" (Pratt 20). If we assume that Chaucer wrote "The Knight's Tale" and his description in the "General Prologue" in the last decade of the fourteenth century, then Chaucer is writing at the end of an era: the end of crusading and even the beginnings of the end of chivalry, itself. Even from a literary perspective, "The Knight's Tale" is one of the last major romances written in the Middle Ages. Perhaps it is an awareness of this transitional period that prompts Chaucer to envision such a "bismoitered" Knight.

While the military actions in which he took part are all crusades in a technical sense (in that they are all against pagans and foes of the Church), they are not like the great crusades that ended a century before. Hatton cites historian Richard Vaughn as calling the fourteenth century, "the age of the arm-chair crusader" (Hatton 82). The efforts of Philip de Mezieres to form a united Christian crusade were inspired by the real need for such a campaign. However, Philip's plans and the efforts of the Order of the Passion of Christ never fulfilled their ambitions, nor did they bring an end to the corruption in chivalry. Knights would face new enemies at home as the Hundred Years'

[41] Hatton cites Philip de Mezieres' contributing factors to the spiritual decay of Europe and the weaknesses in contemporary crusading attempts as a lack of unity in leadership and selfishness on the part of the ordinary soldiers. "In other words, Christian chivalry was corrupt from top to bottom."

War pitted Christian against Christian. For Chaucer's contemporaries and centuries of readers that would follow, the exaggerated verisimilitude of the Knight and his world seems less of an actualization of the chivalric ideal than a sad reminder of what could have been.

The narrative structure, including characters, content, and form, as well as the tale's larger purpose, have been as intensely debated as the identity of the Knight by Chaucerians. Some argue that "The Knight's Tale" is a courtly epic in the tradition of its source material, namely, Boccaccio's *Teseide.* From a historicist perspective, D.W. Robertson claims that it is "[A] comic epic tale…composed either to encourage or to celebrate Richard's marriage to his French bride as a solution to the 'fraternal strife' that plagued relationships between Christian England and Christian France" (Robertson 439). On the other hand, R.M. Lumiansky holds that it is actually a philosophical poem that explores the tenets of Boethian thought, while Paull Baum argues that the story is largely pervaded by satire. In *Chaucer and the French Tradition* Charles Muscatine asserts that the poem "is essentially neither a story, nor a static picture, but a poetic pageant and that all its materials are organized and contributory to a complex design expressing the nature of the noble life" (Muscatine 181). However, the most commonly accepted interpretation categorizes "The Knight's Tale" as romance.

The traditional point of view that holds "The Knight's Tale" as romance is championed by Paul T. Thurston who cites Shelley's praise: "*The Knight's Tale* is romance – the finest metrical romance we have in English. It is a tale of chivalry and romantic love…The poem is out-and-out romantic" (Thurston 9). This reading of the tale is consistent with the traditional interpretation of the Knight himself, for what other kind

of story would a "verray parfit gentil knyght" tell? While I do not deny the presence of common romance elements and themes, which give the tale its narrative structure, I do not think it can be classified so easily.[42] The Knight does not recite the story simply because it is the kind of story a man of his position would tell. Under close examination, the meaning of Theseus' story and the bitter feud between Palamon and Arcite over the love of Emelye becomes equally *subjective* as the Knight's identity. Under the guise of a romance, the Knight unpacks his thoughts and emotions, which suggest a psychological state of disillusionment, concern, and confusion. This interpretation of "The Knight's Tale" is illustrated initially and most-readily through the story's central figure, Theseus.

An examination of the critical analysis dedicated to the character Theseus hardly reveals a unanimous interpretation. Again, Chaucerians remain divided with regard to their treatment of "The Knight's Tale's" protagonist. While most critics acknowledge his efforts to bring order to a world of chaos, the virtue of his character is divided by their interpretation of his motives for such action and the consequences that result from them. Many readers are willing to take the Knight's description of the Duke of Athens as a "noble duc" at face value. Kathleen Blake claims that he is "presented as willful and decisive in character" (Muscatine 181). C. David Benson describes Theseus as a "chivalric hero" and emphasizes the importance of his military conquests as a defining characteristic (Benson 109). In "The Topic of the 'Knight's Tale,'" W.F. Bolton goes so far as to call Theseus "godlike because he is reasonable" (Bolton 225). In opposition,

[42] The problem of the "romance" categorization is articulated by John Finlayson: "Instead, then, of assuming that there is merely some kind of inevitable or socially appropriate relationship between the Knight and his *Tale*, and being content with some easy statement that 'we can't really define romance but we all know what it is' and thence proceeding to call "The Knight's Tale" a romance, without considering in any but a superficial manner what consequences this has for artistic technique and vision, we would do better to examine more attentively the form the author has chosen" (Finlayson 127-128).

there are also those who find Theseus to be a flawed character. Rather than the chivalric ideal, Jerold C. Frakes asserts that his actions to control Fortune are a futile (and costly) exercise. Brooke Bergan, citing V.A. Kolve, argues that the effect of Theseus' desire for order is "an appalling disorder" (Bergan 10). Finally, Daniel Kempton accuses Theseus of being "wishfully unrealistic, as well as self-centered...most busy in the defense of himself" (Kempton 244).

To better understand the character of Theseus and the Knight's relationship to the character, it is necessary to look at four specific scenes within "The Knight's Tale." The reader's introduction to Theseus and the destruction of Thebes, the interruption of the duel between Palamon and Arcite in the garden, the arranged tournament, and the aftermath of the "organized melee" are all critical moments where the motives and consequence of the protagonist are most clearly illustrated by the narrator. Individually and collectively, they demonstrate the corruption and failure of Theseus' "wysdom" and "chivalries" to bring order to his world. Furthermore, they represent the narrating Knight's efforts to articulate his psychological state, as well as relate his criticisms of the current (fallen) state of medieval knighthood. Just as the narrating Knight presents his characters for this critical exercise, so too does Chaucer use "The Knight's Tale" to comment on the genre of chivalric romance.

Readers are first introduced to Theseus in "The Knight's Tale" as he returns from a successful campaign against the Amazonians. It is his description as the conquering hero that presents the reader with the first parallel to the Knight, that is, it establishes a

relationship between teller and tale.[43] Theseus, like the Knight, is presented as a model of "wysdom" and "chivalrie," and yet it is curious that the narrator precedes this statement with the fact that he had military success against "many a riche contree" ("Knight's Tale" 865).[44] Immediately, the qualification "riche" brings the duke's motives under suspicion: is Theseus' military prowess the result of his knightly valor against worthy adversaries or merely his greed for wealth and fame? Subtle narrative additions such as this account for the great divide between critical interpretations of Chaucer's text.

Upon his glorious return from battle, Theseus stops for a band of weeping women dressed in black. Initially, the tone he adopts is one of agitation and annoyance:

> What folk been ye, that at myn homcomynge
>
> Perturben so my feste with criynge?"
>
> …Have ye so greet envye
>
> Of myn honour, that thus compleyne and crye? ("Knight's Tale" 905-908)

Effectively, the women have disturbed his triumphant occasion with their mourning. Even his assumption that the women are begrudging the duke his "proper" celebration because they wish to steal his honors is presumptuous and self-aggrandizing. Nevertheless, Theseus quickly comes to the conclusion that if he hopes to continue his lauded return, he must attend to the needs of the women. Thus, his "pitous" reaction to the ladies' plight is less genuine in light of his initial reaction. Again, the quality of his "chivalrie" is called into question by swearing "his ooth" upon his knighthood. The oath

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[43] This parallel is not to be interpreted as the Knight positing himself within the story, that is, Theseus represents the Knight. Rather, it merely transfers the questions raised in the Knight's description from the "General Prologue" into "The Knight's Tale," proper.

[44] All references to "The Knight's Tale" are from *The Riverside Chaucer.* Larry D. Benson's General Edition; Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987.

he swears seems to be directed toward self-promotion; the primary motive for his actions is not to give justice to the women in black, but rather to recover the glory of his homecoming.

The dishonoring of the corpses in Thebes exemplifies the chaos that pervades the world of "The Knight's Tale." However, the efforts of Theseus and his "hoost of chivalrie" to restore order and exert his authority only complicates the matter further. Having taken Thebes, the duke is able to give the fallen men the proper funeral rites; however, in doing so, he creates yet another pile of bodies (of Theban soldiers), who are in turn desecrated by scavengers and pillagers.[45] Despite the order that Theseus imposes militarily, chaos still remains as a by-product of his "virtuous" actions. By securing the honor and memory of King Capaneus' army, he sacrifices the honor of King Creon's men. Furthermore, the manner in which justice is sought also raises questions about the virtue of the duke's character. Critics who differ on their overall assessment of Theseus' character acknowledge the incongruousness of Thesus' motivations and actions in this scene.[46] Their shared interpretation further strengthens a self-serving reading of Theseus' response to the mourners. Once Creon, with whom the women held their grievance, was killed, justice had, for better or worse, been served. There was no need to lay siege to the city and the surrounding countryside. This chaotic act of wrath and rage is purely of Theseus' design and is an early reflection of his troubling character.

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[45] See lines 1005-1008 of "The Knight's Tale."

[46] Even Ian Robinson, who takes a positive view of Theseus' response to the Theban women cannot help but recognize the bloody chaos that results from his attempt to be noble (cited in Kempton 247). However, Henry J. Webb in "A Reinterpretation of Chaucer's Theseus" is most poignant in his analysis of Theseus' sack of Thebes:"Theseus, after conquering Thebes, slaying Creon, and putting 'the folk to flyght', proceeded to destroy the city by renting 'adoun bothe wall and sparre and rafter.' This expression of rage…served little purpose…But Theseus – unless he were attempting to point a doubtful moral – had no reason for his action other than fury" (Webb 290).

Another important scene that demonstrates the failure of Theseus's wisdom and chivalry, as well as a misguided attempt to impose order in place of chaos, is the duke's intervention during the duel between Palamon and Arcite. Undoubtedly, the principal conflict in "The Knight's Tale" is the influence that Theseus has over the two Theban knights found together on the battlefield of Thebes. It should be noted that from the sack of Thebes, to their imprisonment, and finally to their battle in the arena, the effect of Athenian influence (predominantly the will of Theseus) corrupts the identity of these brothers-in-arms. It drives a wedge between both their familial commitment to one another and their knightly bond of brotherhood.

While "hert-hyntyng in May," the duke discovers Palamon and Arcite dueling fiercely in a grove. It is not the fact that the two men are fighting that displeases Theseus; it is the fact that they are fighting without his consent and guidance. As is the case with their imprisonment, Theseus aims to assert his governance over the free wills of the two embattled youths. Furthermore, it is the circumstances of the duel that angers Theseus. He interprets the isolated setting and the animal-like ferocity of their duel as a sign of chaos. However, because of the timing of Theseus' entrance, he is unable to see the progression of words and events that led to the duel. After agreeing upon a "tyme and place," ("Knight's Tale" 1635) Palamon and Arcite proceed to help one another prepare for the battle: "Everich of hem help for to armen oother / As friendly as he were his owene brother" ("Knight's Tale" 1651-1652). These premeditated and precautionary steps hardly qualify as an unrestrained response to their disagreement. The irony of the scene and the events that follow is that the impassioned fight is quite virtuous (according to the romance genre). By fighting amongst themselves in isolation, they do not

implicate others in their personal affair; the violence is contained and controlled. Although it is later deemed chaotic by Theseus, it nevertheless demonstrates civility and responsibility on the part of Palamon and Arcite as they fight for the love of Emelye.

Theseus' initial reaction to the scene in the glade is reminiscent of his impetuous response to the mourning women on the road. Initially, the duke violently lashes out at the two men who have interrupted his hunting session, a recreation that "hath he swich delit / That it is al his joye and appetit" ("Knight's Tale" 1679-1680). After parting the two men, Theseus cries out: "Namoore, up peyne of lesynge of youre heed! / By myghty Mars, he shal anon be deed / That smyteth any strook that I may seen" ("Knight's Tale" 1707-1709). Before his wrath can be manifested upon Palamon and Arcite ("Ye shal be deed"), the women of the hunting party intercede on the cousins' behalf:

> And alle crieden, bothe lasse and moore,
> 'Have mercy, Lord, upon us women alle!'
> And on hir bare knees adoun they falle
> Til at the last aslaked was his mood, ("Knight's Tale" 1756-1759)

In this particular instance, the intercession of the women inspires Theseus to create a more "reasonable" solution. However, their influence has a two-fold effect upon Theseus: his supreme will is subverted and an artificial sense of order prevails in its place. To the former, Theseus' supreme "auctoritee" is upended by the pleas of the women. Within the patriarchal system in which the story takes place, this feminine subversion suggests the fallibility of Theseus, the male ruler. In other words, if they can subvert his position, he no longer represents the ultimate source of authority. With regard to the latter effect of the women's pleas, Theseus merely replaces the "chaos" of the

grove with an elaborate scheme devised to resolve the matter between the two Thebans. However, as the plan takes form, it no longer serves its initial function; but rather, it acts as a demonstration of Theseus' authority and greatness, that is, his attempt to usurp power. This solution proves neither reasonable nor does it have the desired effect of imposing order upon the conflict between Palamon and Arcite. The only advantage he gains is enclosing the violence, which is of little consolation when considering how the violence is intensified.

The preposterousness of the scenario that Thesus devises to resolve the conflict between Palamon and Arcite is matched only by its artificiality:

> My wyl is this, for play conclusion
>
> Withouten any repplicacioun –
>
> …And this day fifty wykes, fern ne ner,
>
> Everich of you shal brynge an hundred knightes
>
> Armed for lystes up at alle rightes,
>
> Al redy to darreyne hire by bataille
>
> …As I shal juge been and trewe. ("Knight's Tale" 1855-1856, 1850-1853, 1864)

The duke's imposition of order ("My wyl") now takes the personal and private nature of the conflict and implicates two hundred other knights. The battle seems less about winning the hand of Emelye and more about demonstrating the power and influence of Theseus. The significance of Arcite and Palamon's sibling rivalry is reduced to an aggrandizing, public spectacle filled with excess that reflects the vanity of its "juge."

Theseus' shameless self-promotion is disguised by his efforts to curb the violence and bring order to the conflict. Despite noble intentions for intercession (to impose order and civility in the affair),[47] Theseus' judgment lacks all sense of practicality, and the initial sentiment is soon lost. He is willing to risk the lives of two hundred other knights simply to enhance and enrich the conflict. Furthermore, the fanfare that surrounds the exhibition does not bring attention to Arcite and Palamon, but defers it to Theseus and his ability to control the "perceived"[48] chaos of their world. Their free will is seized and undermined by the desire of the duke to demonstrate his glory through the imposition of his own will.

It is also noteworthy that Theseus meets no resistance to his assertion of authority and his revision to their plans. Arguably, his audience, including Palamon and Arcite, are blind to the real implications of the duke's order. This inability to comprehend and interpret the duke's decree reflects the level to which those in attendance are seduced and manipulated by Theseus. Instead of considering or even questioning the value of Theseus' decision, they simply celebrate it: "Who kouthe telle, or who kouthe it endite, / The joye that is maked in the place / Whan Theseus had doon so fair a grace?" ("Knight's Tale" 1872-1874). Yet, this comment does not come from a character within "The Knight's Tale;" it is delivered by the narrating Knight. What would seem to be the humble efforts of the Knight to convey the adulation that Theseus receives is, in fact, the narrator's subtle criticism of those who are present. Instead of directly criticizing Theseus' actions, and thus revealing a narrative bias, the Knight slyly claims that he is

[47] This perspective admittedly, can be read only through rose-colored lenses.
[48] I use "perceived" in an ironic way here as the duel in the glade has a certain degree of order and civility marked by the cooperation in preparation, an aspect of the affair not witnessed by Theseus.

unwilling and unable to convey the appropriate sentiment.[49] Thus, the phrase, "doon so fair a grace" takes on an ironic (if not altogether sarcastic) tone in the light of this reading as Theseus' command proves neither gracious nor joy-inspiring.

In the introduction to Part III of "The Knight's Tale," the Knight deems it necessary to express, in detail, the "dispence" that Theseus pays to prepare for the combat between Palamon and Arcite. He even describes the structure as a "noble theatre" furthering the notion that the Theban cousins' conflict has been transformed into a public spectacle. F. Anne Payne appropriately reads the "tourney" as a ceremonial occasion, which "allows [Theseus] to show the world his wealth and magnificence" (Payne 101). This is one of many examples that demonstrate Theseus' indirect efforts to draw the audience's attention away from the disorder of conflict and toward his orderly means of resolution.

Perhaps the most important features of the newly constructed theater are the temples dedicated to the gods, Mars, Venus, and Diana. The presence of the temples and the detailed description provided by the teller is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it serves to bridge the physical events of the story with the larger spiritual world. Despite Theseus' aggrandizing his authority by portraying himself as a god (specifically by assuming the fourth cardinal position in the theater), he acknowledges the gods' influence and authority in the real world.[50] Secondly, a common theme that is present in each temple is the depiction of a world in chaos. Whether or not it is an admission on the part of the Knight that disorder is an inevitable part of the world or even a simple

[49] The narrative tone of this commentary points to the disenchanted and artificial sentimentality with which the Knight is offering this tale.

[50] To this point, it arguable that the Knight, himself, has recently gained a greater awareness of his spiritual place in relation to God, which may explain his participation in the pilgrimage to Canterbury.

acknowledgement of its presence in the world, the graphic descriptions nevertheless illustrate and foreshadow the futility of Theseus' attempts to counter, control, and impose order on the world's chaos.

The description of the battle and the pomp and circumstance that precede it represent the most direct relationship between teller and tale in "The Knight's Tale." The Knight's extensive military background makes this scene a perfect opportunity to provide expert insight and commentary. However, paired with the in-depth description is an accurate account of the carnage that ensues within the "noble theatre." Despite Theseus' efforts to curb the event's brutality by making the combat non-mortal, violence is doled out in near-comical proportions. It is, for lack of a better expression, a bloodbath. By following Theseus' decree, blood is not only shed by Palamon and Arcite, but by the additional two hundred other knights that are involved in the affair. Why are these "Wel armed" knights taking part in the battle (apart from complying with Theseus' command)? They have no viable reason or tangible interest in the outcome, as they have no claim to lady Emelye's hand. Furthermore, there is no decisive evidence that proves they are connected to or have relationships with the two Thebans, Palamon and Arcite. Instead, the Knight explains that they are drawn to the contest not only by a love of chivalry, but they aspire to make names for themselves: "For every wight that lovede chivalrye / And wolde, his thankes, han a passant name, / Hath preyed that he myghte been of that game" ("Knight's Tale" 2106-2108). But as has been evident in previous texts, their love of chivalry is diminished by their earthly desire for fame and glory. To this vain and earthly end, their blood is spilled unnecessarily within Theseus' "noble

theatre." Again, it echoes the distinction between identity and "renoun" from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

Ultimately, there is no glory to be won, no hearts put at rest, and no names revered by the "feeste in Atthenes that day" ("Knight's Tale" 2483). Blood is shed and because of the constraints of the mock-war imposed by Theseus, what little glory and honor results from the event shifts directly to the duke, who sits amongst the gods. One would only expect that Theseus would be a victim of hubris in the conclusion to "The Knight's Tale;" however, it is those under Theseus, the knights that fight under his control who suffer from his poor judgment. Instead, the results of Theseus' attempt to impose authority and order are disillusionment, lamentation, and death – the very thing he condemned in the glade.

The conclusion to "The Knight's Tale" can most readily be categorized as politically motivated. According to Kempton, "political order is the end result of a long and demanding struggle for some measure of control over a world characterized by intense physical and psychological violence, the kind of world we see through the Knight's eyes" (Kempton 247). While I can side with Kempton's categorization of "a measure of control," the only order (political or otherwise) that is gained by the end is that Theseus remains in command; the hierarchy established by the temples and the cardinal positioning stands. However, like Mars, Venus, and Diana, Theseus cannot stem the tide of chaos. As the theatre debacle demonstrates, the idea of an ordered world remains fleeting as chaos exists as an inherent part of the worlds of Theseus and the narrating Knight.

In an almost meta-critical manner, he acknowledges the presence of chaos again, and yet the tale shifts starkly from sadness to joy. To this point, Chaucerians debate the motives for and validity of Theseus' proposal of marriage between Palamon and Emelye following Arcite's funeral. Jerold C. Frakes argues that the ending of "The Knight's Tale" is unsatisfying. Furthermore, he claims, the love between these characters fails to attain a divine quality common in the romance genre. "It is strictly a human affair, despite all of Theseus' lofty prefatory remarks…it is anticlimactic, for it brings nothing not already long anticipated and is so forceful that it goes beyond mere closure of the narrative" (Frakes 4-5). By questioning the artificiality and staging of the conclusion, one can ask: what kind of joy is achieved, actually? The lack of satisfaction points again to the meta-critical nature of the work and the oscillation between the "ideal" the "real." Theseus attempts to exert authority and impose chivalry for spectacle's sake leads to the death of Arcite, which stains the union of Palamon and Emelye. Likewise, the reading of the narrating Knight, who "loved chivalrie" yet is "bismotered" by the carnage suggests that a less than idealistic romance is to be expected. Finally, we have Chaucer (the author, not the pilgrim) questioning the romance genre, itself and exploring and exploiting its inherent artificiality by distinguishing social belief from social reality.

However, while I agree with Frakes' overall characterization, assessing the motives that bring out this ending is more relevant to the discussion of Theseus' character. Why does "The Knight's Tale" end the way it does, and why can it be described as an inevitable conclusion to the story? These two questions are actually interrelated as the answer serves to unify the tale under a singular frame. In the chaotic aftermath of Arcite's death, the Athenian parliament is forced to reassess its alliances.

Theseus, seeing the opportunity to unite Athens with Thebes, proposes the marriage between Palamon and Emelye.[51] Efforts to draw out Theseus' motive are irresolvable. Is the matchmaking a genuine attempt to bring peace to the region and honor the promise made to the battle's victor, or is it a veiled political move to win control over another "riche contree?" Whether genuinely virtuous or opportunistic and self-aggrandizing, this final imposition of will affirms the problematic nature of Theseus' character.

The latter motive for Theseus' joining Palamon and Arcite in marriage has an added dimension that requires further explanation. Clearly, Emelye cannot exist as an autonomous character – she must be joined to realize her identity within the patriarchal world of "The Knight's Tale." This point is even acknowledged and affirmed by Diana, the classical embodiment of chastity who refuses to accept the imposition of a male figure. Thus, the marriage between Palamon and Emelye addresses a very significant issue for Theseus beyond just the maintenance of natural order: it would provide him with an heir. Having an offspring would most effectively unite and align the two kingdoms that Theseus brought together through his earlier conquests.[52] Thus, the failure of Theseus to procure an heir takes on a heightened importance as the story draws to its conclusion. So in addition to any political gains to the kingdom and personal gains to his reign, the arrangement of the marriage between Palamon and Emelye becomes a practical solution for Theseus and assures the succession of his kingdom.

Returning to the issue of the frame narrative established by Chaucer, it would be convenient but imprudent to dismiss the relationship between teller and tale as Michael

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[51] Although Emelye is technically Amazonian, for all intents and purposes, she is considered Athenian because of Theseus' marriage to her sister Ypolita.

[52] This point also serves to support the relationship between teller and tale as an heir preserves the patriarchal pattern that remains the foundation of the feudal world of the Knight. The Knight, himself, has performed his patriarchal duties as his son the Squire is also on the pilgrimage to Canterbury.

Calabrese attempts in, "A Knyght Ther Was." As I have mentioned previously, a valuable link between the tale and its teller can be identified. To dismiss this relationship would be to deprive the "Knight's Tale" of one of its most endearing qualities. Furthermore, such a narrow reading would be like King Arthur and his court at the end of *Sir Gawin and the Green Knight* who celebrate Gawain's return but fail to acknowledge the significance of his journey. Although the story of Theseus and the rivalry between Palamon and Arcite for the love of Emelye is sufficient romance in its own right, the fact that it is told by the Knight adds another dimension to the story and to the Knight himself. This interpretation raises two questions? What is the relationship between the Knight and his tale and what need or purpose does the tale serve its teller?

To the former question of the Knight's authorial presence in the tale, I would argue that the problematic nature of its protagonist, Theseus, is the most revealing indication of the Knight's presence in the story. Many critics such R.H. Nicholson and William F. Woods hail Theseus as the ideal, the embodiment of chivalry and justice. However, a critical reading such as the one I propose refutes such a generous character analysis of the "noble duc." Even the use of the word "noble" is, as Webb suggests, "open to suspicion." He states, "It is quite possible, of course, that Chaucer considered Theseus 'noble' much as he considered the Friar a 'noble post' and that the irony behind the former epithet, though more subtle, was none the less as biting as the latter" (Webb 296).[53] Support for this reading of "noble" is also found in the qualifier attached to the bloody mock-war's setting: "noble theatre." While the structure may be noble in its design, the ultimate purpose it serves and the outcome therein is anything but noble.

[53] Also see E. Talbot Donaldson's "Chaucer the Pilgrim" PMLA, Vol. 69, No. 4 (Sep., 1954).

When analyzing Thesus, the disparity between design and application, or more appropriately, between intent and result becomes a central point of debate. The positive reading of his character by Nicholson, Woods, and others, may be the result of an emphasis on the benevolence of his intentions. While it is difficult to fault the duke's idealistic aim to bring order and justice to a chaotic world, the means by which he tries to accomplish this objective, as has been demonstrated, are met with considerable failure. It is this repeating cycle of Theseus' imposition of order and subsequent failure that structures "The Knight's Tale." I suggest that the manner in which the Knight composes Theseus' story is as much a criticism of the individual character as it is a reflection on the Knight's world, particularly the extensive military turmoil in which he has been involved. Just as the cycle of chaos and violence dominates Theseus' world, so too do they consume the experiences of the narrator.

When addressing the Knight's purpose for "The Knight's Tale," all conclusions are speculative admittedly. The indeterminacy is the result of the mystery that surrounds the character of the Knight. However, based on the critical reading of his tale, one could intimate that the tale serves a therapeutic function. The authorial or editorial choices made by Chaucer to his Boccaccian source, as well as the Knight's own authorial choices in his narration, suggest a deliberate even if not fully or consciously realized intention. There is, from one perspective or another, a comment regarding knighthood and the state of chivalry at the end of the fourteenth century. Without affixing the Knight's character to either of the two extreme interpretations (ideal chivalric hero and mercenary), the tale suggests that there is a cost associated with knighthood. Although there is no explanation given for the Knight's presence on the pilgrimage, one can assume that his presence goes

beyond mere moral and spiritual duty. His presence may very likely be related to his role as a knight, or more accurately, related to his actions as a battle-worn knight. If this is the case, does the telling of the story serve to purge the Knight's "bismoitered" and potentially disillusioned conscience? If so, there seems to be very little hope or sense of renewal by a critical reading of the story's conclusion.

Examining the question of purpose to the other author of "The Knight's Tale," namely Chaucer, we are left with an equally inconclusive result. Was Chaucer really presenting an homage to chivalry in his time, or was he perhaps offering a subtle critique of the fallen state of knighthood? It is possible to read "The Knight's Tale" as Chaucer's "implicit reproval of the Hundred Year's War," (Cowgill 671) a conflict that pitted Christian against fellow Christian. Furthermore, such a reading certainly is supported by the strong relationships that Chaucer maintained with contemporary knights and prominent members of court such as John of Gaunt who sought to resolve the conflict through the arranged marriage of Richard II.[54] Specifically regarding the Knight, did Chaucer intend to portray him as a mercenary as Terry Jones suggests? No, it is unlikely that Chaucer would have taken such an extreme approach when portraying a respected figure in medieval society. Likewise, an idealized portrayal as many including A.S. Cook have interpreted also is unlikely as the atypical description in the "General Prologue" and the inherent chaos of "The Knight's Tale" both reveal.

It seems the true identity of the Knight lies somewhere in between these previous readings, someplace elusive. Indeed, this would align the Knight with his tale where,

[54] This is largely the approach taken by D.W. Robertson Jr. on the subject of "The Knight's Tale."

according to Bolton, questions evolve from answers.[55] If the world of Theseus can be influenced and altered by the desires of its players, then the same malleability can be applied to the relationship between teller and tale. The Knight is a figure who can conform to a reading of his tale, and likewise, the tale can conform to a reading of the Knight. This element of accessibility certainly supports the complimentary and, dare I say, conclusive interpretation of Chaucer's authorial intent. "Perhaps, [Chaucer] wanted to preserve a figure, who through action, character, appearance, and experience, would ever force future generations to confront English Christian identity and military ideology" (Calabrese 11).

Given Chaucer's frame narrative, as well as the political focus of "The Knight's Tale," the romance still maintains the genre's larger themes. Romance's emphasis upon authority and the importance of individual identity, as well as the courtly dynamics of gender relations remain constant throughout the texts discussed in this chapter. However, when these themes are revisited in the twentieth century, hard-boiled detective fiction dramatically alters their representation. The medieval romance's attitude toward authority, identity, and gender relations is inverted by the modern incarnation of romance. Institutions of authority are not held in high esteem and are often undermined by the detective rather than respected and obeyed. Just as authority is viewed with diminished reverence, so too, is the detective's own identity (from without and within). Due to the nature of their work and the accepted relativism at play in urban life, their image, both publicly and privately, suffers as a result. Consistent with the general inversion at work, this tarnished image is accepted without regret or shame by the private

[55] To this point, W.F. Bolton cites line 2777 where Arcite asks, "What is this world? What asketh men to have."

detective. Finally, in matters of gender relations, courtliness is replaced by wariness. The objectification of women in the hyper-masculine hard-boiled world gives the private detectives a distinct advantage as they remain dominant yet defensive when dealing with women. However, I am not suggesting a direct association between these two forms of romance. Twentieth-century hard-boiled detective fiction is addressing a more contemporary re-visioning of medieval romance – nineteenth-century romantic nationalism and the rise of medievalism leading up to the Great War.

CHAPTER 2

NINETEENTH-CENTURY MEDIEVALISM

> Although the value of romance is debated, even devalued, in certain strains of Victorian medievalism, the general hypostatization of romance survived through the nineteenth century to emerge in some of the most influential academic works on medieval romance. (Ganim 158)

The purpose of the second chapter is, foremost, to begin to bridge the five century gap between the Middle Ages and the twentieth century. While the larger goal of this dissertation is to provide a comparative analysis of medieval romance and hard-boiled detective fiction, I do not intend to present the two forms of literature in strict or isolated opposition. To argue that hard-boiled writers are directly criticizing their medieval predecessors and intentionally subverting the literary structure (both narrative and thematic) of chivalric romance would be tenuous, at best. Instead, I intend to provide, beginning with this chapter, a more immediate context, chronologically speaking, in which these modern writers are engaging. Specifically, the rise of medievalism coupled with Romantic nationalism in nineteenth-century cultural history serves as the literary intermediary. By surveying the social and political climate, as well as certain literary traditions in the nineteenth century, I establish an identifiable and more likely target for the critique of hard-boiled writers.

This transitional chapter provides a review of the relevant cultural precursors prior to World War I and is not argumentative in nature. Romantic nationalism and medievalism both played an influential role in the cultural landscape of nineteenth-

century Europe up until the Great War. While the former is often cited as a movement which contributed to the start of the war, the latter becomes an illustrative example of a form that it took. By sampling from pertinent writers, both modern and contemporary, I outline the general discourse regarding the rise and influence of medievalism on cultural history and nineteenth-century literature.

I should note at this point, that although I am focusing on the nineteenth century as a period that sought to rediscover and re-imagine the cultural traditions of the Middle Ages, it can be argued that cultural interest in the Middle Ages never ceased, in a strict sense. Since the Renaissance, there remained a constant fascination with the Middle Ages. In truth, one cannot examine medievalism in the nineteenth century without acknowledging the influence of previous and/or concurrent traditions. In particular, the rise of Romanticism at the end of the eighteenth century significantly altered the cultural and literary landscape that had formerly been committed to the ideals of the Enlightenment. In many ways, Romanticism developed in reaction to the Enlightenment and sought to replace science and reason with emotion and imagination. The challenge to purely rational scientific perspectives, in areas from politics to literature, now found meaning in aesthetics and personal experience.

With Romanticism's pursuit of limitless horizons, one of those horizons lay in the past. The word "Romanticism" itself shares common ancestry with the origins of the Romance genre, and many artists found inspiration in the medieval past. In the visual arts, architecture, and literature, the revival of a medieval past grew steadily throughout the nineteenth century. While scholars of the nineteenth century have attempted to

compartmentalize the different approaches to the Middle Ages, often chronologically,[56] common definitions of the term "Medievalism" consist of the system of beliefs and practices that attempt to capture the aesthetic experience of the Middle Ages, be that in philosophy, religion, or art. The attention to medieval styles and forms, raised to the level of ideals, is the foundation of what can be described as a counter-culture movement in the wake of the Enlightenment and during the rise of the Industrial Revolution.

From a social perspective, there is a parallel that can be drawn between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries, which also sheds light on the latter's interest in the former. For both, the diversification of economies would see the rise in a powerful new social class. In the time of Chaucer, the common, albeit rigid, three estates model that included the Church, the Nobility, and the Peasantry[57], became obsolete with the introduction and growth of an influential mercantile middle class.[58] Likewise, the Industrial Revolution created an explosion in the traditional social structure where wealth and influence was siphoned from the aristocracy and the reduction in living standards (poor becoming poorer) made room for the modern mercantile class that included industrialists and business men. The growth in industry, in England in particular, led to the rise in urbanization and the mass movement to cities with factories that employed large percentages of the population. While employment rose in these urban centers, as

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[56] i.e. Early incarnations are often referred to as Romantic Medievalism while latter variations are labeled Victorian Medievalism to coincide with Queen Victoria's reign.

[57] The estates model suggests that all members of medieval society can be organized according to the three categories. John Gower, a contemporary of Chaucer, expands upon the estates model in *Vox Clamantis* and the *Mirour de l'Omme*. More recently, critics including D.S. Brewer, Jill Mann, and R. T. Lenaghan have furthered our understanding of the three estates model (and its inadequacies) and the satire that it often inspired.

[58] Another significant influence was the labor shortage caused by the plague in the fourteenth century. It can also be argued that Chaucer was also introducing another estate in the form of Intellectuals, those trained to be literate but who would not pursue a career in the Church. Ann W. Astell develops this theory in *Chaucer and the Universe of Learning* as she analyzes the Clerk. Chaucer, himself, fits into both of these additional classes.

well as the average income, the quality of life for individuals did not improve relative to these other changes. Despite the decreased quality of life, the Industrial Revolution was responsible for unprecedented population growth throughout Europe, which in turn, further worsened the living conditions of the urban poor.[59] Contemporary authors such as William Cobbett, a populist radical, attempted to raise awareness about the unfavorable effects of the Industrial Revolution and sought to return England to its rural roots, a world believed to be lost.[60]

At the other end of the social spectrum, the aristocracy and land-owning gentry also felt the effects of the Industrial Revolution. While their suffering was not physical in the way that the lower working class lived, they experienced what Richard Hofstader referred to as "status anxiety." They felt the economic and political pressure imposed by the rising middle class. In one of several attempts to counter the effects of the Industrial Revolution, elements of the established aristocracy sought to unite (only philosophically, of course) with the lower class, whose mutual misery was brought about by industrialism.[61] Of course, I am adding the qualifier, "mutual" ironically, as the aristocracy shared little common ground with the working class. To be sure, they did not seek to elevate the working class to a higher level, but rather, to return to an idealized model from the past – one which they believed appropriated social classes to their respected and deserved place. "Feudalism," in the medieval sense, provided the model where there was a mutual dependency between their two classes. Where the peasantry

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[59] For a more detailed study of the standard of living during the Industrial revolution, see Clark Nardinelli's "The Industrial Revolution and the Standard of Living" (2008), N.F.R. Craft's "Some Dimensions of the 'Quality of Life' During the British Industrial Revolution" (1997), and Charles H. Feinstein's "Pessimism Perpetuated: Real Wages and the Standard of Living in Britain During the Industrial Revolution" (1998).
[60] This comes from Charles' Dellheim's essay, "Interpreting Victorian Medievalism" in *History and Community: Essays in Victorian Medievalism*, edited by Florence Boos.
[61] Ibid 44.

served a functional role in society, they also relied upon the upper class for protection. It was re-imagined with an emphasis on the aristocracy's reliance on the lower class's hard work and, in turn, an obligation to their protection and well-being. Being equal parts self-serving and manipulative, the aristocracy committed themselves to this medieval model in hopes of gaining public favor and power.

Beyond the aristocracy's nationalistic and paternalistic sentiments, there was another group that lent their voice, again, on the working class's behalf, which contributed to the medieval revival in the nineteenth century. In many ways like the emerging intellectuals of the fourteenth century, an educated and influential collection of middle class social activists began to rail against the threats posed by industrialism. Authors and artists such as William Morris, John Ruskin, and Thomas Carlyle championed the working class and contrasted their oppression with an idealistic vision of their feudal counterparts. In an effort to accomplish what ineffectual parliamentary politics failed to fix or altogether acknowledge, these men took up the humanitarian cause by criticizing the impersonal and utilitarian means of production. The movement led by these men (peaking in the 1840s) is referred to commonly as "Social Medievalism." In fact, the quality of output was a centerpiece of John Ruskin's attack on industrialism. He emphasized the lost dignity of labor when comparing the workmanship of an individual craftsman to the mechanical imperfections of factory output. He famously said to have stated, "A great thing can only be done by a great person; and they do it without effort."[62] Taking the socialist perspective to the next level, William Morris championed the notion of social unity. He reiterated Marxist critiques of social conditions that plagued England,

[62] Ruskin takes this relationship and applies it to national interests in a letter to "The Workmen and Laborers of Great Britain" claiming, "The strength and power of a country depends absolutely on the quantity of good men and women in it."

particularly, how the demands of capitalism superseded individual independence and the absence of personal fulfillment in labor.[63] Thomas Carlyle also employed the aristocracy's ideal feudal model to criticize the oppression of an industrialized England. As noted in Michael Alexander's *Medievalism: Middle Ages in Modern England*, "Carlyle contended that the permanent bond between a feudal lord and a 'thrall' was more real than the freedom of a factory hand in the market economy" (Alexander 97). It should be made explicitly clear that Carlyle and his peers certainly did not share the same socio-political motivations for the medieval revival as the aristocracy. Social medievalists like Carlyle, Ruskin, and Morris, as well as Victorian social criticism written by Friedrich Engel and Karl Marx, use what Paul Meier refers to as "positive manifestations" of medievalism for the betterment of Victorian society. In contrast, Meier rightly labels the aristocracy's self-serving and escapist revival of the Middle Ages as a "negative manifestation."[64] Regardless of their individual motivations, both the aristocracy and the socially motivated middle-class saw industrialism's dangerous influence on traditional English society.

While I have outlined what the detractors of industrialism used to convey their social critique, I have not sufficiently addressed why. Drawing parallels to Europe's feudal past was not merely a convenient way to qualify thematically the counter-arguments to industrialism. While many historians argue that the medieval revival in the nineteenth century is a misconception stemming from an incomplete understanding of the Middle Ages, the prominence of medievalism in nineteenth-century culture can be attributed largely to its literary popularity. However, the basis for Victorian medieval

[63] See Chris Waters' "Marxism, Medievalism and Popular culture" in History and Community: Essays in Victorian Medievalism ed. Florence S. Boos; New York: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1992.
[64] See Meier, Paul. *William Morris, the Marxist Dreamer*. Brighton: Harvester Press, 1978.

literature actually is found in the previous century's primitive efforts to adapt and assimilate medieval elements into the modern novel.

Admittedly, eighteenth century Gothic literature bears little resemblance to its medieval models largely due to its sensationalist emphasis. Nevertheless, authors such as Horace Walpole and Matthew Lewis garnered the widespread interest of readers with their exotic settings and the ominous presence of the supernatural. In the genre's most celebrated text, *The Castle of Otranto,* Walpole wastes little time bluntly introducing aspects of the medieval.[65] In a dramatic and certainly unexpected turn of events a large armored helmet falls and crushes the young Prince Conrad:

> The horror of the spectacle, the ignorance of all around how this misfortune had happened, and above all, the tremendous phenomenon before him, took away the Prince's speech. Yet his silence lasted longer than even grief could occasion. He fixed his eyes on what he wished in vain to believe a vision; and seemed less attentive to his loss, than buried in meditation on the stupendous object that had occasioned it. He touched, he examined the fatal casque; nor could even the bleeding mangled remains of the young Prince divert the eyes of Manfred from the portent before him. (Walpole 19)

While Walpole's work is widely regarded as the inaugural gothic novel, it is not considered a shining example of medieval adaptation. Marcie Frank goes so far as to label Walpole's presentation of aristocratic family intrigue as "camp" and devalues the incestuous family dynamic calling it a "parody [of] the aristocratic investments in the

[65] I want to reiterate that these "aspects" and elements that Gothic literature employed have only the loosest connection to actual medieval literature and not an accurate depiction or reproduction. Nevertheless, to contemporary audiences, they are recognizable as pertaining to the Middle Ages and its literary forms.

inheritance of property" (Frank 418). Regarding its hollow attempts to channel medieval literature, Walpole's novel only contains medieval trappings, which is to say that there is only the faintest resemblance to the medieval world or its romance literature. Instead, *The Castle of Otronto* presents a distorted reworking of medieval stereotypes.

Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* uses the framework of a medieval morality tale but omits the catharsis of repentance and divine intercession. As if to foreshadow his revisionist intentions and signal the impending ruin of the monk Ambrosio, Lewis writes, "[He] was yet to learn, that to an heart unacquainted with her, Vice is ever most dangerous when lurking behind the Mask of Virtue" (Lewis 84). The flimsy hope that lies in the narrator's "yet," goes unfulfilled and the doomed protagonist's "Virtue" is merely vanity. Electing not to follow medieval models of redemption,[66] Lewis devotes the action of the novel to the consequences of Ambrosio's sinfulness. To this end, he goes so far as to sacrifice the lives (and souls) of innocents to further the grotesque downfall of the damned monk. Lewis, like fellow Gothic writers, ultimately fixates on the sensational aspects of the storytelling, rather than accurately conveying a sense of the medieval in his literature.

Another consequence of Gothicism's sensationalist style is that it sacrifices the didactic value of the text, an essential component, particularly in medieval romance. Arguably, there is an inverse relationship in Gothic literature between the grotesque and lurid qualities of a work and its didactic merit. Still, Gothicism's medieval authenticity (or lack thereof) is the central issue that separates Gothic writers from later nineteenth-

[66] E.g. the fifteenth century morality play, *The Summoning of Everyman* or the sixteenth century mystery play *The Second Shepherd's Play* from the Wakefield Cycle.

century medievalists.[67] While the emphasis on horror and fantasy increased Gothicism's popularity,[68] Victorian medievalism attempted to do just the opposite. Rather than a loose association with medieval history and romance, medievalist writers like Sir Walter Scott and Alfred Lord Tennyson attempted to bridge the Middle Ages with the modern by positing modern themes in an idealized medieval setting.

Before my analysis of how these authors blended modernity into a medieval form, I should explain what, from the nineteenth-century medievalist's perspective, necessitated this recovery of the Middle Ages. While the shortcomings of eighteenth century Gothic writers like Walpole and Lewis certainly provided a foundation to be built upon, the next generation of authors was more resolute in their literary efforts. While it would be overreaching to say that these later medievalists achieved authenticity in their writing, they arguably produced a less outlandish result. Their efforts to adapt medieval literature stemmed from their understanding of the medieval world and more importantly, what that world represented in their own time.

There are two prominent views regarding the Middle Ages that frame the medievalist outlook in the nineteenth century. First, the work of antiquarians and historians uncovered materials that would give medievalists a more complete understanding of the Middle Ages, relatively speaking, of course. However, the collection and study of these findings contribute to the period's veneration as a Golden Age in European history. Contributing to this idealization of the Middle Ages is the propinquity of medieval life to the narratives of romance. In other words, the Middle Ages are imagined as romance,

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[67] This is not to say that the eighteenth century's perception of the medieval world was inherently or universally flawed. Contrarily, the eighteenth century was a time of intense philological and historical scholarship that established the groundwork for later medievalists. See the works of George Hickes, Thomas Percy, Humphrey Wanley, and Thomas Warton.

[68] For instance, the Gothic works of Edgar Allan Poe exemplify this change in the tradition.

particularly by nineteenth-century authors, who use this mythological vision of medieval history (rather than a strict, yet incomplete record) to inform and guide their own writings. They simply do not acknowledge the exaggerated verisimilitude at work in medieval romance. It is a purposeful suspension of disbelief on the part of author and audience that successfully cultivates the medieval revival in the nineteenth century.[69]

It does not require great insight to recognize the hypocrisy demonstrated by nineteenth-century medievalists who attacked Gothicism for its lack of authenticity and in turn failed to distinguish between chivalric romance and actual medieval history. However, there was a pervading sentiment in the nineteenth century that might account for the medievalist disposition. In 1790, Edmund Burke famously wrote in response to the French Revolution, particularly the beheading of the queen, "The age of chivalry is gone."[70] The sentiment is the result of two prevailing opinions. While he laments chivalry's inability to stem the tide of the Enlightenment, he also remains apprehensive at the prospect of power in the hands of the newly liberated man, as well as free government. Likewise, in *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, Bishop Richard Hurd attempts to renew interest in medieval literature (particularly, as it pertains to modern poetry) by first acknowledging, "What we have lost is a world of fine fabling, the illusion of which is so grateful to the charmed spirit."[71] I would argue that the positions of Burke and Hurd best represent the thematic spirit that governed the medievalist view of the

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[69] Admittedly, this skewed re-vision of the Middle Ages is hypocritical as the nineteenth-century criticism of Gothicism focused on the latter's inability to recreate an authentically medieval text. Nevertheless, the lines between history and literature are blurred by nineteenth-century medievalists.

[70] From Edmund Burke's, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, vol. 2 (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1864).

[71] I should acknowledge that because it was written in 1762, Hurd's letters also may have influenced Gothic writers and their interest in the more supernatural aspects of medieval literature for their aesthetic value. However, the attitude seems fully realized the nineteenth-century medievalist approach to poetry and literature

nineteenth century: the (desperate) attempt to recover that which they believed to be lost as a result of modernity.

Although he has experienced the literary equivalent of a fall from grace, Sir Walter Scott stands as one of the most prolific writers of the medieval revival. As much a political figure as a literary one, Scott's love of Scotland and its history permeated his extensive writing. However, Scott's ability to posit contemporary political matters and social issues into earlier historical settings, particularly the Middle Ages, helped him garner a loyal following and cultivate a literary tradition in the nineteenth century. From historical fiction novels such as *Ivanhoe* to his poetic narratives *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* and *The Lady of the Lake*, Scott remains an indispensible figure in medievalism. As Michael Alexander notes, Scott fulfills the hopes of an entire generation of writers that includes Wharton, Percy, and Gray insofar as "verse romance would enjoy a modern revival" (Alexander 33). John Henry Raleigh adds to Scott's acclaim in "What Scott Meant to the Victorians," by describing him as "an international force…Wherever one looks in the life and letters of the nineteenth century, not only in England but in Western world as a whole, one finds the impress of 'the Wizard of the North'" (Raleigh 8). To begin to quantify Scott's influence, David Duff cites Mark Girourard's chapter titled "Radical Chivalry" from *The Return to Camelot*, "At a time when the sale of five hundred copies of a [poem] would have been counted a modest success, *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805) sold twenty-one thousand copies…*The Lady of the Lake* (1810) sold over twenty thousand copies in its first year alone" (Duff 120). Truly, the extent of Scott's contemporary influence cannot be argued, and his status as the preeminent medievalist author of the early nineteenth century is undeniable.

Despite the extent to which Scott succeeded in presenting his vision of the medieval world to contemporary audiences, it is important to note that it remains, as Alice Chandler acknowledges, an "imaginary medieval world," a distinction to which his audience was ignorant. Still this raises an important point, one which is, by and large, applicable to the other references and allusions to the Middle Ages made in the nineteenth century: the public that consumed this medieval re-visioning knew little about their historical veracity. This is to say that the Middle Ages were a fertile subject matter that could be used (and in some cases, abused) by writers. For example, Stephanie L. Barczewski emphasizes Scott's depiction of Robin Hood as an Anglo-Saxon hero defending his country against Norman usurpers in *Ivanhoe*, "despite the lack of historical evidence to support it" (Barczewski 131). I am not trying to infer any malicious intent on Scott's part, but rather that the creative liberties that he took when recreating his medieval world (not unlike but certainly to a lesser extent than gothic writers of the eighteenth century) were just that, creative. Scott's particular brand of historicity is well summarized by Raymond Chapman: "…he [created] an image of the Middle Ages which was credible in historical details, acceptable to the new generation of readers, and also evocative of worthy ideals" (Chapman 27). On the other hand, it should be noted that some critics have been entirely unwilling to differentiate between Gothicism's vision of the medieval world and that of Scott. In *The Great Tradition,* F.R. Leavis diminishes Scott's efforts to elevate his literature and claims "[Scott] made no serious attempt to work out his own form and break away from the bad tradition of the eighteenth century romance" (Leavis 5). While I would agree that the matter of authenticity had not been entirely resolved in the work of Scott, Leavis seems unwilling to overlook authorial

intent, which certainly separates the social and political value of Scott's work from the sensationalism of the Gothic tradition.[72] Furthermore, in "The Horrors of My Tale: Trauma, the Historical Imagination, and Sir Walter Scott," Chad T. May succinctly distinguishes the Victorian approach from its Gothic predecessor and the way they envision their shared past, respectively:

> Unlike the detached eighteenth-century vision of history that juxtaposed the superstition and barbarity of the past to the clarity and reason of the present, the historicists of the nineteenth century insisted on an organic relationship between time periods. (Chad 98)

May's notion of an "organic relationship" to the Middle Ages is consistent with the political and social agendas of the nineteenth century that drew nostalgic parallels to England's feudal past. To this point, the public's medieval conditioning was solidified and constantly reaffirmed throughout the nineteenth century.

While Scott's role in the popularization of medieval literature in the nineteenth century is indisputable, ironically it became a passive-aggressive point of criticism against him in the following century. Inter-war critics were particularly hard on Scott. Edwin Muir famously identified the "very curious emptiness" that existed behind Scott's vision of the medieval world in *Scott and Scotland* (1936). Muir's views were joined by others including Hugh MacDiarmid, E.M. Forster and Neil M. Gunn whose criticism sought to distance their generation from the Romantic nationalism of the nineteenth century.[73] With the tenuous matter of medieval authenticity and the degradation that

[72] The significance of Scott's writing to romantic nationalism will be touched upon later in this chapter.
[73] For more on interwar criticism of Walter Scott see Margery Palmer McCulloch's '"A very curious emptiness": Walter Scott and the Twentieth-Century Renaissance Movement'. *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 35-36 (2007), 44-56.

came with the "popular literature" label, arguably, the most damaging attack against Scott's legacy was the influence of Modernism. As Romanticism fell out of favor following World War I, Modernism shifted the literary focus from the exterior to the interior with greater attention being paid to the psychological and emotional aspects of character and story – something particularly lacking in Scott's works. Nevertheless, Scott remained a substantial figure in nineteenth-century medievalism and his influence on later authors is incontrovertible. By popularizing a medieval mythology and exposing it to a wider audience, Scott expanded the influence of medievalism in the nineteenth century. However, failure to address the exaggerated verisimilitude at work in those medieval texts had the indirect effect of distorting the public's perception of the Middle Ages. It is this mistreatment, not only committed by Scott, which Modernists criticize. The idealization of the Middle Ages and its ability to distort contemporary opinion also will be addressed by post-war critics, including hard-boiled detective fiction writers.

As perhaps the Victorian era's most celebrated and prolific poet, Alfred Tennyson championed the Medieval Revival and nourished the public's ever-growing interest in medieval content by writing about what he called, "the greatest of all poetic subjects" – the Arthurian legend. Although his poetic catalog touches a diverse range of topics, Tennyson constantly drew inspiration from England's historical and mythical past. Having an intimate knowledge of Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, which was republished several times in the Romantic period by Wilks, Walker, and Southey, in Tennyson's Arthurian vision, he maintains the highest regard for the medieval king, whom he revered as "Ideal manhood closed in real man" (*Idylls* "Arthur" 38).[74] According to Tennyson's son, Hallam, his father's goal for reworking the Arthurian legend was to "combat the

[74] All references to Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* are from J.M. Gray's Edition (2004).

cynical indifference, the intellectual selfishness, the sloth of will, [and] the utilitarian materialism of a transition age" (Tennyson "Memoir" 129).

Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* represents the Poet Laureate's attempt at an epic medieval cycle. Although it does not strictly follow the epic form, it does address an important issue faced by poets in the nineteenth century in the shadow of the novel's growing popularity. In "Tennyson's Idylls, Pure Poetry, and the Market," Dino Franco Felluga argues:

> Poets were faced with an apparently paradoxical injunction: realize (be like the novel) but idealize (be "poetic"). The very fact that Tennyson managed not only to crack a difficult market but to appease critics from various journals and political affiliations suggests that, for the 1860s at least, the Idylls surmounted the contradictions inherent in these conflicting demands and managed to be all things to all people. (Felluga 784)

Though I concede that Tennyson attempted to strike a tenuous balance between conflicting tastes (prose and poetry), I disagree with Felluga's assertion that *Idylls* succeeded in universal acceptance and acclaim. Many of Tennyson's contemporaries believed that the poet sacrificed the integrity of Malory's source material and indulgently honored his royal patrons, Queen Victoria and Albert, the Prince-Consort. The disapproval is well summarized by Clinton Machann who conveys Tennyson's difficulty in positioning gender in his work, as well as the matter of Arthur's masculinity (Machann 199).[75]

[75] In addition, "Swinburne mockingly referred to the "Morte d' Albert, or Idylls of the Prince Consort" and proclaimed that Tennyson had "lowered the note and deformed the outline of the Arthurian story, by reducing Arthur to the level of a wittol, Guenevere to the level of a woman of intrigue, and Launcelot to the level of a 'corespondent.'" Henry Crabb Robinson thought Tennyson's Arthur was "unfit to be an epic-hero"

In addition to the gendered politics in Tennyson's *Idylls,* there is another kind of duality at work in the epic, specifically, the poet's depiction of King Arthur. In Tennyson's vision, Arthur is a complex figure who seems to exhibit two identities. Like the above quotation, he is both "ideal" and "real man." Many critics have likened this more human-than-human representation to a Christ-like figure.[76] Dualities and other incongruities are among the many conflicts that exist in the *Idylls of the King*. In response to the combined effect and growth of industrialism and capitalism, Tennyson attempts to address the ruinous effects of materialism (and by extension, sexual politics). Dealing with the concept literally and figuratively, Michael Hancock and Michael W. Hancock note the role of precious stones as a commodity in *Idylls of the King.* For instance, they mention Sir Bedivere's unwillingness to return Arthur's sword, Excalibur, to the lake, as he is enamored with the bejeweled weapon and recognizes its posterity value. In "The Stones in the Sword: Tennyson's Crowned Jewels" they argue that "…masculine ideals typically come into conflict with more worldly matters and material interests, including sexual desire" (Hancock and Hancock 1). They acknowledge the inevitable tension that arises when the chivalric knight is expected to decorate and adorn their courtly women. Not surprisingly, the result is "problematic."

However, the most well-tread area of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* is the author's endorsement and commentary on the ideals, themselves. Just as Walter Scott promoted a chivalric code in Ivanhoe for the aristocracy, Tennyson, too, presents an idealistic and arguably unattainable code of behavior that his Round Table fails to achieve:

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and Henry James called him a prig. T. S. Eliot asserted that Tennyson had adapted "this great British epic material – in Malory's handling hearty, outspoken and magnificent - to suitable reading for a girls' school."

[76] See John D. Rosenberg's *The Fall of Camelot: A Study of Tennyson's ldylls of the King* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1973) and Richard D. Mallen's "The 'Crowned Republic' of Tennyson's 'Idylls of the King.' Victorian Poetry, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Fall, 1999).

To reverence the King, as if he were

Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,

To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,

To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,

To speak no slander, no, nor to listen to it,

To honor his own word as if his God's,

To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,

To love one maiden only, cleave to her,

And worship her by years of noble deeds…(*Idylls* "Guenievere" 465-473)

However, the real audience for this behavioral model is the reading audience of the nineteenth century. Tennyson hoped that his English readers would adopt a comparable value-system in their own lives for the betterment of society in a time of overwhelming change. In *Tennyson's Camelot: the Idylls of the King and its Medieval Sources*, David Staines recognizes Tennyson's didacticism at work in Arthur's code, which effectively promotes Arthurian values to all successive generations. This is upheld by Staines interpretation of Tennyson's authorial intention, which, he believes, renders all criticism obsolete.[77] Contrarily, Catherine Phillips does not subscribe to the universality of Staines' interpretation but rather suggests that Tennyson's ideals are more of a work-in-progress and certainly not finalized in the text. She argues that Tennyson's *Idylls* is an "exploratory" exercise, which allows for a certain plurality or "polyphony" to be engaged by successive generations (Phillips 251,252).

[77] See David Staines' *Tennyson's Camelot: the Idylls of the King and its Medieval Sources*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 1982.

Literary medievalism represents just one form that Romantic nationalism took during the nineteenth century. The works of Walter Scott and Alfred Tennyson exemplify the literary achievements of medievalism in Great Britain, yet there was another kind of literary movement that swept over Europe – one that also juxtaposed the present and the past. The adoption, translation, and effectively, the proliferation of national epics throughout Europe during the nineteenth century, arguably, is the clearest and most compelling example of Romantic nationalism's impact on literature. First, that the movement was trans-European is significant. It essentially became a race to mythologize and legitimize, literarily, the nation's historical identity. For example, Spain embraced *El Cid,* England, *Beowulf,* France, *The Song of Roland*,[78] Finland, *Kalevala*, Iceland, the *Poetic Edda*, Italy, *The Divine Comedy*, Poland, *Pan Tadeusz*, and Germany, the *Nibelungelied*. While not all of these works necessarily supply a national origin story, they nevertheless venerate something of cultural significance intended to reinvigorate a sense of identity or commonality. As Andras Unger explains in "Joyce's "Ulysses" as National Epic: Epic Mimesis and the Political History of the Nation State," the function of the national epic serves as an "open-ended meditation on historical continuity…[and] the establishment of legitimacy" (Unger 2,4). Indeed, the continuity of the past is what makes the national epic such an effective instrument in the present.

Beyond the domestic function that national epics served, namely, engendering cultural unity, the publication of these stories also presented an historigraphical opportunity. Just as medievalists (conveniently) read romance to be a kind of medieval

[78] Although labeled the "Oldest Epic of Christendom" by Anges Lambert, the chanson de geste, as a literary form, fits the criteria for National Epic, as the genre itself maintains a flexible (albeit, much contested definition). For more, see Joseph Duggan's *The Song of Roland: Formulaic Style and Poetic Craft.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1973.

history and then used the medieval settings to posit modern issues or themes, epics also were shaped in such a way that their translations fit the needs of the present. Rather than simply acknowledging singular aspects of the literary past, national epics were used to exemplify and promote favorable qualities in the present. The epic, as a genre, obviously, is a fertile ground for selecting such ideologically favorable traits. Consequently, the national epic became yet another tool that Romantic nationalism used in the hyper-competitive politic arena of the nineteenth century.[79]

Early in this chapter I introduced the notion that there is a connection between the rise of medievalism, as part of the larger Romantic nationalism movement, and the First World War. I reaffirm that I have no intention of drawing a direct line of causality between these two events. Instead, I only want to highlight a common theme, which remains at the center of the Medieval Revival and is an inherent feature of Romantic nationalism. This theme is at the center of many of the cultural and political problems that escalated tensions and led to World War I. The desire to connect the present with the past is the essential feature that is promoted by Romantic nationalism. The metaphorical formation of this chronological bridge allows specific cultural, historical, linguistic, and ethic features to be reintroduced in the present. Ironically, medievalism accomplished this task in reverse by placing contemporary themes, issues, and concerns into the past. While this kind of anachronistic manipulation is fairly benign in matters of literature, it proved to have devastating consequences in areas of politics.

Perhaps the most significant byproduct of Romantic nationalism is the sense of entitlement that it engenders. Whether it is entitlement in a geographic sense that

[79] This propaganda-like function is upheld by Thomas Greene in "Norms of Epic" (Comparative Literature, Vol. 13, No. 3, Summer, 1961), who identifies an unmistakable political emphasis in the epic genre.

supports regional dominion (primacy) or cultural superiority that creates subjective hierarchies, the fever of Romantic nationalism positioned European countries at odds with one another.[80] The search for social and political legitimacy by the beginning of the twentieth century relied on the manufacturing of a cultural legacy. I use the term "manufacturing" regardless of the author's intent as the benevolence, neutrality, or malevolence with which history is treated is secondary and in some instances, rendered obsolete by its ultimate use. By translating, interpreting, and in some cases, wholly inventing history for immediate purposes, Europe's stability was put at risk and would eventually thrust millions into war.

The post-war criticism aimed at the Romantic Nationalism movement cites the careless re-appropriation of values and ideals without proper regard for setting and consequence. Medievalism, as an illustrative example of this larger movement, is equally guilty of perpetuating the kinds of idealistic myths akin to propaganda. Although this may not have been their intent, the effect of this movement in the context of World War I proved devastating. It is a resentment of this misappropriation that propels Modernism. In the next chapter, I argue that the hard-boiled detective fiction rejects the ill-conceived idealism that characterizes nineteenth-century medievalism by re-appropriating and inverting medieval romance's central themes.

[80] Although I do not wish to deviate from my central focus, I need to mention that this competitiveness was embodied in and intensified by Imperialism, which concurrently was being played out on a global level.

CHAPTER 3

THE HARD-BOILED INVERSION

> The War was decided in the first twenty days of fighting, and all that happened afterwards consisted in battles which, however formidable and devastating, were but desperate and vain appeals against the decision of Fate.

Winston Churchill's view of The Great War succinctly captures the nature and breadth of the conflict. However, what he describes as Fate has more to do with its inevitability than the proceedings that contributed to this outcome. In the previous chapter, I suggested that medievalism, as part of the larger Romantic Nationalism movement, was a contributing factor to World War I. However, the idealism, myth-building, and selective memory of the movement dissolved in the bloody trenches. Those fortunate enough to survive the war were not as susceptible to the exploitation of cultural history. The societies that emerged found a new cultural perspective – one that turned the gaze from the past to the modern present. In this chapter, I will outline how the cultural effects of World War I, including relevant social, political, and economic developments in the United States, shaped an emerging romance subgenre. Specifically, hard-boiled detective fiction reflects the twentieth century's rejection of nineteenth-century medievalism and its manipulative tendencies. By inverting central medieval romance tenets in a decidedly modern setting, hard-boiled detective fiction effectively renders romantic sensibilities obsolete in the modern world. Even while maintaining the same basic structure of a quest narrative, the result of hard-boiled detective fiction's treatment of medieval romance themes is the social and moral devolution of the heroic protagonist.

Paul Fussell's seminal work *The Great War and Modern Memory* appropriately addresses the transformative effects of War War I on successive generations. Fussell's treatment of the conflict illustrates the devastating cultural influence that the war had, particularly on its participants. From a stylistic perspective, Fussell's own frankness reflects the desire to tear down traditional, pre-war rhetoric. The text's narrative intent seems to channel the attitude of Hemmingway's protagonist, Fredric Henry, in *A Farewell to Arms:* "Abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene" (Hemingary 161). *The Great War and Modern Memory* succeeds in stripping the idealism and artificial romanticism traditionally used to portray war and reveal its gruesome reality.[81] Fussell repeatedly employs the term "irony" to represent the disparity between the preconceived notions of war and its reality. He states, "Every war is ironic because every war is worse than expected. Every war constitutes an irony of situation because its means are so melodramatically disproportionate to its presumed ends" (Fussell 7). This view is illustrated in greater detail in Barbara Tuchman's *The Guns of August* where the antiquated political and military notions that led to War War I are outlined. Tuchman contends that the devastation of the war was ultimately the result of miscalculated intentions. Strategies predicated on previous wars were obsolete because the world and more specifically technology had changed. Tuchman, like Fussell, finds "irony" in the misguided approach and ruinous effect of the war. The error that both authors suggest is the predisposition to look to the past rather than addressing the needs of the present.

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[81] This position also is maintained by Samuel Hynes in *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (New York: Collier Books, 1990). In it, Hynes argues that the abstract, "big words" that were used as propaganda, consistent with the myth-building of the nineteenth century, create a false narrative for the war. As a result the younger, surviving generation "rejected" the values of those they believed were responsible for the war.

Paul Fussell highlights one scene in *The Great War and Modern Memory* that he uses to illustrate the prevalence of theatricality in combat. Not only does incident perfectly capture the "irony" between pre-war sentiments and the Great War's reality, but it also epitomizes the lunacy and incongruity of Victorian chivalry in the war. On November 11, 1918, the last official day of the war, he includes Herbert Essame's experience:

> On the Fourth Army front, at two minutes to eleven, a machine gun, about 200 yards from the leading British troops, fired off a complete belt without a pause. A single machine-gunner was then seen to stand up beside his weapon, take off his helmet, bow, and turning about walk slowly to the rear. (Fussell 196)

The concurrence of such an excessively violent act followed by one of politeness is, for lack of a better term, absurd. It is difficult, if not impossible to reconcile this deferential savagery. In hindsight, what makes the experience almost surreal is the fact that the event occurs on the same day as the armistice, which would ultimately end the war. The German machine-gunner's exit also serves metaphorically as the dismissal of any fleeting romantic notions; the pre-war idealism and its "abstract" vocabulary, like the ammunition belt, were spent.[82]

Abstractions and national shibboleths were a primary casualty of the Great War. However, the consequences go beyond the cultural resentment toward Romantic

[82] I would be remiss if I did not mentioned that although disdain for 19th century idealism was widely held, there remained a small portion of the population that attempted to preserve the Romantic spirit following the Great War. In *The Great War in Medieval Memory,* Stefan Goebel traces the efforts to immortalize the medieval spirit in commemoration and suggests, "…medievalist diction provid[ed] solace through the historical continuum of the wars and warriors of yore flourished after 1914-18… best understood as a state of mind rather than a state of history" (Goebel 13-14).

Nationalism and the rejection of the previous century's idealism. In *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture,* Samuel Hynes presents the myth of the war and the predicament for those who survived:

> A generation of innocent young men, their heads full of high abstractions like Honour, Glory and England, went off to war to make the world safe for democracy. They were slaughtered in stupid battles planned by stupid generals. Those who survived were shocked, disillusioned and embittered by their war experiences, and saw that their real enemies were not the Germans, but the old men at home who had lied to them. They rejected the values of the society that had sent them to war, and in doing so separated their own generation from the past and from their cultural inheritance. (Hynes xi-xii)

The destruction of values and images, analogous to the death of millions, left an indelible mark on society. With such loss of life, in particular young men, there was a need to compensate, to redefine masculinity. This impulse is best illustrated by the works of Ernest Hemingway, who sought to reconstruct the male image. His literary style, like his life, embodied the rejection of nineteenth-century values and tropes. Stylistically, Hemingway produced a more concentrated text where, as Thomas Putnam describes, "meaning is established through dialogue, through action, and silences—a fiction in which nothing crucial—or at least very little—is stated explicitly."[83] Despite its simplicity, Hemingway's texts often convey a rugged, hyper-masculine male image, likely reflecting the author's own ideals. The result of Hemingway's mode is the creation

[83] Putnam, Thomas. "Hemingway on War and its Aftermath" *Prologue* Spring 2006, Vol. 38, No. 1, 2006. Web < http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2006/spring/hemingway.html>

of a prototypical "tough-guy" in his early work.[84] However, what informs and in many respects influences the nature of these protagonists is the world in which they live. Sheldon Norman Grebstein addresses Hemingway's design in *Tough Guy Writers of the Thirties* and claims:

> …The overwhelming impression derived by the reader of Hemingway is that of a violent world, a world at war, a world in which anarchy prevails… [This scenario] is replaced in the tough novel by the scenario of a society beset and corrupted by crime. Crime is the specific social equivalent of war, and its prevalence signifies that no watchful deity and no meaningful pattern of order rules over man. (Grebstein 20-21)

In this respect, Hemingway's conception of a world viewed darkly, in addition to his protagonist's disposition, contributes to the creation of the hard-boiled world, as much as its detective.

It is important at this point to signal a geographic shift in my dissertation. While I have almost exclusively addressed historical and literary matters as they pertain to Europe, it is necessary to speak to the interests of the United States. Because hard-boiled detective fiction is largely an American literary innovation, it logically requires that I address factors that are more geographically immediate and historically relevant. Although I will not abandon European influences on crime fiction and the detective genre, the remainder of my argument will focus on the United States.

Violence alone is not the only factor that contributes to the imagined world of hard-boiled detective fiction. There are many other contemporary historical issues at play, many of which stem from the Progressive Era of the early twentieth century.

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[84] E.g. *To Have and Have Not*'s Harry Morgan

Regarding the delicate state of American society, Harold Faulkner wrote: "To many thoughtful men in the opening years of the twentieth century it seemed that America in making her fortune was in peril of losing her soul" (Faulkner 81). Politically speaking, the Progressive movement positioned itself in defense of "the people" against the ills of society and the corruptive and ultimately destructive forces of big business. It is difficult not to assign a dualistic view of American society during the Progressive Era; a "have" versus "have not" dichotomy that in many ways reflects the capitalist dynamic at the time. With business interests and politicians on one side and the populist on the other, Progressives fought for a democracy that reflected all of American's interests, not just the interests of those in power. Although not always successful, their reforms anticipated the need for America to adopt measured change against the historic changes that the twentieth century presented.

Perhaps the most significant and influential issue of the early twentieth century was Prohibition. Although alcohol consumption was a centuries old concern in the United States, the early twentieth century marks a major change in national policy. The efforts of the temperance movement led to the passing of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution (and the Volstead Act), which placed a nationwide ban on the sale, production, importation, and transportation of alcoholic beverages beginning in 1919.[85] Reverend Billy Sunday famously (and mistakenly) predicted the outcome of Prohibition: The reign of tears is over. The slums will soon be a memory. We will turn our prisons into factories and our jails into storehouses and corncribs. Men will walk upright now, women will smile and children will laugh. Hell will be forever for rent" (Woodiwiss 6). Even in 1928, unwilling to accept evidence of Prohibition's breakdown, President

[85] Although the Constitutional Amendment was ratified in 1919, it began to be enforced in 1920.

Herbert Hoover offered the following description of Prohibition: "[the] great social and economic experiment, noble in motive and far-reaching in purpose." Ultimately, the "noble experiment" failed to achieve its idealistic goals due, in large part, to insufficient resources. The reasons for its failure have been aptly summarized by David Von Drehle: "America's borders were too extensive, its entrepreneurs too creative, its thirst too great to stop the flow of booze" (Von Drehle 56). Prohibition was unable to stop liquor from being transported illegally into the country; however, the more relevant issue than how it was transported is by whom it was transported.

The trafficking and sale of alcohol during Prohibition was conducted by a new breed of criminal – one who exploited the imbalance of supply (low) and demand (high) during this period. The proliferation of organized crime and the rise of notorious gangsters became a significant facet of American culture. The criminal enterprises that formed as a result of prohibition directly opposed the movement's intentions, that is, a means to better society. In fact, crime rates related to alcohol consumption increased after 1920.[86] In *The Rise and Fall of Prohibition: The Human Side of What the Eighteenth Amendment Has Done to the United States*, Charles Hanson Towne reveals: "…Arrests for drunkenness and disorderly conduct increased 41 percent, and arrests of drunken drivers increased 81 percent. Among crimes with victims, thefts and burglaries increased 9 percent, while homicides and incidents of assault and battery increased 13 percent" (Towne 156).

Another undesired consequence of Prohibition was the corruption of public officials and the means by which bootlegging operations were so successful. Criminals gained legal immunity by means of administering bribes to law enforcement and

[86] Ironically, it was only after Prohibition was repealed that crime rates began to drop.

politicians and thus operated without restraint. Corruption was so widespread that even the Bureau of Prohibition, the federal agency tasked to enforce Prohibition, needed to be reorganized in an effort to reduce internal incidents of bribery. In regards to the matter, its commissioner, Henry Anderson, admitted, "Public corruption through the purchase of official protection for this illegal traffic is widespread and notorious. The courts are cluttered with prohibition cases to an extent which seriously affects the entire administration of justice" (Buckley 90). Although this cost of business was substantial in and of itself, bribery hardly reduced the profitability of bootlegging ventures. The industry's profitability also resulted in increased competition between criminal organizations, competition that would often result in gangland violence. Compounding the issue was the very public nature of the violence. Incidents like the Saint Valentine's Day Massacre not only demonstrate the failure of Prohibition, but its lasting impact on American society.

The failure of Prohibition to live up to the idealistic vision promised to American society contributed to the public's growing disenchantment with political and law enforcement officials after World War I. From the public's perspective, public officials were, at best, impotent during prohibition, and at worst, they were complicit in its failure. The government's inability to curb the unexpected effects of Prohibition (crime, corruption, unemployment) and stem the tide of criminal proliferation led to distrust, trepidation, and cynicism.

Compounding these undesirable effects was the social impact of the Great Depression. Following the stock market crash of 1929, a reduction in consumer spending combined with decreases in investments resulted in significant decreases in industrial

output and unprecedented levels of unemployment. Unemployment in particular intensified the social consequences of the Great Depression. Prior to the economic recession, the unemployment rate in the United States was 3.3%; in 1933, it reached upwards of 25 percent.[87] The motto, "unemployed through no fault of their own" became the testimony of millions of Americans during the 1930s, who were victimized by economic and political mechanisms beyond their control. As Joel Dinerstein notes, the myth of American industrial capitalism deteriorated in popular imagination as the public embraced non-traditional rags to riches stories, which reflected their own desperate state. He claims, "In replacing the virtuous hero of the businessman with a rogue criminal protagonist, the gangster film…provided a vicarious outlet for those who felt cheated of their savings, hopes, and future, without sacrificing the myth of upward social mobility" (Dinerstein 418). This shift highlights the introduction of relativism into the American psyche, which allows the hard-boiled detective to occupy the ambiguous space between law-enforcer and law-breaker without criticizing his moral standing.

Another myth impacted by the Great Depression was President Hoover's "American system of rugged individualism." Self-reliance and personal independence offered little comfort to a nation that was demoralized and impoverished. Instead, American exceptionalism was realized by the success of President Roosevelt's "New Deal," which illustrated the need for federal intervention to revitalize the American workforce. Roosevelt's relief, recovery, and reform agenda (consisting of "alphabet agencies") effectively commandeered private industry in an effort to increase

[87] The exact figure varies slightly, but according to Margo Robert's conservative estimate in "Employment and Unemployment in the 1930s," the unemployment rate reached 24.9%. See also Jensen, Richard J. "The Causes and Cures of Unemployment in the Great Depression". *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 19, No. 4, (Spring, 1989), pp. 553-583.

employment, stabilize farm prices, fund state welfare programs, as well as restore confidence in the American banking system. However, the conception of the hard-boiled detective predates Roosevelt's initiatives and thus reflects the dismissed notions of rugged individualism (with particular emphasis on the "rugged"). In doing so, hard-boiled authors reconfigured the frontier myth by replacing the untamed, lawless landscape of the Wild West with urban settings where crime and violence are prevalent.[88] The detective, himself, is a derivation of that individualism, outnumbered and overmatched by the corrosive elements of society. This is not to say that the hard-boiled detective necessarily reflects the idealism of Hoover's notion, which holds the individual capable of withstanding and ultimately overcoming any challenge. In fact, the limits of the private detective's individualism are portrayed constantly as he struggles and often is overmatched by the design of the hard-boiled world.

Another major social issue that concerned the political landscape of the United States was the rise of the women's movement and the demand for suffrage. While its roots go back to the nineteenth century, the women's movement gained considerable ground during the Progressive Era from the 1890s to 1920s. Women's right to vote presented the possibility for a monumental shift in the social and moral order of the country. Relying on a variety of antiquated arguments that included Social Darwinism and natural law, antifeminists sought to maintain traditional patriarchal roles in opposition to the women's movement. In many ways, the rise of feminism during this period led to a kind of crisis of masculinity as traditional gender roles and definitions

[88] This will serve as another site of inversion between hardboiled and medieval romance. In medieval romance, the act of leaving the court and entering the countryside signifies the hero entering the wild, where laws and chivalric codes do not rule. Conversely, hardboiled fiction is set predominantly in cities where corruption and violence supplant the rule of law.

were being challenged publicly. In "The Domestication of Politics", Paula Baker presents such male apprehension to women's suffrage: "It represented a radical departure from the familiar world of separate spheres, a departure that would bring, they feared, social disorder, political disaster, and, most important, women's loss of position as society's moral arbiter and enforcer" (Baker 621). The matter of position within the social hierarchy was a particularly prominent feature of antisuffragist contention. It was feared that if women were allowed to exit the domestic sphere, it would not only upset the country's gender designations, but the country's future.[89] Such opinions, fallacious and outrageous by modern standards, were commonplace in the first half of the twentieth century.

Nevertheless, those who railed against the women's movement citing issues of social positioning and traditional gender roles were motivated as much out of patriarchal chauvinism as uncertainty and fear. How would extending the right to vote to women affect gender roles in America? How would it alter political structures and social dynamics, and more specifically, what would domestic male and female relations become? These are the kinds of questions that were raised in response to feminism and the campaign for women's suffrage. However, the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment, prohibiting any United States citizen from being denied the right to vote on the basis of sex, did not assuage tensions nor did it unite public opinion. Issues of gender equality and social positioning would continue to be fought on political fronts for decades

[89] One such "slippery" argument suggested that giving women the right to vote would create a "race of masculine women and effeminate men and the mating of these would result in the procreation of a race of degenerates."

and male apprehension set off by the feminist movement would even materialize in literature.[90]

At the turn of the century, the North American Review printed a collection of articles on the subject of women in American society. In a note produced by William S. Walsh, he states:

> Doubt is in the air. There is an upheaval of old traditions and conventionalities. Not only the superstructure, but the very foundations, of old faiths and old beliefs are threatened with annihilation. With no firm ground to stand upon, the self-confidence of the past has vanished. (Walsh 372)

Although Walsh's comments anticipate the impending changes in gender dynamics inspired by feminism, the statement encapsulates many of the social and political issues that the United States faced in the early twentieth century. Beyond gender issues, the comments reveal the growing uncertainty that pervaded American culture at this time. This anxiety undoubtedly would lead to fear and resentment. Whether the issue was political corruption, the impotence of law enforcement or even the changes in gender dynamics that Walsh alludes to, little comfort is found in the kind of abstract loyalties and customs to which nineteenth-century European countries were clinging. A new reality was emerging in the United States, a tumultuous period of history during and after the Inter-war period that affected all facets of American life.

As I have previously stated, literature is one way in which the twentieth century attempted to distance itself culturally and ideologically from the previous century, in

[90] It could be argued that the same arguments were sustained up and through the 1980s during which time the Equal Rights Amendment was proposed.

large part due to the experience of the Great War. Although the United States was not as heavily invested in the conflict as their European allies (temporally, financially, or corporally), the effects of the war can be observed in its post-war literary modes. The rise of Modernism, characterized by the absence of idealism, as well as disillusionment and distrust in traditional authorities and institutions, certainly epitomizes the changing literary landscape. However, modifications to existing genres are another way in which the effects of World War I can be observed in literature. Despite the growth and popularity of nineteenth-century detective fiction in both the United States and Europe, the genre underwent a radical transformation in hands of American authors following the Great War.

Although there are elements of detective fiction that can be traced as far back as ancient Greece, most critics readily agree that the genre formally began during the Victorian period with Edgar Allan Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue" and his detective C. Auguste Dupin. Even his Victorian successor, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle admitted, "Where was the detective story until Poe breathed the breath of life into it?"[91] The three stories that Poe wrote, which he referred to as tales of ratiocination, engage readers in such a way that they have the opportunity to participate in solving the mystery.[92] This

[91] Arthur Conan Doyle, in an address to the Poe Centennial Celebration Dinner of the Author's society in March 1909.

[92] I will not go so far as to say that readers of detective fiction are active participants in the narrative because that would imply that they can affect the story in any tangible way. However, the reader's participation goes beyond what is commonly implied by "passive" because they are not content to have the solution revealed to them. Instead, the reality is somewhere in between as readers attempt to solve the mystery for themselves, parallel to the story's detective. As Catherine Ross Nickerson characterizes it, the reader's efforts are akin to "a mental itch" they attempt to scratch.

dynamic is largely responsible for the popularity of detective fiction and crime fiction in general over the past century.[93]

While the presence of the detective is, not surprisingly, the defining characteristic of the genre and what distinguishes it from other forms of mystery and crime fiction, the type of detective, both in terms of profession and disposition, is the basis for taxonomy in the genre. Most early incarnations of the protagonist are amateur detectives (as opposed to police detectives and later hard-boiled private detectives), erudite gentlemen whose participation in police investigation is on a consultant basis. Consequently, there is an air of leisure to their efforts. Poe's Dupin comes from a wealthy family but lives modestly, working for amusement (at times even declining compensation), Doyle's Sherlock Holmes only takes cases that interest him, Dorothy Sayers' Peter Wimsey has the title "Lord," being the son of a Duke, and finally Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot is a retired Belgian police officer.[94] This is not to suggest a lack of commitment, but rather, that the investigation is something additional or supplementary in which they are participating; they are certainly not grinding out their living like later hard-boiled detectives do. In keeping with the genre's Victorian origins, these detectives are also well-respected individuals, civil and well-mannered, despite any eccentricities.[95] Although they may have expert knowledge of the criminal element, they hardly can be confused with it, let

[93] Detective fiction or mystery fiction (the two terms are often interchangeable) is the most widely read kind of literature. Publishing estimates suggest that 25 percent of all books published in US UK and several other English speaking countries are in the mystery category.
[94] Although Agatha Christie is a twentieth-century writer, the style and form of her writing conforms to the Victorian model of the nineteenth century.
[95] These eccentricities are often discounted as the unfortunate, but tolerable results of their genius.

alone immerse themselves in it like their hard-boiled counterparts.[96] Instead, they remain gentlemen, with the intellectual means to assist the proper authorities.

In addition to the particularly Victorian formality associated with the detectives' identities, the same is true of their conduct during investigations. The amateur detectives maintain a sense of duty despite the recreational nature of their activities. One might infer that these notions of duty imply a strict sense of right and wrong; however, this is not always the case. Their sense of duty is always sensitive to the circumstances and situation. For example, in Christie's "The Adventure of Johnny Waverly," the child of a wealthy aristocratic family is kidnapped. It is discovered that the father of the boy is responsible for the kidnapping (as well as his wife's poisoning) in an effort to extort money from the boy's wealthy but tightfisted mother. Rather than turn Mr. Waverly in to the police on charges of kidnapping and child endangerment, Poirot simply gives the gentleman a verbal warning. He explains, "If I did not believe you to be a good father at heart, I should not be willing to give you another chance… Your name is an old and honoured one. Do not jeopardize it again" (Christie 188). Essentially, the detective gives the perpetrator a pass because of his social standing. To avoid the appearance of a "scandal," Poirot subjectively modifies justice to fit the nature of the criminal, rather than the crime. More important than the fact that a child has been kidnapped (not to mention his mother was poisoned) is the maintenance of the "old" and "honoured" name of Waverly. The detective's acknowledgement of status and requisite reverence supersede objectivity in matters of justice. This scene typifies the Victorian sensibility rooted in

[96] Some might argue that Sherlock Holmes is an exception to this model because of his association with "The Baker Street Irregulars" – the gang of children he often employs to aid him. However, their name and identity highlight not only the disparity between themselves and their employer, but also the unconventionality of their association.

early detective fiction. Because the narrative emphasis remains on the investigation, that is, the intellectual machinations at work within the detective, justice and, more to the point, punishment is of diminished importance.

The Victorian detectives remain loyal to the same abstractions and customs that define Victorian culture in the nineteenth century. Their very identity is characterized by these abstractions and often supersedes their objectivity toward guilt and innocence. However, one concept in particular, "duty," ultimately defines (and limits) their identity in the genre. The "amateur" label renders a detached association with the work that these detectives do. Their connection to or investment in the actual crime is limited by this designation. Although they are active participants in the investigation (and almost always responsible for its resolution), amateur detectives remain secondary players insofar as they are assisting in the case – as if it is good will alone that motivates them to help. Consequently, the recreational nature of their "work" reveals the medium's artificiality. This observation does not detract from the quality of the literature or devalue it. Rather, I am identifying the kind of fiction being presented in these detective stories and aligning it with the approach taken by nineteenth-century medievalists and social activists, who clung to idealizations and manipulated heroic images of the past to depict a fictitious reality. Urgency, for these amateur detectives, is abstractly defined as their sense of "duty." In the wake of World War I, American hard-boiled detective fiction authors such as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler take a dramatically different approach to the genre. By replacing the Victorian artificiality with an overstated sense of reality, they purposefully invert the cultural associations to what they perceive to be an irrelevant past.

The Hard-boiled Style:

The American style of detective fiction produces a significantly different result from its Victorian predecessor. The explanation that accounts for this distinction is characterized in Raymond Chandler's manifesto on the literary style when he praises his predecessor, Dashiell Hammett: "Hammett took murder out of the Venetian vase and dropped it into the alley" (Chandler "Murder" 216). Although the structural similarities between the Victorian and American hard-boiled forms of detective fiction are recognizable, stylistically, the two are strikingly dissimilar.

The term "hard-boiled" is derived from the hardening or toughening of an egg after prolonged exposure to boiling water. This hardening applies not only to the characters but the setting as well. While the imagined world of British detective stories remains strikingly similar to the Primary world in which its authors write, the same cannot be said of American hard-boiled fiction. The alteration to reality precisely is what necessitates the "hard-boiled" designation. Hard-boiled authors employ what I refer to as exaggerated verisimilitude to create the Secondary world of their literature in much the same way that medieval romance authors embellish elements of the medieval world to create the setting for their chivalric tales. In other words, the American experience in the early twentieth century, which suffered soaring crime rates during Prohibition and the Great Depression, informs hard-boiled authors and provides a starting point for creating the setting of their detective stories. Then authors such as Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and Mickey Spillane amplify the prevalence of crime and corruption to create the imagined world in which their detectives operate. Chandler claims that the hard-boiled setting is a real world depiction in *The Simple Art of Murder*: "It is not a very

fragrant world, but it is the world you live in, and certain writers with tough minds and a cool spirit of detachment can make very interesting and even amusing patterns out of it" (Chandler "Murder" 218). I agree that the hard-boiled world is rooted in reality (Primary world). However, the "patterns" that hard-boiled authors formulate derive from misanthropic perceptions of the Primary world, which create the heightened reality (Secondary world) of their detective stories. The way in which hard-boiled authors construct their corrupt, dangerous, crime-filled Secondary world is what I am referring to as exaggerated verisimilitude. Again, the Secondary world's particular exaggeration is the omnipresent threat of violence and an overwhelming sense of uncertainty and obscurity (what Chandler affectionately typifies as "the mean streets"). The same disparity is addressed by a colleague of Hammett's who notes, "'When I'm through my day's gumshoeing I like to relax; I like to get my mind on something that's altogether different from the daily grind; so I read detective stories" (*Hardboiled Writers* 105). Yet, the stimulus for this radically modified narrative approach is derived from the fallout after World War I and connects to nineteenth-century Victorian culture.

I propose a simple cause-and-effect relationship that reveals itself, or rather, is actualized in hard-boiled detective fiction. If the drive of Romantic nationalism (of which medievalism was one form) and the political posturing it inspired is accepted as a cause for the Great War, then disenchantment and resentment towards those pre-war nationalistic attitudes are its effect, even in America. Likewise, the idealism that permeated much of Victorian culture converts into cynicism in American society that suffers in the wake of this nineteenth-century ethos. Therefore, I contend that American hard-boiled detective fiction is a predictable and conscious response to the literature

inspired by Victorian medievalism. By inverting the central themes of authority, identity, as well as courtly gender dynamics, all of which are derived from medieval romance, it demonstrates America's rejection of this medieval-inspired ideology.

This argument raises an inevitable question: why does hard-boiled literature, and by extension American culture, have disdain for and reject these Victorian values when Britain, which unequivocally suffered more as a result of World War I, does not? I believe that the cultural distinction at play can be understood in terms of national identity. It can be argued that post-war British culture did not uniformly break from its pre-war culture because those Victorian values are ingrained in their cultural DNA (predating, as well as postdating, the war to some degree or another). Just as there was a movement to disassociate post-war Britain after the Great War and embrace modernism (as Fussell contends), there remained a strong resilient contingent that pushed for the *status quo*. Stefan Goebel describes in *The Great War and Medieval Memory* the effort to maintain some semblance of continuity with the past, exemplified by the form of war commemoration: monuments of a "meaningful past." He explains:

> Medievalism in war remembrance, recovering the fallen and the missing soldiers of the First World War and relocating them in the grammar of medieval history, entwined intimate responses with cultural precedents for an unprecedented human catastrophe. Here was hope of redemption through tradition. (Goebel 286)

Goebel is right that medieval-themed remembrance was a way to make sense of the death and destruction, but he seems on more dubious ground when he claims that it was a means "to restore and regain control over their lives." The proliferation of medieval

commemorative art may have been visibly present, but the meaning, both culturally and politically, of those images did not necessarily retain the same significance in the post-war zeitgeist. Goebel's assertion regarding the British desire for continuity was not a majority opinion, let alone one held by those who physically participated in the war. Nevertheless, his contentions are supported physically by the abundance of medieval commemoration. In any event, the preservation of this cultural heritage simply may be a sign of obstinacy; their denial of the causality between the Victorian mentality (vis-à-vis Romantic Nationalism) and the real-world outcome (World War I).[97] It follows then that comfort is taken in the familiar.

America, on the other hand, had the benefit of distance, both physically and metaphorically (war-time commitment, not to mention shared mores) between themselves and Victorian culture. They simply had less cultural and certainly less historical connection to the aforementioned abstractions and thus, were able to sever ties with them. However, detachment was not enough. In re-affirming a post-war American identity, they outwardly rejected Victorian culture and analogous pre-war sensibilities by embracing modernity and reaffirming the "rugged" individualist notions upon which it was founded. From a literary perspective, one way in which America illustrates this shift is the creation of the hard-boiled mode of detective fiction, which further gives credence to the opinion that hard-boiled is an innately American style.[98]

When comparing American hard-boiled detective fiction to its British predecessors, perhaps the most distinguishing feature is the physicality. If Poe's,

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[97] It can also be argued from a literary perspective within the detective fiction genre as continuity in style was maintained before and after WWI from Doyle to Sayers to Christie. In fact, the diminutive world in which Christie's other famous amateur detective, Miss Marple, lives suggests the importance of stability and permanence in British life.

[98] See McCann, Panek, and Rzepka.

Doyle's, Sayers', and Christie's detectives are most readily characterized by their extraordinary intellectual abilities, that is, an almost specialized knowledge that they employ, then the hard-boiled detective is recognized for his toughness. The detectives of Hammett, Chandler, and most certainly Spillane regularly exhibit physical prowess, which survival in the hard-boiled world requires.[99] The addition of the physicality required to resolve matters alters the nature of the investigation so much so that it changes the narrative from an intellectual exercise to something else entirely. Wits alone will not solve the case, nor can the matter be deduced from the comforts of a living room chair. Instead, it requires a physical sacrifice of the detective, often his blood, to reach the conclusion, which is anything but inevitable. I do not mean to imply that hard-boiled detectives are brutes. Rather, in addition to sufficient professional expertise and intuition, their identity as hard-boiled detectives simply necessitates certain physical characteristics and aggressive dispositions, which are demonstrated regularly. What instigates this aggression is what makes it difficult to associate the hard-boiled detective with more traditional heroism. These are not wholly righteous and morally superior individuals. In fact, as Sean McCann notes, there is "an often disturbing image of moral neutrality" (McCann "Hard-boiled" 49). Although McCann is conservative with this label, I insist that "moral neutrality" applies to the subgenre's major authors (Hammett, Chandler, Spillane), if for no other reason than it is established (unabashedly, I might add) by the original hard-boiled detective, Daly's Race Williams. In much the same way

[99] In addition to following his lead, in The Simple Art of Murder Chandler claims, "Hammett gave murder back to the kind of people that commit it for reasons, not just to provide a corpse; and with the means at hand…He put these people down on paper as they are, and he made them talk and think in the language they customarily used for these purposes" (217). Although murder belongs to the criminal, the hardboiled detective is capable of the same deadly force.

that in the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king, in the hard-boiled world, even a character that is morally neutral is remarkable.

The heroic label is a dubious one in discussions of the hard-boiled detective. Although Raymond Chandler is willing to apply the label to his detective, "heroism," like morality, still is a relative term in the hard-boiled world. As much as he wants to praise his champion as "the best man in his world," there remains the conscious need to temper his praise by adding, "and a good enough man for any world."[100] Because of the exaggerated verisimilitude that emphasizes the darker side of American life, being the "best man" in that world is a qualified remark; it is as much a critique of the hard-boiled (Secondary) world (and by extension, the Primary world) as it is a compliment to the protagonist. The result is the same even when the comment is read more narrowly. By interpreting "his world" to mean that of private detectives and "any world" to be all walks of hard-boiled life, he does not fare much better.[101] In fact, avoiding superlatives altogether might produce a more accurate assessment of the hard-boiled detective. He is distinguishable in the hard-boiled world and unique within his profession.

Nevertheless, most critics are willing to grant the hard-boiled private detective hero status. However, like McCann, they cannot help but couple their praise with provisional commentary about the hard-boiled world. For example, E.M. Beekman in "Raymond Chandler and an American Genre" stipulates that the private detective "as a man was who was not far removed from the criminal elements he combated. No fancy pants, he was ready to shoot or hit and to use illegal means to finish a case" (Beekman

[100] I read "his world" to refer to the hardboiled world, where violence and criminal activity are commonplace.
[101] Not ALL private detectives share the protagonists' laudability. Many, if not most, are as corruptible as any other individual (e.g. Sam Spade's own partner, Miles Archer).

151). In making this comment, Beekman urges us to look past the private detective's quasi-Machiavellian approach and see the merits of his behavior. Likewise, John Cawelti cannot escape the circumstantial nature of hard-boiled hero when he states, "…the hard-boiled detective is a traditional man of virtue in an amoral and corrupt world. His toughness and cynicism form a protective coloration forming the essences of his character…" (Cawelti 152). The suggestion being made is that without this "coloring," the private detective would be no different from the rest of the hard-boiled world. Even the use of "color" implies an additional ingredient to his character, something to which "virtue" is added to alter his natural identity. While I agree that the private detective's heroism is a significant feature of the hard-boiled mode, I cannot concede their unconditional idealization. In his book, *'Murder Will Out': The Detective in Fiction*, T.J. Binyon celebrates the way in which Chandler romanticizes his detective, Philip Marlowe. He insists that "[Marlowe], like Spade, is idealized, but as a perfect man, not a perfect private detective; he is an amalgam of knight and father confessor, with touches of sainthood" (Binyon 42). The pedestal upon which Binyon places the detective (even Hammett's Spade) is too high for me. By focusing so intensely on the character, Binyon overlooks the deeper problem of the hard-boiled world's composition. Without acknowledging this exaggerated alteration to their imagined world, he fails to consider the authorial bias given to these characters. They simply exhibit too many flaws even within the context of the hard-boiled world. Any attempt to idealize the private detective is looking too narrowly, that is, strictly judging within the confines of the hard-boiled world.[102] It is necessary to recognize the exaggerated verisimilitude that governs the hard-boiled world and distinguishes it from the Primary world of the reader. Without

[102] Even his manner of judgment, I would challenge.

this acknowledgement, a fair assessment of the private detective's quality cannot be determined.

I have addressed hard-boiled detective fiction's exaggerated verisimilitude[103] as a means to distinguish it from its Victorian counterpart. However, an additional consequence is that it converts hard-boiled detective fiction into romance literature. Hard-boiled literature not only fulfills Christine Chism's two requirements for romance, entertainment and instruction, but given its exaggerated verisimilitude, it achieves all three goals of the genre. In my analysis of medieval romance, I noted that its inherent idealism contributes to the form's entertainment value. Hard-boiled detective fiction does not imitate medieval romance in this regard. In fact, there is a remarkable lack of idealism. Instead, its entertainment value derives from its austere emphasis on violence and sex. While physical combat, suffering, temptation, and romance are common features of medieval romance, hard-boiled detective fiction takes its cue from post-war modernism and does not romanticize these elements. Instead, in keeping with twentieth-century cultural appetites, they are presented realistically and dare I say more truthfully. Another component of hard-boiled detective fiction's entertainment is its ambiguous or even morally questionable position on justice. Without faith in the institutions and traditional means of justice, reflecting contemporary society, hard-boiled detective fiction draws suspense from the way in which justice is defined and served. As a result, the private detective, whose own morality is problematic, nevertheless becomes the subjective arbiter of right and wrong. Without the idealism that medieval romance relies

[103] I.e. In many ways as a world viewed darkly.

upon, hard-boiled detective fiction's subjectivity is the means by which "what is" becomes "what ought to be."[104]

Chism's second goal, instruction, arguably medieval romance's strongest (albeit understated) feature, is hard-boiled detective fiction's least prominent romantic quality. Perhaps the easiest and most readily identifiable reason for its diminished role is the prominence given to cynicism in the hard-boiled style. Cynicism remains a constant feature of these stories, as no character (the private detective included) is impervious to skepticism and distrust. In fact, the private detective often is the instigator and cynical centerpiece of hard-boiled detective fiction. However, to a lesser extent than in medieval romance, hard-boiled detective fiction attempts to employ a kind of reverse-psychology by emphasizing individual and social flaws. First, the audience is invited to identify this flawed nature, an easy task in and of itself. Only then, with this awareness, can they be expected to translate those personal and social inadequacies in the Primary world. In some cases, hard-boiled detective fiction aims to shame elements of society, particularly figures of authority, which are represented in a negative light deliberately. However, these examples usually are incorporated in hard-boiled detective fiction's jaded view toward authorities and social hierarchies. In short, hard-boiled detective, like medieval romance, maintains the three goals of the genre by entertaining, instructing, and elevating the text by means of exaggerated verisimilitude. For this reason, hard-boiled detective fiction represents a modern mode of romance literature.

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[104] It could also be argued that hardboiled detective fiction's inherent entertainment value is derived from its intended audience. The specific readership demographic that read the pulp magazines like *Black Mask* that featured hardboiled detective stories were often the victims of the corruption and violence that were depicted. Thus, the subjective exacting of justice becomes, to a degree, a kind of wish-fulfillment for the audience.

Having introduced the historical context, the literary tradition, as well as the setting of the hard-boiled world, and its principle character, I will begin my literary analysis by identifying the authors whose works I will address. I have elected to write about Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and Mickey Spillane. In keeping with Bill Pronzini's position in the introduction to *Private Eyes: One Hundred and One Knights*, "Hammett virtually invented the modern 'hard-boiled' school, Chandler…refined it…, and Spillane bent it in a perverse new direction" (Pronzini "Private Eyes" 1). In addition to being three of the prominent names and most widely read authors in the hard-boiled genre, their works most overtly and most regularly illustrate the inversion of medieval themes in hard-boiled detective fiction. Some critics may argue that Ross MacDonald is the more appropriate author to round out the trio. While I do not dispute MacDonald's literary merits or discount his relevancy, Spillane's approach exemplifies everything that hard-boiled came to represent by the second half of the twentieth century. Further argument could be made that hard-boiled detective fiction's popularity in the middle of the twentieth century led to its diversification (culturally, as well as stylistically) in which case, Spillane's notoriety and thematic approach to the genre is more in keeping with his literary predecessors. Finally, I have elected to examine the short stories of the first two authors rather than their novels, because they are often critically ignored.[105] By doing so, I can address my argument in a comparatively similar literary format. As for Spillane, I have chosen his first novel, *I, the Jury*, in which he immediately embraces hard-boiled detective fiction's medieval inversion (and aversion).

[105] Spillane's short fiction catalog is far too limited. Only "The Screen Test of Mike Hammer" would suit, as his other texts do not necessarily feature a private detective.

On January 11th 1936, at the 'First West Coast Black Mask Get-Together,' Samuel Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler found themselves in the same room for the first time. Despite the similarities and differences in the paths that led them to detective fiction writing, ironically, both resented the label's implied limitations. As veterans of World War I (Chandler fought with the Canadian army in France while Hammett was stationed in Maryland training to be an ambulance driver), both men were aware of the war's implications and were witness to its national effects. However, their personal lives before and after the war also contribute to their approach to the hard-boiled mode. Of any contributor to hard-boiled detective fiction, none has as qualified a background to write in the subgenre as Dashiell Hammett. As a former detective for the Pinkerton Detective Agency, his personal experiences informed his writing. Beyond the professional insight, Hammett, like Chandler and Spillane, wrote out of need more than leisure. He always maintained modesty and never failed to acknowledge the monetary incentive that prompted him to write: "I have a liking for honest work, and honest work as I see it is done for the work's enjoyment as much as for the profit it will bring him" (*Hardboiled Writers* 97). Much of Hammett's success is credited to his pragmatism and analytic style that he brought to detective fiction. Whether informed by his his experience with crime as a member of the Pinkerton Detective Agency, or even if he is channeling Hemingway's terse tough guy writing, Hammett writes his fiction with greater precision, dispensing with the eccentricities and embellishments of the Victorian style.[106] In a review of his first novel, *Red Harvest*, critic Herbert Asbury had the following to say of Hammett's hard-boiled style:

[106] For more on the influence of personal philosophies in Hammett's writing see Josef Hoffman's "A Man Must Do What He Must: Hammett's Pragmatism."

> Those who begin to weary of the similarity of modern detective novels, with their clumsily involved plots and their artificial situations and conversations, will find their interest revived by this realistic, straightforward story, for it is concerned solely with fast and furious action and it introduces a detective who achieves his purposes without recourse to higher mathematics, necromancy or fanciful reasoning. (Asbury 62)

Asbury's review acknowledges the change in style that would define the hard-boiled detective story for decades. To his credit, Hammett was able to maintain this quality using a variety of detectives: the Continental Operative, Sam Spade, and Nick and Nora Charles. The Continental Operative, Hammett's first detective, modeled after Hammett's Pinkerton colleague, James Wright, hardly fits the physical image of hero. Middle-aged and overweight, with a propensity for violence, the Op takes pleasure in the violent aspects of his work (another remnant of Daly's Race Williams, traditionally accepted as the first hard-boiled model). However, Sam Spade becomes the detective with whom Hammett is most frequently associated despite only being feature in one novel and three short stories. Spade is an amalgam of seemingly conflicting characteristics. He is sarcastic and cynical but maintains a personal code of behavior that often governs his actions. Furthermore, he routinely confronts violence in the world even though he does not carry a gun. I will analyze stories that only feature these two detectives, excluding the domestic dynamic that governs Mr. and Mrs. Charles. Hammett's fiction is revered for its informed insight, as well as its effortless style; however, it more importantly provided the standard by which all future hard-boiled detective fiction is measured.

Raymond Chandler is first to admit to being a devoted follower of Hammett's. However, his loyalty is not only a product of his creative tastes and audience appetites; it is based on a larger literary philosophy, which harbors shocking levels of resentment toward his English predecessors and counterparts. The Victorian commitment to their "polished" formula that is limited to "logic and deduction." Regarding the deficiencies of detective fiction of the "Golden Age,"[107] he claims: "They are too contrived, and too little aware of what goes on in the world. They try to be honest, but honesty is an art. The poor writer is dishonest without knowing it, and the fairly good one can be dishonest because he doesn't know what to be honest about" (Chandler "Murder" 214). Chandler's position is compelling because it sheds light on the complicated issue of verisimilitude and genre classification. Because Victorian detective fiction is not set in an imagined Secondary world, there is less (if any) attention paid to informing the audience (contemporary or otherwise) about that world. The world of these Victorian stories is the world of its reader without expansion or enrichment. If these detective stories are set in the Primary world, then they are limited in the social commentary they can provide. In other words, what do they offer to distant or unintended audiences? How can they open a higher plane of awareness if they, themselves are limited to only that temporal plane on which they are written? Without altering or augmenting their setting to depict something more than the Primary world, they cannot achieve the third goal romance. Again, this highlights the most significant distinction between Victorian and American hard-boiled detective fiction – one which unites the later with the romance genre. Hard-boiled

[107] Chandler also takes issue with the classification of "Golden Age" detective fiction. He notes a chronological discrepancy for the period between the Great War and 1930: "Two-thirds of three-quarters of all the detective stories published still adhere to the formula the giants of the era created, perfected, polished and sold to the world as problems in logic and deduction" (Chandler "Murder" 210). Basically, Chandler is questioning the validity (and limitations) of the label given the continuity of the Victorian style.

detective fiction commits to an imagined Secondary world and exaggerates certain recognizable (if admittedly, undesirable) aspects of the Primary world that the audience can identify, appreciate, and reflect upon. This hard-boiled dynamic effectively fulfills romance's third goal.

Chandler's personal life also informs his literary philosophy, and in turn, his approach to hard-boiled detective fiction. Unlike the other two "domestic" authors in this chapter, Chandler was raised in England after his father abandoned their family. One aspect that I would like to highlight is his formative education. His mother sent him to Dulwich College where he studied literature. In a letter to his publisher, he reflects upon the value and significance of his education as it pertains to his writing:

> It would seem that a classical education might be rather a poor basis for writing novels in a hard-boiled vernacular. I happen to think otherwise. A classical education saves you from being fooled by pretentiousness, which is what most current fiction is too full of. In this country the mystery writer is looked down on as sub-literary merely because he is a mystery writer, rather than for instance a writer of social significance twaddle. (MacShane 139)

Chandler defends the value of his education, as well as taking time to contradict the stigma of mystery writing being a lower class of literature, a position he continually disputes. Furthermore, his time at Dulwich required adherence to "noble ideals of scholarship and public service," a modern, albeit specialized behavioral code that invokes notions of chivalry. However, the code did not to extend into Chandler's behavior and personal life as he struggled with alcoholism, absenteeism, and caroused excessively with

female co-workers. Perhaps in an attempt to resolve his personal issues in his writing, Chandler bestows a behavioral code upon his private detective, Philip Marlowe.[108] It is a modified version of the code that Hammett confers upon his detectives with greater emphasis upon the detective's dignity and sexuality. For this reason (as well as implied narrative symbolism that I will later address), Chandler's detective fiction most readily invites comparison to medieval romance.

Mickey Spillane has the auspicious honor of being both the most widely read hard-boiled writer after World War II and one of the most critically reviled. Part of the appeal of Spillane's writing is its visceral quality, the likely result of the author's time as a comic book writer. He undoubtedly followed the authorial models of his predecessors, Hammett and Chandler and intensified the cynical yet determined subjectivism of their protagonists in his detective, Mike Hammer. However, Spillane's willingness to embrace and incorporate the increasingly explicit nature of American popular cultural tastes ("the seamy side of things") contributed to his success, as well as his literary reputation.

More so even than Hammett, Spillane downplayed the artistry of his writing and instead defended the practical side of his profession. He admits, "Authors want their names down in history; I want to keep the smoke coming out of the chimney." Spillane, ever the populist, declared his utilitarian approach to writing and welcomed the financial windfall that his popularity garnered, almost to a fault. In an interview with J. Madison Davis, he claims, "[Spillane] wrote however many hours he needed to get finished. How long it took to write a book depended on alimony, when the rent was due, and blown gaskets. Once, he said, desperate for money, he had written a novel on a weekend"

[108] Chandler creates a prototype incarnation of Marlowe named Mallory. This detective, featured in Chandler's short fiction, is as an apparent homage to Thomas Malory, author of Le Morte d'Arthur, further validating the relationship between hardboiled detective fiction and medieval romance.

(Davis 6). Admittedly, this modest approach to writing may have been a disservice to someone like Chandler, who sought to achieve credibility (on a critical level) for hard-boiled detective fiction. Nevertheless, they both shared a mutual defiance of those critical of the hard-boiled style. Regarding his detractors, Spillane said, "Those big-shot writers could never dig the fact that there are more salted peanuts consumed than caviar... If the public likes you, you're good." Indeed, popularity in the twentieth century maintains a cache that often exceeds artistry, and Spillane acknowledges the commercialism dynamic at play.[109]

Perhaps criticism of Spillane stems from the author's unwillingness to revise the hard-boiled model and in fact, intensifies it. He also retains the social commentary on American society after World War II. In fact, Spillane preserves the authorial disposition in the wake of World War II that many hard-boiled authors found after World War I. The unfortunate "irony" that he identifies after World War II echoes the "irony" Fussell discovers in modernists writing after and in response to the Great War. Max Allen Collins, a personal friend and supporter of Spillane's, argues, "Spillane's vision is of a postmodern America, after World War II had destroyed her innocence, when its population woke up screaming from the American Dream" (Collins x). Although I agree with Collins' general assertion, I am not willing to accept his overall conclusion that Spillane's writing reflects a postmodern world. Instead, it seems as though Spillane simply adopts the same perspective as his hard-boiled predecessors. The "irony" that Spillane identifies may contradict the Rockwellian image of America in the 1950's;

[109] To this point, Spillane adds, "The first page sells that book. The last page sells your next book." It should be noted that Spillane was careful never to refer to himself as an author, only as a writer, a self-conscious acknowledgement of his approach to writing.

however, it may also address the need for social recalibration on a national level following such a conflict.

What truly unites these authors is their approach to detective fiction. The hard-boiled style, including characters and tone, is a rejection of pre-war Victorian values and the romantic revitalization of medievalism. To illustrate this denunciation, there is an inversion of the central themes of medieval romance, preserved in Victorian medievalist literature, with the hard-boiled detective taking the place of the chivalric knight. Furthermore, he pays no deference to authority, as traditional forms and institutions are the subject of ridicule and cynicism. Also, the detective's own status is devalued. His identity, both publicly and privately, is of diminished importance; likely the result of his questionable moral code and conduct. Finally, gender relations have not so much been inverted as they have been taken to their logical conclusion. While females in medieval romance often are revered and serve as the catalyst for the heroes' quest, their worthiness of such reverence is dubious. While medieval romance downplays or internalizes this dangerous potential, hard-boiled externalizes it and characterizes women as figures to be feared. The temptation and seductive qualities of the female are personified by the femme fatale, who threatens the safety and integrity of the hard-boiled detective. Perhaps in response to the changing role of women in contemporary society, hard-boiled authors openly objectify their female figures (to the extent that they are identified as villains openly) and subvert the courtly qualities of medieval romance. Although hard-boiled detective fiction still maintains the structural elements of romance, thematically, it inverts its core tenets. In keeping with the modernist literary tradition of the early twentieth

century, hard-boiled detective fiction is written in response to the American experience after the Great War and addresses the relevant cultural implications of the conflict.

Authority in Hammett's Hard-boiled World:

Unlike medieval romance where authority is revered as something that the protagonist strives to uphold or serve, in hard-boiled detective fiction, it is the subject of criticism and rebuke. The implied hierarchies and power struggles that are created by authority are a hindrance to society rather than an ideal. The most readily-criticized figures of authority in Hammett's stories are in law-enforcement. In the framework of detective fiction literature, law enforcement officers represent a kind of foil to the detective. They are, theoretically, the public's first line of defense and upholders of justice, but in the eyes of most hard-boiled writers, that theory is a fleeting thing. Hard-boiled authors like Hammett rarely pass on an opportunity to illustrate the shortcomings of the police. They usually are described (indirectly or directly) as brash, often inept, and generally lacking the temperament and fortitude to follow a case to its proper end. Despite the fact that the sleuth is a secondary or supplementary investigator,[110] the two detectives (police and private) often work side by side in Hammett's stories, which makes comparative criticism all the more apparent to readers.

In "Arson Plus," Hammett's Continental Op is hired by an insurance company to investigate the fire that destroys the home of a wealthy recluse in rural Sacramento and presumably claims the life of its owner. Unwilling to accept the police's presuppositions,

[110] In "Slippery Fingers" the Continental Op notes, "Half of the jobs that come to a private detective are like this one: three or four days – and often as many weeks – have passed since the crime was committed. The police work on the job until they are stumped; then the injured party calls in a private sleuth, dumps him down on a trail that is old and cold and badly trampled, and expects –" (Hammett "Fingers" 24). The temporal disadvantage to which the private detective is put is seemingly overwhelming, not to mention the resources and legal entitlement.

the Op, as he is commonly referred to, must endure the police's apathetic approach to the case. Despite his efforts, he struggles to engage the police in the investigation: "Mac's too lazy to express an opinion, or even form one, unless he's driven too it" (Hammett "Arson" 11).[111] The fact is that solving the case to which the deputy is assigned is simply not enough to motivate one of the better (admittedly albeit relatively) officers. The duty to "serve and protect" is unknown to these law-enforcement officers and certainly not an ideal to which they strive.

Hammett's criticism of law-enforcement as a base of authority takes on a hierarchical form as high-ranking superiors prove less capable than those who report to them. The irony being that the higher rank, the responsibility bestowed upon them, yet the less worthy that individual is of such authority. For that reason, the sheriff who presides over the case in "Arson Plus," Jim Tarr, receives the harshest criticism for his complacency and habitual laziness. For Tarr, justice is a relative matter of convenience ("It's straight enough for me. I'm satisfied.") When presented with an alternate theory to the crime, he is unwilling to accept it even though it is substantiated by evidence. Dismissively, he responds, "'Those yarns are pipe-dreams,' the sheriff said. 'We got all three of 'em cold, and there's nothing else to it. They're as good as convicted of murder'" (Hammett "Arson" 17). The sleuth's response to the sheriff's obtuse outburst, which ultimately renders the previous theory obsolete, reveals the police's incompetency. However, that Tarr's own subordinate derisively urges him to do so, compounds the critique. Deputy McClump, embracing the moment of righteousness, passive-aggressively allows the private detective to criticize the Sheriff, "Go on! You tell him

[111] All references to Hammett's short stories are from *Dashiell Hammett: Crime Stories and Other Writings* (Library of America, 2001).

about the holes in his little case. He ain't your boss and can't take it out on you later for being smarter than he is!" ("Arson" 19)

Hammett's attack on the chain of command illustrates the failure of law-enforcement on several fronts. Most evidently, the private detective succeeds where the police fail even with the inherent disadvantages of his profession. The Continental Op is able to parse appropriately through the evidence of the case and debunk the assumptions of the police. Furthermore, the assumption that better officers, being both more experienced and more knowledgeable, would hold the higher positions within law-enforcement is not an unreasonable assumption. However, Tarr's denial of alternative possibilities proves most damning when snidely countered by his own deputy. The deputy's casual insubordination, valid though it may be, is absent from medieval romance. Authority, in the form of chain-of-command, is a thing of deference in the chivalric court as illustrated by Gawain's efforts to protect his king and accept the challenge of the Green Knight. Tarr's deputies are more likely to criticize their superior officer than come to his aid.

Sheriff Tarr's disinclination to humor the private detective when the Op brings forth new information reveals not only his ignorance but also his unqualified attitude. What makes his entrenchment worse is his resentment of the private detective's professionalism. In response he declares, "You guys are the limit! You run around in circles, digging up the dope on these people until you get enough to hang 'em, and then you run around hunting for outs!" ("Arson 18). Tarr's pathetic attack on the private detective's methodical approach to the case is as pejorative as it is laughable. What is a fundamental part of the detective's process (thoroughness) is understood even by the

reader as the proper approach to an investigation. Yet it remains an unnecessary if not altogether foreign quality to the ranking member of law-enforcement in the crime story.

Another form of authority that earns the attention of Hammett's criticism is the legal system. Similar to law-enforcement, justice is handled by the legal system in a skewed and consequently partial manner. Rather than treating justice as an ideal, the participants' (lawyers, judges, juries, etc.) subjective motivations dictate their actions. In "Zigzags of Treachery" Hammett's Continental Op must navigate through a case of extortion that dates back decades involving criminals of all sorts to solve the murder of a respected surgeon. In addition to the requisite schemers and manipulators, there is also the mounting pressure of a legal system, which does not seem to be working in the best interest of justice. In particular, the Continental Op identifies the prosecuting attorney for the case as a public servant who is "…out for blood this time – election day isn't far off" ("Zigzag" 87). Again, Hammett passes judgment on a motivational problem. The comment follows a concern about the growing frequency of female acquittals. Gender biases aside (for the moment), the speaker implies that with the likelihood of another female defendant (the doctor's current wife), there will be pressure for "stricter enforcement of justice." The exchange is irony-laden beginning with the attorney's additional incentive based on the timing of the case. The prosecutor intends to use this case as leverage for reelection to the District Attorney's office, as if the case, at another time, would not command his complete attention or fullest efforts. However, the expression, "out for blood" suggests a lack of objectiveness; the timing makes it personal to the point that it demands violent or vengeful rectification. Furthermore, the pursuit of "justice" seems largely a matter of statistical correction due to past verdicts. Apparently,

given these circumstances, Lady Justice is sneaking a peak from beneath her blindfold. Hammett's insinuations are a critique of the justice system, whose impartiality is being called blatantly into question, and yet that, in itself, does not register concern for the characters, just another complication to the case.

Hammett's criticism of justice's bias represents an inversion of the ideal established in medieval romance. Unlike justice in the hard-boiled world, there is an implied certainty in medieval romance. The matter of justice is not in doubt during the melee in "The Knight's Tale." Regardless of Theseus' attempts to curb the violence, there is an undeniable determination at work (supernatural or otherwise), that leaves only one brother standing to win the lady. Even in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, despite the promised power of the girdle that he wears, Gawain, is convinced that he is doomed when he approaches the Green Chapel. Finally, in *The Knight of the Cart*, Lancelot keeps his word to his liberator and returns to his imprisoned state after participating in the tournament so that justice is maintained.

The Continental Op also faces a troubling prospect if he is fortunate enough to solve the case. In "Zigzags of Treachery" he reflects on the private detective's vulnerable position within the courtroom. Considering the prospect of having to testify, he admits:

> I've testified before juries all the way from the City of Washington to the State of Washington, and I've never seen one yet that wasn't anxious to believe that a private detective is a double-crossing specialist who goes around with a cold deck in one pocket, a complete forger's outfit in

> another, and who counts that day lost in which he railroads no innocent to the hoosgow. ("Zigzags" 113)

Admittedly, the comment refers to a preexisting prejudice and is directed primarily at the juries' assumptions regarding private detectives that testify in court. However, it is reasonable to assume that this perspective has been formulated and nurtured by lawyers that want to discredit the sleuth professionally.[112] While it is not uncommon, even today, for aspersions to be cast at certain professions in court, it nevertheless is a manipulative tactic employed by the legal system to their respective advantage. Aware of this disadvantage, the Continental Op knows there is no room for doubt. He must be "morally certain" of the evidence he uses because he knows, "a private detective on the witness stand – unless he is absolutely sure of every detail – has an unpleasant and ineffectual time of it" ("Zigzags" 111). Again, the certainty that he strives for is consistent with the standard of evidence in the legal system. However, by repeating this professional reality and juxtaposing the Continental Op's sentiments with the prosecution's personal incentive, Hammett suggests a biased standard, given the court's prejudice, which reinforces the court's overall partiality.

Hammett's Samuel Spade stories also contain the same relationship between the private detective and conventional figures of authority, particularly the police. Spade encounters members of law-enforcement, most frequently, Homicide Detective Polhaus and his lieutenant, Dundy, both of whom are on the receiving end of Spade's antagonism. More so even than the Continental Op, Spade takes considerable liberties with the good-humor of these detectives. He never misses an opportunity to mock or provoke, confuse,

[112] The fact that the Continental Op does not add a rebuttal may indicate his concession that there is some truth to the statement. The private detective's questionable morality takes many forms (e.g. the house detective at the Marquis Hotel, "who is a helpful chap so long as his hand is kept greased").

and even undermine these members of law-enforcement, at times only for his own amusement. Hammett does not hesitate to show the impudence (to the point of contempt) that Spade has for the police. It should also be mentioned that although Spade's attitude toward the police is meant to be humorous, he is rarely in the wrong; the police are often deserving of Spade's criticism. Therefore the private detective's insubordination is reflective of the failure of authority.

In "A Man Called Spade," Hammett's first of three short stories portraying Sam Spade, the detective's arrival on the scene of a presumed homicide is not well-received. His mere presence is resented by the police who attempt to question his value to the investigation. Ever-resilient, Spade ignores these obstacles and proceeds with his own investigation. During his examination of the crime scene, Dundy interrupts his own outlining of the known evidence to ask, "'How you been, Sam?'" ("Spade" 2). In isolation the question would seem innocuous enough; however, it demonstrates a lack of professionalism on the police detective's part. Standing over the body of the recently deceased, Dundy attempts to transform the crime scene into a social occasion, the effect of which would diminish the need for and responsibilities of Spade in this case. Furthermore, the collection of relevant witnesses to the crime is sitting in the adjacent room waiting on the investigation (including the departed's brother, his daughter and his staff). The police's unprofessional behavior is subtle, but it points to a larger comparative problem.

Very simply, the police do not share the same code of behavior as the private detective. Spade pushes the buttons of those he encounters and flirts dangerously with the boundaries of proper behavior, and although he narrowly avoids crossing this line, his

professionalism (as it pertains to solving the case) never comes into question. Applying the familiar saying, "bent not broken," who is to say what is bent and what is broken by the private detective? It is the advantage, and in some circumstances (like on a witness stand) the disadvantage that comes with a profession that exists, operates, and is perceived by the public as morally gray. How could he compromise his integrity if the very existence of that integrity is questionable? What constitutes unbecoming conduct for a sleuth? Neither "right" nor "wrong," "good" or "evil," the sleuth's position on the moral spectrum is ever-shifting and indeterminable.[113] Thus, it is understood that Spade's profession grants him a greater degree of latitude in matters of professional behavior because there are no fixed rules or moral imperatives for the private detective, unlike his police counterparts. Law-enforcement, as a source of authority, cannot operate under the same ethos as the private detective if they are deserving of the authority they have. It is the very reason that private detectives do not share in the same level of authority and public consideration as the police because they, theoretically, operate under a different professional code. However, the same dynamic does not exist in medieval romance. Because Lancelot is not formally associated with Arthur's court at the beginning of *The Knight of the Cart* does not diminish his sense of duty, nor does it avail him of his chivalric code. Rather it is an understood, that is, assumed that there is still an idealistic (knightly) authority that he serves. This is why his mounting the cart remains such an unthinkable act. Loyalty to authority and adherence to ideals are not a matter of convenience or circumstance.

In addition to the police's unprofessional behavior, Spade must also contend with their lack of commitment. Spade's commitment to the case (and all cases, for that

[113] This is aided in part by authorial design and creative license.

matter) is monetary,[114] yet the salaried police seem unwilling to fulfill their duties. They are satisfied with what is minimally acceptable during their investigation, which presumably will turn out to be insufficient at the legal level. Being equal parts impatient and defiant to the investigatory process, police detective Dundy bellows,

> "The deuce with all this,' he said bitterly. 'He's got a brother with reasons for not liking him. The brother just got out of stir. Somebody who looks like his brother left here at half past three. Twenty-five minutes later he phoned you he'd been threatened. Less than half an hour after that his daughter came in and found him dead—strangled." ("Spade" 4)

However, good enough is not good enough, legally speaking. The matter in question is the appropriate legal procedure needed for a homicide investigation, which Dundy feels is unnecessary. It would seem that the patience level of the investigator can render circumstantial evidence concrete, magically. Dundy is put out by having to work this homicide, not to mention having to work alongside Spade. To facilitate the impromptu case closure, he proceeds to coerce the desired testimony from the terrified facility staff. This and other attempts to find a quick and convenient answer to the case are rebuffed and refuted by Spade just as quickly as they are presented. Dejected, Dundy can only "scowl with dissatisfaction at Spade" ("Spade" 14). As always, the private detective never misses an opportunity to ridicule the police and their impotent presence in criminal matters. While combing through the list of phone numbers on the deceased's call log, the police, as if anticipating Spade's rebuke, try to bring the exercise to an

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[114] Having a monetary incentive is not necessarily a criticism of the private detective's character, just a professional reality. Spade does not even bother to send a bill for his work on this particular case as it will prove more troublesome than is worthwhile for his efforts ("…whoever's handling the estate'll raise hob if I send them a bill for any decent amount of money.").

abrupt end: "'That last one's police emergency.' He put the slip back in his pocket. Spade said cheerfully, 'And that gets us a lot of places'" ("Spade" 15). Spade's response is as clever as it is calculated. On one hand, there is the matter of urgency; police emergency was called, yet it failed to prevent the murder. In and of itself, the commentary is unremarkable, albeit true. However, the exchange insinuates that "emergency" is a relative term, in light of the effort put forth by the police thus far. If Dundy's performance on the case, thus far, is any indication of what is meant by "emergency," then it is no wonder that the man died, and the police are unable to solve the case. Just as Spade never misses an opportunity at the expense of the police, Hammett consistently portrays the police as an inept foil to the sleuth, unworthy of the authority which they presume to have.

Identity in Hammett's Hard-boiled Detective:

The mutual animosity shared by the private detective and traditional forms of authority is a fixture of Dashiell's Hammett's hard-boiled stories. In many ways, the breakdown of the authoritative hierarchy can be understood by recognizing the private detective's diminished identity in the text. In the most obvious sense, private detectives do not think that authorities of law and order are worthy of respect and cooperation. As a first hand witness to their ineptitude, corruption, or their general apathy, the private detective does not submit to their authority, and by extension, their implied superiority. Additionally, private detectives do not readily consider themselves part of the traditional legal system. While they operate typically within the confines of the law, they are private

contractors and therefore greater legal latitude is granted to them and their profession.[115] This is not to say that by maintaining a functional working relationship with law enforcement, private detectives do not gain certain advantages.[116] Rather, they leverage the undefined position to their advantage to get the best of both worlds.

Independence and autonomy does not necessarily suggest superiority. While there are moments of professional superiority, the same certainly cannot be said of reputation. In fact, the very function of these stories (as crime fiction) indicates the need for the private detective's services (as traditional law and order is insufficient or incompetent). However, the private detective's public's perception is not especially flattering. I have already made this point in terms of their courtroom reputation. Some of the cases, or rather, the manner in which they are presented, alludes to the sleuth's questionable status. When the defendant's attorney desperately presents the Continental Op with her story, he admits, "You're a detective. This is an old story for you. You're more or less callous, I suppose,…" (Zigzags 87). The abruptness of his comments, as well as the repeated use of the second person pronoun, is accusatory. The statement acknowledges the difficulty of the situation: to make something routine seem urgent and worthy of attention, while also conceding the detective's jaded nature. It is a presumption on his part – one based assuredly on past experiences. Similarly, Sam Spade is propositioned by a client in "Too Many Have Lived" who plays upon the moral flexibility of the private detective profession. In a suggestive manner, he asserts, "'I can talk to you, Spade. You've the sort of reputation I want in a private detective. That's

[115] By this I mean that the common restrictions of proper conduct and due process do not limited the manner in which they go about their investigations. Of course, this is construed by the private detective as being "above the law" in some cases. Strictly speaking, they imagine the laws do not apply to them.
[116] In addition to the access they gain, sleuths can participate in interrogations and other investigatory operations (see *Zigzags of Treachery* 107).

why I'm here…if you found him and fixed it so he stayed away for good, it might be worth more money to me'" ("Too Many" 19). Again, the implication is that the private detective is corrupt or at least corruptible for the right price. It should also be noted that Colyer makes direct reference to Spade's personal reputation, rather than making a generalization about the private detective profession. Whether Spade's imperfect reputation is by design or bona fide is inconsequential in this instance. The very suggestion of the detective's crooked nature is what is important and that Colyer is aware of this reputation is condemning enough.[117] Hard-boiled has taken the flawed humanity of the chivalric knight to its logical end. Without ideals to guide him and inform his decisions, the hard-boiled detective is susceptible to corruption. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* idealism provides protection, which is given physical form in the ornamented shield that the knight carries. The hard-boiled detective has no such protection and consequently his "renoun" suffers.

Before delving deeper into matters of character, it is necessary to examine the identity of Hammett's private detectives in a more superficial way, that is, their physical identity. Perhaps the Continental Op's most defining characteristic is that he is vaguely described. He most certainly is not an elevated or stylized hero. Hammett's choice to withhold the character's name even suggests the diminished importance of who the character is. Often described as short, fat, and middle aged, the Continental Op hardly assumes a familiar visage for a hero. Ironically, these unflattering descriptions are provided by the detective, himself.[118] During one of his train rides between San

[117] Hammett's "$106,000 Blood Money" provides another example that substantiates the questionable reputation of private detectives where the Continental Op discovers that a fellow detective within his own agency is corrupt.
[118] All of Hammett's Continental Op stories are told from the first person point of view.

Francisco and Sacramento in "Arson Plus" he admits, "I was getting to be one of the line's best customers, and my anatomy was on bouncing terms with every bump in the road" ("Arson" 17). This kind of self-deprecating humor illustrates the honest and forthright nature of the detective. Likewise, the Continental Op's ability to admit that he is in less than perfect shape is as endearing as it is humorous. In "Crooked Souls" he acknowledges how time has affected his ability to do his job: "I carry a lot of weight these days, but I can still step a block or two in good time" ("Crooked" 43). It seems that in spite of his "fat carcass," he remains an effective agent. That Hammett imparts this kind of brutal honesty to his protagonist is important because the Continental Op is the reader's only source of information in these stories. Readers are aware of the bias that comes with the stories but accept it, because they accept and sympathize with the character. He demonstrates no super human abilities, only the expertise that comes with experience on the job (which arguably makes him more admirable to audiences). Although physical, that is anatomical, descriptions frequently are absent in medieval romance, the emphasis placed upon their armor and weaponry is a substitute for physical form. As is evident in Book II of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* there is no superficial detail too small to be mentioned.

If the Continental Op is rotund, then Dashiell Hammett's other private detective is his antithesis. Hammett provides his most detailed illustration of Spade in the opening of *The Maltese Falcon*:

> Samuel Spade's jaw was long and bony, his chin a jutting v under the more flexible v of his mouth. His nostrils curved back to make another, smaller, v. his yellow-grey eyes were horizontal. The v *motif* was picked

> up again by the thickish brows rising outward from twin creases above a hooked nose, and his pale brown hair grew down – from high flat temples – in a point on his forehead. He looked rather pleasantly like a blond satan. (Hammet, *Falcon* 1)

Unlike medieval romance that often opens with the story's setting (often historical or situational), Hamett begins his novel with this peculiar and troubling image of his most famous and popular detective. What is most unsettling is the difficulty in reconciling the final detail. "pleasant" and "satan" are rarely introduced together and yet Hammett elects to marry the two in his central protagonist. It could be argued that this uncommon pairing references the private detective's dualistic position in society. Neither wholly good or bad, right or wrong, the private detective remains an ambiguous figure in a world viewed darkly. Or else it could be another inversion of medieval romance and its non-secular tone. If chivalric knights are warriors for Christianity (as Christ himself is described as the premiere knight), then Spade as the demonic doppelganger seems less peculiar.

Hammett maintains this striking image of Spade in his short stories as well. It should be noted that unlike the Continental Op stories that are written in the first person point of view, Spade's short stories (and novel, for that matter) are written in the third person, which makes the detective less accessible (and amenable). Nevertheless, the stories make similar references to the satanic v's of Spade's face. "When he smiled, the v's of his chin, mouth, and brows grew longer" ("Spade" 1). Hammett provides an analogous description later in the story: "The amusement twitching Spade's face accentuated his likeness to a blond Satan" ("Spade" 12). While the repetition of

Hammett's description takes into account that not everyone may have read *The Maltese Falcon*, there is also the possibility that the author is repeating if not altogether forcing this specific image into the readers' minds. By doing so, they are forced to contend with another kind of unflattering image for the hero. The lengthening of the facial features is an uncommon heroic characteristic; the angular nature of his face is a more villainous attribute.

The timing of Hammett's descriptions is also important. While their use early in the texts provides a preliminary image for the audience, the author also purposefully makes references to them to accentuate the scene. For instance, prior to Coyler's subtle but unmistakable indictment of private detectives in "Too Many Have Lived," Hammett acknowledges a change in Spade's appearance and demeanor. Upon the suggestion that the detective never "find" the man he is hired to locate, he writes, "Spade rocked back in his chair. His face—given a not unpleasantly satanic cast by the v's of his bony chin, mouth, nostrils, and thickish brows—was as politely interested as his voice. 'Why?'" ("Too Many" 19) Spade seems willing to play into Coyler's view of the corruptible private detective (perhaps only to oblige the client coyly). The juxtaposition of Hammett's description is disconcerting. The audience does not know if the transformation is genuine or merely part of the detective's ploy. Nevertheless, the contrast of the pleasant and the nefarious is difficult to reconcile and Spade's seemingly innate and premeditated ability to invite these descriptions is a troubling aspect of the hero.

Another pair of descriptions that Hammett uses to describe Spade in his stories are "wooden-faced" and yet "dreamy-eyed." Although not as challenging of a contrast as the

pleasant satan, they are also significant aspects of Spade's physical description. The former alludes to his inexpressiveness, particularly during investigation. Hammett often makes references to the practical skills sets of poker and the benefits that come with being able to read people (their expressions, actions, etc.).[119] Contrarily, Spade avoids others reading him by keeping a blank face. Hammett emphasizes this feature by contrasting it with the police, who cannot be so discrete. In "A Man Called Spade" Hammett writes, "Dundy looked at Spade. Spade's face was wooden. Dundy glowered at him" ("Spade" 7). This brief, seemingly trivial exchange not only points to differences in professionalism (police versus private detective), but illustrates the restraint and control that Spade has to manipulate the physical manifestations of his emotions. Also, it suggests that Spade's facial transformation with Colyer most likely is by design.

By contrast, the latter "dreamy-eyed" image is an equally significant feature. The description connotes a seductive yet innocent quality, both of which the detective uses to his advantage. It is a quasi-romantic quality that is employed during moments of conflict rather than intimate interactions. During the sudden and final confrontation in "A Man Called Spade," the perpetrator, as if sensing the end of his rouse, lunges at the detective: "Bliss wheeled to face him [Spade] more directly. 'Damned if you will!' He put his hand behind him. Spade, wooden-faced and dreamy-eyed, came forward" ("Spade" 16). The combination of these traits provides a complex image of the detective. In one sense, his woodenness suggests that he is not as emotionally invested in the struggle as Theodore Bliss. In other words, it is not a personal confrontation.

[119] e.g. "These things weren't as plain as billboards, you understand, but they were there to be read by anyone who had ever played poker – either with cards or people" ("Zigzags" 106).

Then again, the use of "dreamy-eyed" adds an element of excitement on Spade's part. That he expects and reacts to the attack is one thing, but that he willingly comes forward, as if the equal aggressor is significant. Although he does not show the emotion openly on his face, Spade's eyes tell the readers that he relishes the physicality of confrontation.[120] Also, all of this occurs within arm's reach of the police detectives, whose own reaction is omitted from the scene (presumably because they fail to react initially as they are still stunned from the detective's solution to the case).

Perhaps channeling his own experiences as a Pinkerton detective, Hammett includes moments where the detective's on-the-job expertise is conveyed to the audience. The effect of these moments is two-fold: first it is an illuminating and privileged insight into the profession, and second, it further develops the detectives' characters and their approach to their work. One of the most common reminders that the Continental Op provides is that he does not rely on luck or good fortune to help him on a case. While hard-boiled American detective fiction often takes a radical approach to the infamous "20 Rules for Writing Detective Stories" by S.S. Van Dine, this is one area in which Hammett, in particular, keeps a sensible perspective.[121] In the Continental Op's own words, "a detective can't afford to believe in luck or coincidence" ("Arson" 7). Even more divinely inspired events are not to be relied upon, "…satisfied that my only hope for success – barring miracles, which usually don't happen…" ("Zigzags" 89). Pragmatism defines the private detective's outlook on a case; he must be analytical and

[120] This is one of the ways in which the private detective literally personifies Hoover's "rugged individualism."

[121] According to Van Dine, "The culprit must be determined by logical deductions — not by accident or coincidence or unmotivated confession. To solve a criminal problem in this latter fashion is like sending the reader on a deliberate wild-goose chase, and then telling him, after he has failed, that you had the object of his search up your sleeve all the time. Such an author is no better than a practical joker" ("Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories" *American Magazine* (1928-sep)).

not rely on fortune. Cynicism's influence on hard-boiled detective fiction explains the view of fortune that is defined by randomness, and thus it is unreliable for the analytical detective. This is dissimilar to the medieval concept of *rota fortunae,* which dictates that fortune is cyclical (albeit, equally unreliable).[122] For this reason, the Continental Op is unwilling to entertain the notion of chance (let alone rely upon it) during an investigation.

The private detective's reticence in matters of chance does not preclude him from recognizing or appreciating isolated moments of good fortune. Instead, the Continental Op takes them with modesty and humility. In "Zigzags of Treachery" the private detective makes a spontaneous change of plans that proves effective. This "light bulb moment" necessitates some reflection from the narrator: "I'm not what you'd call a brilliant thinker – such results as I get are usually the fruits of patience, industry, and unimaginative plugging, helped out now and then, maybe, by a little luck – but I do have my flashes of intelligence. And this was one of them" ("Zigzags" 100). Foremost, the Continental Op acknowledges the rarity of the situation by qualifying his good ideas as "flashes," suggesting that they are atypical and certainly fleeting. At the same time, he reinforces the foundational elements of good detective work upon which he routinely relies. This is another way in which hard-boiled authors distinguish their style of detective fiction from the Victorian. The Continental Op's steadfastness rather than some extraordinary intellect is what makes him an effective private detective and what makes the character just as appealing (although perhaps not charismatic) a figure to

[122] While Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy* is a central text in the medieval notion of the Wheel of Fortune, other examples include *The Romance of the Rose*, *The Divine Comedy*, *The Canterbury Tales,* and *Le Morte d'Arthur.*

readers.[123] It is as though hard-boiled detective fiction is demystifying the detective and humanizing the efforts he puts forth in his quest.

Insights into the private detective's expertise also include revealing trade secrets. Like Spade's ability to control his emotions, restraint also proves to be a helpful attribute. Unlike the chivalric knight, or even the Victorian detective like Sherlock Holmes, there is nothing particularly special or "enhanced" in the hard-boiled detective. He simply has honed his natural (admittedly, unremarkable) abilities to suit his profession. When taking witness testimony, the Continental Op demonstrates impartiality. While listening to attorney Richmond's passionate pleas for his client, the detective remarks that he ignores "everything he said that didn't have to do with the case" ("Zigzags" 88). Although he might seem callous, the Continental Op is able to ignore the pathos of the situation and focus entirely on the pertinent information. In *The Knight of the Cart*, Lancelot is beleaguered and distracted constantly by superfluous and supplemental elements (e.g. the distressed lady attacked by the castle's knights).

The private detective's impartiality highlights another characteristic of the detective, particularly the Continental Op, as well as the kind of world in which these stories take place. Upon further reflection of Richmond's emotional appeal, the Continental Op remarks, "I don't like eloquence: if it isn't effective enough to pierce your hide, it's tiresome" ("Zigzags" 89). The private detective seems to condemn the attorney's pleas as passive, almost effeminate behavior. In a world in which masculinity

[123] This point is reinforced by the detective's explanation of how to shoot a gun properly. Although in the moment, it seems like the Continental Op is a crack shot. He later explains that it is only logic and good sense that allows him to disarm the perpetrator. He admits, "Looks like a great stunt – this shooting a gun out of a man's hand, but it's a thing that happens now and then. A man who is a fair shot (and that is exactly what I am – no more, no less), naturally and automatically shoots pretty close to the spot upon which his eyes are focus. When a man goes for his gun in front of you, you shoot at *him* – not at any particular part of him…But it looks impressive" ("Zigzags" 109-110).

and certainly action are venerated, talking excessively, by contrast, is considered feminine, or at least, unmanly. The Continental Op continually disregards these emotional appeals. Also, this blunt admission by the detective stresses the importance of moderation and concision. He says only what he needs to say and does only what needs doing. While the private detective is not a mindless thug, he also is not one who relies solely on his verbal acumen. Perhaps what makes private detectives like the Continental Op and Samuel Spade so effective in Hammett's stories is their discretion – their innate ability to know when to talk (and in addition, what to say) and when to act. Understanding and mastering this balance is what differentiates the private detective from less effective and effectual characters. This connects to conflict between Reason and Love in *The Knight of the Cart*. Lancelot abandons Reason in favor of Love and therefore lacks proper judgment in his actions. Likewise, Sir Gawain's effectiveness in rebuffing Lady Bertilak's advances proves futile, as self-preservation trumps his virtue. Perhaps this inversion between hard-boiled detective fiction and medieval romance is illustrated best in "The Knight's Tale" where Theseus' alternative spectacle, which supplants the battle in the glade, ignores the privacy and efficiency of the cousins' solution. Instead, the grandeur of the exhibition is of greater importance than the brother's quarrel. Ultimately, effectiveness is what dictates success or failure in the world of hard-boiled detective fiction; will alone is insufficient.

The verisimilitude of a world perceived darkly is a defining quality of American detective fiction. Consequently, it is a simple matter of causality that demands that if the private detective is the hero that occupies this world, then to succeed in his endeavors, he must also be hard-boiled. Cynicism and rampant moral relativism (where

any morality even exists) pervade, if not saturate, nearly every aspect of the secondary world, and the private detective is neither immune nor excluded from this feature. It is an unfortunate reality that the detective must endure, in addition to his immediate investigations. To say that everything and everyone is tainted by this reality would be an overextension of the point, but certainly not by much.[124] This represents another inversion of the medieval romance. The court in which the King and his knights convene is a place of sanctuary, where law and order are maintained. Outside of these walls, however, the same cannot be said. Lawless defines the wild countryside, which provides the setting for the knight's quest. The knight must either venture into the wild or some element of lawlessness must invade the court (e.g. the Green Knight or Meleagant). The private detective has no such sanctuary or buffer zone, as the urban landscape in which he resides is also the setting for his quests.

The urban setting provides the most fitting landscape for these detective stories that are shrouded in mystery and corruption. The very mention of the city connotes uncertainty. In "Arson Plus" the local sheriff is skeptical of the Continental Op's presence in his rural community. He says, "We got a city slicker here to catch our firebug for us" ("Arson" 3). While the sheriff mockingly acknowledges their inferiority, there is also doubt and paranoia about the private detective's presence. The Continental Op definitely is an unwanted figure not because he presumptively intends to help the sheriff with a local case, but expressly because of where he is from.

[124] The exceptions, few and far between, though they may be, are in constant danger. For example, Effie Perrine, Spade's loyal secretary, is one such wholesome innocent. As if recognizing its rarity and desiring to protect and preserve it, Spade is careful not to expose her to the corruption of the world. Immune even to Spade's casual advances, she usually remains safely within the confines of detective's office.

The mystery and danger that are synonymous with the city is a fixture of hard-boiled detective stories, which often plays a role in the cases being solved. For instance in "Crooked Souls," the Continental Op is skeptical about the daughter of a wealthy businessman having been kidnapped. The detective admits, "'…I'm a little doubtful about grown persons being kidnapped in cities. Maybe it really happens sometimes, but at least nine-tenths of the cases you hear about are fakes" ("Crooked 49). Again, two things are revealed by this statement. First, the detective provides the reader with more inside information about his job and more importantly his perspective. Second, the Continental Op suggests that things are not always (in fact, rarely) as they seem.[125] Duplicity and urban life run hand in hand. So it is reasonable to assume that kidnappings (in one form or another) must be a common occurrence in the city if someone intends to use the cover of a kidnapping to disguise other devious activities, as is the case in "Crooked Souls." However, in the Continental Op's professional opinion, most kidnapping cases fall under the framework of the latter, which maintains that the city is a violent, dangerous place, but the danger does not always come from where one would think. If innocents are as rare as these detective stories imply, then to a certain extent, basically everyone is guilty of something or another. As the detective weighs the possibility of the servants being suspects for the destruction of the mansion in "Arson Plus," he declares, "(The servants) might pad the bills, or even go south with some of the silver, but they don't figure as killers in my mind" ("Arson" 7). Again, the detective's past experience drives his current thinking on the case. More importantly, while he dismisses the possibility of the servants being responsible for the fire, he does

[125] Sir Gawain has no such notions when he is inside Bertilak's castle or when he learns of its proximity to the Green Chapel.

not believe that they are innocent in all matters, necessarily. Petty theft is still theft. The detective's comment passes over guilt or innocence and instead focuses the reader's attention on degrees of criminality in the world.

The idea that the city and city life are governed by duplicity is a common feature of Hammett's hard-boiled detective stories. Samuel Spade is aware of the fact that all things, not just his cases, or his criminals, have at least two sides. The victim in "A Man Called Spade" is referred to as a financier to which Spade replies snidely, "You mean he was a promoter" ("Spade" 5). Spade's comment sets up a contrast between appearances versus reality. True, Max Bliss's business cards may have read "Financier," a respectable and white collar profession; however, Spade distinguishes between the profession that the deceased claimed to have and the job that he did. By correcting Bliss's daughter, Spade bluntly is describing the actual work that Max Bliss did. To the issue of duplicity and the overarching cynicism that dominate these stories, it is Detective Dundy who most poignantly and concisely sums up the world: "Everything's a phony" ("Spade" 11). Dundy's sweeping condemnation of the world is fitting. It is ironic that in such a cynical time where the world lacked authenticity, an expression like "the genuine article" was popularized. Although the private detective is aware of this feature of the hard-boiled world, it is lost on the chivalric knight who naively believes what he sees and considers it authentic. This is why Gawain fails to acknowledge the convenience and coincidence of finding Bertilak's castle or why Arcite and Palamon accept Theseus disingenuous proposal to settle their dispute. Both Gawain and the Theban brothers-in-arms take reality at face value and fail to recognize duplicity at work in medieval romance.

If deceit and duplicity are such powerful agents in hard-boiled detective stories, it is understandable that "truth" is a relative term, ambiguous and nearly indeterminable. The phrase "no honor among thieves" finds almost literal meaning in "Zigzags of Treachery" as the Continental Op, posing as a fellow criminal, anticipates being double-crossed by the blackmailer Ledwich. After confirming that the note in the doctor's envelope was palmed, the detective puts his plan into action, which leads to Ledwich's death. This series of events is significant for several reasons. Foremost, it depicts the detective as a convincing criminal. The hard-boiled detective often assumes the identity of a criminal in his cases. Without the official capacity or moral justification of an undercover police detective, the sleuth willingly compromises his public image and personal integrity to pursue the criminal on their turf. The Continental Op even anticipates and disregards his own questionable actions when he admits that he is acting on what he perceives as an imperative: to save Mrs. Estep's life, "Law or no law" ("Zigzags 119). This kind of moral relativism is what predicates the absence of ego or self-regard that allows the detective to sacrifice his principles (if they can be called that) in order to do his job. Second, the detective is directly responsible for the death of Ledwich by arming him with a disabled gun. Returning the criminal's broken weapon is an act of self-defense (while they negotiate amongst themselves); however, the Continental Op allows Ledwich to get away, knowing the police are waiting nearby. The trap is set and the outcome is predictable.

The fact that Ledwich dies as a result of the Continental Op's Machiavellian strategy does not affect the detective. There is no remorse or regret on his part. Instead, the only sign that the detective is aware is his intentional disregard. Upon

leaving the scene, he reflects, "…it isn't a nice thing to look at a man you've deliberately sent to his death (a personal admission of guilt). Not even if it's the surest way of saving an innocent life…" ("Zigzags" 122). Admittedly, this brief commentary is more than the Continental Op offers after the death of the unsuspecting pawn, Boyd, whom he also sends to his death earlier in the story. So why is there such little regard for life? The short answer is that in the dark world of hard-boiled detective fiction, life is cheap, and the greater the degree of guilt that is carried, the cheaper the life is. The private detective dispenses with the baggage of regret and remorse because he rationalizes what these deaths represent. True, lives are lost. Are they innocent lives? Certainly not ("[Ledwich] was thief, blackmailer, double-crosser, and at least twice a murderer"). However, their deaths allow an innocent woman (at least in this immediate sense) to be set free. Therefore, in the cynically-realized world of Dashiell Hammett's detective, justice has been served; or at least, justice, as far as the Continental Op is concerned, is served. Justice, like truth, morality, and in large part, innocence, is a relative term, and it is treated as such by law-enforcement, the legal system, and even the heroic private detective on an individual level. There are no uniform codes of behavior or universally agreed upon principles; everything in this literary form is subjective. This represents another inversion of the model set by medieval romance. Ideal forms of behavior are not subject to individual interpretation; relativism is the first step the knight takes toward failure on the quest. The knight's personal needs or perspective does not supersede his commitment to these ideals nor can they, if he intends to complete his quest and maintain his chivalry.

At this point it is necessary to address another important feature of hard-boiled detective fiction, which, to some extent, negates the existential despair that would otherwise saturate and be produced by this literature. Because the "successful" closure of a case and the fulfillment of justice may be interpreted by readers as unsatisfactory (due to the manner in which the cases are closed and the kind of justice that is dealt), something is needed to blunt the violence, cynicism, and corruption of the world that the genre depicts. The solution to this problem is humor. Predominantly exhibited by the private detective, the sense of humor possessed by the Continental Op and Samuel Spade is neither high nor low brow. Instead, it is sarcastic and often dark and jaded. The former is prone to moments of self-deprecating humor (usually about his physique), the latter uses sarcasm to ridicule others. While I have suggested one possible function for humor in hard-boiled detective fiction, another might be just the opposite. Rather than taming the bleakness of the author's world view, the kind of humor that is used may intensify the story's cynicism. While the detectives' snide remarks undeniably add a little levity into the scene, they also contribute to its harshness. For instance, when detective Spade makes fun of police detective Dundy he does so because thinks that he deserves it. Not only does Dundy make himself an easy target (because of poor police work and his cantankerous attitude), but the mockery is a way for Spade to project his professional superiority without truly upsetting their working relationship. Therefore, while it is reasonable to identify the private detective as a kind of "hero" in the text, the term itself, like almost everything within the genre, is relative. He is not to be mistaken for an exemplar of virtue and nobility like the chivalric knight. He undeniably is a part of the cynical world and is not immune to contempt, violence, or scorn.

Gender in Hammett's Hard-boiled Society:

Just as Hammett presents a "hero" that is marginalized by the world in which he lives, the same can be said about gender relations in hard-boiled detective fiction. One of the most consistent elements in the genre is the subjugation of women that ranges from distrust on one end to complete misogyny on the other. In a period of history that is experiencing a radical change in the role and perception of women in society, hard-boiled detective fiction channels the corresponding masculine fears and reacts in a radical way. The answer to the empowerment of women in society is to vilify women (almost universally) in these stories.[126] Hard-boiled detective fiction's response to Edmund Burke's comment "The age of chivalry is gone," is to say, "Yes, and women are the reason why!" To justify the chauvinism further, authors imagine a female character that validates this perspective: the femme fatale. Hard-boiled detective fiction established the femme fatale as an archetypal figure – one who uses seduction and temptation to manipulate their victims. Hard-boiled's reductionist view of their strong-arm methods focuses on their sexuality as their best and usually, only means of getting what they want. This interpretation is an illustration of the exaggerated verisimilitude employed by hard-boiled authors.

Ironically, in yet another criticism of the protagonist's heroic status, the private detective is not innocent in this condemnation. It is as if hard-boiled detective fiction capitalizes on Sir Gawain's brief and unsubstantiated tirade blaming women for man's downfall. The detective is not above holding such chauvinistic convictions. In fact, he

[126] I concede that similar to the innocent individuals like Effie Perrine, female characters that are not maligned are equally rare. Effie also suits as an example, and while Spade may preserve and protect her innocence (and naivety) by keeping her stashed safely in his office, it could also be argued that it for his own protection that she not be exposed to the world and become like any other dangerous female character.

is just as responsible for perpetuating these sexist perceptions as any other character. The only defense given to the private detective is that he is correct in his identification and condemnation because the female figures have been imagined that way by the authors.

Hammett, for one, interprets women as the "fairer sex" as meaning the weaker sex. In a masculine-dominated world of hard-boiled detective fiction, males that do not measure up are unfavorably compared to women. For example, in "Slippery Fingers" the Continental Op notes, "This Frederick Grover was a short, slender man of something under thirty years, and dressed like a picture out of *Vanity Fair*. His almost girlish features and voice did nothing to make him more impressive…" ("Fingers" 22). Because of Grover's feminine features, the detective thinks very little of the man (and immediately proceeds to forget these details altogether). The detective further emasculates him by qualifying his features as "girlish," not to mention the reference to a fashion magazine. The fact that Grover's voice does not impress the Op probably has as much to do with what he says as the manner in which he communicates it. Clearly, Grover doesn't measure up in the masculine world in which the Continental Op lives. Similarly, disparaging remarks are made about Grover's father, Henry Grover, who had a reputation as a "tough *hombre"* in his youth. However, suspect Joseph Clane informs the detectives that "…after he got older and richer he got soft – a lot of men go like that" ("Fingers" 32). Clane's assessment of Grover's diminished masculinity results in his periodical extortion. Grover, now "tamed" and worrisome is reduced to a mark, someone that Clane exploited. The point that the text is making is that soft men, like the

Grovers, are vulnerable, like women, and are ill-suited to live in a masculine-dominated world.

To maintain the illusion of male domination, Hammett makes his detectives dismissive or at the very least, naturally suspicious towards female characters. Unlike the chivalric knight who is constantly susceptible to the sexual games that women play, the Continental Op remains steadfast and committed to solving the case. His frank self-awareness (again, to the point of self-deprecation) makes him more or less immune to feminine charm or their wiles. In "Arson Plus" he vents, "But I was a busy, middle-aged detective, who was fuming over having his time wasted; and I was a lot more interested in finding the bird who struck the match than I was in feminine beauty" ("Arson" 12). The distraction posed by the women's delayed entrance and suggestive appearance has the unexpected effect of frustrating the detective. He sees it as a mere annoyance rather than a temptation. Ever the professional, he does not allow his personal feelings to affect his behavior or judgment. Where knights are willing to abandon all that they cherish (Lancelot's Reason, Gawain's vow to Bertilak, and Arcite and Palamon brotherhood), the hard-boiled detective is not manipulated so easily.

Likewise in "Zigzags of Treachery," the numerous pathos-driven arguments made by the attorney to his client, Mrs. Estep's, behalf routinely fall on the detective's deaf ears. He exclaims, "She is on the verge of collapse just now. She has always been delicate; and the shock of her husband's death, followed by her own arrest and imprisonment, has been too much for her" ("Zigzags" 89).[127] Richmond's appeals to the

[127] It is also interesting that the reader is never provided with first hand evidence of Mrs. Estep's condition. Instead, the information is second-hand, and although the situation is serious, the attorney's frantic pleas seem oddly disproportionate. He is convinced almost from the onset that the situation is more than she can

Continental Op's chivalry are futile. Although the scene he describes sounds similar to the knight's quest to rescue the damsel imprisoned and in some state of distress a la Lancelot in *The Knight of the Cart*, it does not have the same motivating effect on the detective. What drives the Continental Op is not the chance of rescuing the lady, but the case, itself. That Mrs. Estep's life supposedly hangs in the balance is circumstantial. The private detective will solve the case because that is his job; he does not need to incentivize his efforts based on some vague chivalric imperative.

During the Continental Op's investigation he confronts and questions the victim's first wife, whose role in the case is unclear initially. An early theory maintains that her motives are financial rather than romantic ("her interest was more in getting the money than in getting him"). When he presses her about her relationship to Boyd, she becomes wildly defensive: "She talked for five minutes straight, the words fairly sizzling from between her hard lips but the words themselves didn't mean anything. She was talking for time – talking while she tried to hit upon the safest attitude to assume" ("Zigzags" 106). Despite her chattiness, the detective easily recognizes how little she is actually saying as evidenced by the simple fact that he does not convey to the readers its content. He simply disregards it. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, we recognize the conflict between Gawain's courtly desires and his chivalric ideals when tempted by Lady Bertilak. Her sexual games and verbal threats are enough to trip up the vulnerable knight.

The scene further supports the reading of talking being passive and therefore inherently feminine in hard-boiled detective stories. Talking is another feminine tactic

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bear and that her life is in danger. It is unclear whether Richmond's portrayal is true or if he exaggerates the situation because of preconceived notions based on his client's gender.

by which female characters manipulate situations in their favor. In this case, verbal impotence is made evident by the fact that (the first) Mrs. Estep, proceeds to go silent, which the Op admits is "the only way in the world to beat the grilling game" ("Zigzags" 106). Hammett also addresses women that are suspected of "defending themselves" and resisting masculine power. Regarding the aforementioned sexism at play in the justice system, Hammett conveys the unsettling nature of violence committed by females from the male perspective:

> Within the past few months there have been no less than five widely-advertised murders of men by women who were supposed to have been betrayed, or deceived, or one thing or another…Not one of those five women was convicted. As a result, we have the press, the public, and even the pulpit, howling for a stricter enforcement of justice…There has been too much leniency shown feminine criminals, public sentiment says. The pendulum will swing the other way. ("Zigzags" 87)

An obvious deduction is that these are violent times in which the characters live. The fact that females are contributing to the mounting violence is most troubling to the anxious attorney. That hard-boiled detective fiction "publicizes" this concern demonstrates a modification of the medieval model where female liability, at most, is inferred by the reader. Qualifying the outcomes as "widely-advertised" suggests that the news is operating like a public service announcement or warning (to men) and that this particular rant is yet another unsettling reminder. In the subtext of the statement is the lawyer's disbelief in the notion that women are as dangerous as men. The inability to comprehend this fact might explain why the courts were unable or willing to convict any

of the women. The suggestion then hints that, with unanimous consent from traditional bases of power ("press, public, and pulpit"), men must concede the female gender's propensity for violence and recalibrate the justice system.[128] This notion, briefly given voice in Sir Gawain's angry outburst at the Green Chapel, is realized fully in hard-boiled detective fiction.

Richmond's ravings and the changes that he predicts are motivated by fear. The issue of gender equality in the justice system is a seemingly irreconcilable problem in the hard-boiled world. If the current perspective is maintained and courts fail to convict women (in a chauvinistic yet chivalrous form of protection) then the justice system will be failing to protect the public. On the other hand, if the courts accept that women are capable of committing such heinous crimes, they implicitly will be admitting that women should be treated as equals to men. It is a daunting sociological precedent that Hammett puts forth in this writing.

Dashiell Hammett's development of hard-boiled detective fiction institutes an inverted thematic relationship between hard-boiled detective fiction and medieval romance. Raymond Chandler, following the example set by Hammett maintains this thematic relationship in his writing. Although he creates a slightly more complicated dynamic as it pertains to his detective's identity, we see the same early twentieth-century ethos informing his narrative.

Authority in Chandler's Hard-boiled World:

Like Hammett, Raymond Chandler targets many of the same positions of authority for criticism in his short stories, the police being first among them. In

[128] I would like to add that the kinds of criminals to which public sentiment is responding are "feminine," not female. The subtle word substitution insinuates that even the lawyer who raises the issue cannot bring himself to acknowledge the real gender issue.

"Blackmailers Don't Shoot," Chandler's detective, Mallory, an early prototype of his most famous private detective, Philip Marlowe, attempts to solve the case of an aging actress put in a compromising position by an ex-lover. The private detective is joined by MacDonald, a corrupt police officer, who cannot decide which side of the law best suits his interests. Despite displaying loyalty to his criminal counterparts by turning down Mallory's initial bribes (to which Mallory himself admits "must be damned tough,"),[129] he proceeds to betray them and help the private detective escape. By concealing the fact that Mallory is carrying a weapon, he soon aligns himself with the detective, effectively, double-crossing the kidnappers. "Blackmailers Don't Shoot" reveals to its audience that no loyalties are unbreakable. Allegiances to one's self are all that matter in the hard-boiled world and the prospect of a better offer for the future will always trump a commitment made in the past. MacDonald's ambiguous and vacillating position in the story gives testimony to the hard-boiled principle that authority, whether it is in the form of a personal code of conduct or a fixed institution, is no place to put one's faith. This transforms the medieval model completely. The genre's instructional goal is to train its audience to accept ideals that require putting personal or immediate interests aside. Hard-boiled inverts this tenet by emphasizing the individual's authority to determine his own interests, rather than relying on predetermined ideals.

Mallory's early interaction with MacDonald also reveals a point of departure that Chandler makes from Hammet. In Chandler's first short story and his first contribution to the genre, he makes a point in "Blackmailers Don't Shoot" to emphasize the fact that his detectives carry firearms (in this case, a Luger). It is as though Chandler is reminding

[129] MacDonald even confesses that "most any other night," he would accept the offer. By admitting that he would be corruptible under different circumstances, he indirectly states that everything is relative to the situation.

readers of the inherent and omnipresent danger that exists in the hard-boiled world of his detective fiction. During Mallory's detainment, MacDonald lies about Mallory's concealed weapon saying, "Bright boy don't pack a gun. He works with his head. He's smart" ("Blackmailers" 16), which throws off the other kidnappers. While in the scene, Mac's "bright boy" comment is intended to be sarcastic; it can be read as an authorial nod to Hammett's Spade, who famously does not carry a weapon, yet is quite capable in the violent, hard-boiled world. However, Mallory is armed, and Chandler decidedly does not follow Hammett's lead as it is implausible (and arguably an abuse of creative license), given the nature of the profession, for a private detective like Mallory or later Marlowe to be working without carrying a gun. It also does not restrict the author's depictions of violence, as the detective has a means of exerting his own violence.

After MacDonald's demise, Mallory pays a visit to the captain of detectives, who purposefully reconstructs the narrative of the late detective's downfall to preserve the integrity of the police department. Rather than admit Mac's duplicity, Cathcart claims, "The way we figure it MacDonald got killed in the line of duty, takin' with him a dope-peddler named Slippy Morgan. Mac wasn't on the narcotic detail, but it was his night off and he was a great guy to gum-shoe around on his night off. Mac loved the work" ("Blackmailers" 53). The captain's romantic idealization of the facts, fictitious though they may be, entirely ignores MacDonald's corruption, the implications of his actions, and their reflection upon the department as a whole. Even Mallory registers surprise ("Is that so?") despite the preexisting precedent for cynicism in matters of law enforcement's moral fortitude.[130] Nevertheless, the captain is confident in his narrative reimagining

[130] Not missing an opportunity to poke fun at the police's expense, Mallory later mocks the captain's rose-colored lenses: "Or was that the time the roulette wheel backfired and the trick cigar blew a hole in the

because he can influence other departments (D.A., coroner, etc.) by means of blackmail or simply playing upon their professional indifference. Again, the author provides little reassurance in the authority of law enforcement whose superiors employ coercion as a means of productivity and advancement. Unlike the knight who outwardly pledges allegiance to the King's authority and inwardly to his chivalric code, the private detective remains autonomous, decisively rejecting traditional authorities like law enforcement.

The private detective's disapproval of law enforcement by no means is an exclusive opinion. Mallory's stories, being written in the third person, are supplemented by Chandler's omniscient narration. When describing the private detective's entry into Captain Cathcart's office, he paints a dismal scene: "The room he went into was paved with dirty linoleum, furnished with the peculiar sordid hideousness only municipalities can achieve" ("Blackmailers" 52). The particular combination of modifiers used to illustrate the decrepit conditions of the captain's office does not provide any reassurance in the character of the room's occupant. In particular, "sordid" connotes a disreputable, almost sinister quality, certainly something unbecoming of a law enforcement commander. This purposeful debasement of the municipal facilities is not a budgetary matter but a criticism of its occupants' nature. It is the antithesis of the deference that medieval romance authors' show in their descriptions of royal hall and other courtly settings, where passages describing the luxury and excess abound.[131]

In "Finger Man" Chandler uses Marlowe's ill-fated employment as a bodyguard to expose unabashed political corruption. The short story also marks the first appearance

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garage floor?" ("Blackmailers 54). He relates the events to classic slapstick comedy routines as if to say the whole situation is a joke.

[131] Admittedly, the deliberate overindulgence that these medieval scenes have usually signifies something else entirely (some other kind of unspoken shortcoming).

of Chandler's most famous detective, Philip Marlowe, a simple re-appropriation of the character, Mallory, from his earliest works, who has become the quintessential figure in hard-boiled detective fiction. When asked about Frank Dorr, Marlowe says, "I know he's a big politico, a fixer you have to sell if you want to open a gambling hell or a bawdy house – or if you want to see honest merchandise to the city" ("Finger" 107). Getting past the fact that Marlowe lists "honest" commerce last on his list, almost as an addendum to Dorr's resume, the description overtly portrays the politician as corrupt. Like law enforcement and the justice system, Chandler makes no amends for Dorr's illicit behavior and uses the politician as the story's principle villain. One could excuse Theseus' questionable political maneuverings at the end of the "Knights Tale" as signs of a benevolent patriarch; however, no such argument could be made for Frank Dorr in "Finger Man."

The suggestion of Dorr's villainy is not just a matter of hearsay; rather, upon meeting with Marlowe, he exceeds the detective's suspicions. Chandler almost gleefully embellishes their encounter, depicting Dorr as a gluttonous figure, arrogant and self-entitled.[132] He seems to have mastery over his position of power, something that he habitually abuses. He admits, "You know me. I'm tough and I get what I want. There ain't a hell of a lot I want any more, but what I want – I want bad. And ain't so damn particular how I get it" ("Fingers" 135). Dorr's admission to a Machiavellian mode of behavior affirms Marlowe's early impression; the politico is ruthless and has shamelessly built both his career and his reputation around it.

[132] "He was the kind of man who liked to have a desk in front of him, and shove his fat stomach against it, and fiddle with things on it, and look very wise. He had a fat, muddy face, a thin fringe of white hair that stuck up a little, small sharp eyes, small and very delicate hands…He was scratching the cat's head with one of his little neat hands and the cat was leaning against his hand" ("Finger" 134).

To further demonstrate the vast and malicious influence of Dorr, who Marlowe already believes "covers a lot of territory," Chandler connects the politico to the case in which the private detective testifies at the opening of the story. Dorr is an integral figure in the indictment of City Hall lobbyist Tinnen[133] and questions Marlowe's participation in the matter as a witness. He declares, "'You should have let the cops do that,' Dorr said with a grin" ("Fingers" 136). The politico's insinuation is that with the police "in charge," he could have exerted his considerable influence and pressured them to produce the outcome he desired. This statement has the dual effect of boasting Dorr's power, as well as the corruptibility of law enforcement. Nevertheless, Dorr remains optimistic about the outcome of the trial and hints at the public's impressionability, while also threatening Marlowe.[134] Truly, Dorr is not particular about how he gets what he wants.

At the conclusion of the story, Marlowe successfully recovers the stolen money and turns in the guilty parties, with the exception of Dorr, who is shot dead. The effect of Marlowe's involvement also leads to further arrests of political officials that are corrupt. He states, "Not all of the story came out, but enough so that the City Hall boys in the two-hundred-dollar suits had their left elbows in front of their faces for some time" ("Fingers" 163). Evidently, the corruption ring spread beyond Dorr and others were indicted for their culpability. Marlowe ends the story by saying that he returns the stolen money (and receives only a modest amount for his troubles) and adds, "Sometimes I wonder what he (public administrator) did with the rest of it" ("Finger" 163). The

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[133] Later in the story it is suggested that Dorr's men are responsible for orchestrating Tinnen's suicide while incarcerated to insulate the political figure.

[134] Dorr argues, "…I ain't sure that louse of a D.A. wouldn't convict Tinnen without you – if he could sell the folks the idea you'd been knocked off to button your mouth" ("Fingers" 138). He even goes so far as to suggest that Marlowe might consider recanting his testimony in writing. To sweeten the offer, Dorr adds a monetary incentive and finally, threatens Marlowe with a "murder rap."

suggestion is that the private detective did the right thing by turning in the money; however, he has little confidence in the clerk who may have pocketed some if not all of it. Chandler intentionally leaves readers with this ambiguous parting shot aimed at the justice's system's susceptibility to corruption.

In "Killer in the Rain," the basis for his first novel, *The Big Sleep*, Chandler redirects his disparaging gaze to law enforcement as an unworthy fixture of authority. In an effort to reign in the wayward step-daughter of a retired oil tycoon (Dravec), Marlowe's interactions with police do not improve the readers' impressions of their virtue. In what is surely one of Chandler's most disturbing passages, Marlowe witnesses the behavior of street cops during a storm: "The rain splashed knee-high off the sidewalks, filled the gutters, and big cops in slickers that shone like gun barrels had a lot of fun carrying little girls in silk stockings and cute little rubber boots across the bad places, with a lot of squeezing" ("Killer 171). In a different light, the scene could be the substance of a Norman Rockwell painting; however, when posited in the hard-boiled world, it assumes a far more perverse appearance. That the cops resemble gun barrels rather than any other object sets a violent and dangerous tone or even a thinly-veiled phallic reference. Having "a lot of fun carrying little girls" reads like a little "too much" fun is being had. The description of the girls themselves seems less like adolescents and more like young women dressed provocatively.[135] The final touch, excusing the pun, the observation of "a lot of squeezing" is perhaps the most disturbing. On one hand, it is the actions of the officers performed upon these women. On the other, there is the possibility that the female figures described are in fact little (underage) girls. Whether the

[135] The qualifier "cute" in reference to their little boots takes on an uncomfortable meaning as it is paired with their "silk stockings."

suggestion is that law enforcement is pestering women in a suggestive even perverted fashion, or if the scene describes the molestation of young girls, what remains constant is the abuse of power and authority being perpetrated by law enforcement in this brief scene.

When collaborating with the homicide detective on the case (Violets M'Gee), Marlowe's practical reasoning and common sense leads to an unpleasant falling out. M'gee complains, "I have me a swell theory and look what you done to it. I wish the hell I hadn't brought you. Hell with you. I'm goin' after Dravec just the same" ("Killer" 185). Like Hammett's Dundy in "A Man Called Spade," M'Gee exhibits a lack of procedural discretion and judicial patience. The scene becomes almost farcical as the police detective gets ornery because of Marlowe's contribution to the investigation. No matter how much evidence contradicts his theory, M'Gee has set his sights on Dravec as a suspect. The easier, more convenient solution is the one pursued by law-enforcement, regardless of its merit.

Detective M'Gee is a detective of questionable quality from his introduction. Marlowe notes, "His voice had the cheerful sound of a man who had slept well and didn't owe too much money" ("Killers" 185). The comment may be a simple comparison to the private detective who rarely exhibits such a sunny disposition while working. More likely, however, is that Marlowe is insinuating that M'Gee is ignorant, deliberately or conveniently, about the horrors of his job, which allows him to rest well. If his treatment of the alleged Carl Owen homicide is any indication of his engagement with the facts, it is definitely the former. Marlowe does not share his ignorant disposition.[136]

[136] Another way to interpret Marlowe's opinion is that good credit and rest are just the minimal requirements for a positive disposition. Logically, not having debt makes it easier to sleep.

"Killer in the Rain" presents a good opportunity to discuss religion and its place in Chandler's vision in the hard-boiled world. Admittedly, it is difficult to delineate between Chandler's own beliefs and his authorial tone. Numerous times in the text, Chandler intentionally removes the word "God" from the dialogue of his characters and simply substitutes a dash into the text.[137] For example, Guy Slade dismissively says, "I don't give a good – damn where you go or what you do when you get there" ("Killer" 201). While it is doubtful that the omission is a reflection of Chandler's own beliefs, it is more likely a reflection of the amorality and nihilism at work in the hard-boiled world. God and most religious conviction are absent from these stories. While religion and religious devotion figure heavily in medieval romance, rather than diminishing or distorting its place or value, hard-boiled detective writers like Chandler subvert theological authority by physically removing its references in the text.

Identity in Chander's Hard-boiled Detective:

Despite the fact that the hard-boiled world of Chandler's stories intensifies the violence, cynicism, and uncertainty laid forth by Hammett's writings, the same degradation and cultural corrosion cannot be said of his private detective. In fact, in a world where justice is ambiguous and at times even unattainable, the identity of Chandler's Marlowe echoes back to the figure of the knight, displaying fleeting moments of idealism and conviction. Yet, this statement does not contradict the larger argument of my thesis regarding the inversion of medieval romance in hard-boiled detective fiction.

[137] This is true for characters on both sides of the law thus rendering theories about righteousness and religion are null and void.

While Chandler's detective(s)[138] exhibits similar tendencies and dispositions as the chivalric knight, they are unfulfilling and ill-fated. By that I mean that the idealism that is repressed in Marlowe is not grounded in any tangible institution, such as Monarchy or Christianity, or even more in elusive traditions like Chivalry or Courtly Love. Conventional authorities like government, law enforcement, or even the justice system are flawed and are viewed and treated as such by the private detective. As much as he may want to, Marlowe cannot put his faith in these compromised authorities, which leaves a void for where to place his faith and commitment. Consequently, he operates autonomously guided only by a vague sense of justice and morality.

To illustrate this point I want to digress from my short story analysis and address a passage from arguably Chandler's most famous novel, *The Big Sleep*. In the opening pages, Marlowe is summoned to the mansion of a wealthy baron named General Sternwood. As the private detective ("well-dressed" given the circumstances of calling upon a wealthy prospective client) enters the home, he notices a large stained glass window depicting a medieval knight rescuing a vulnerable woman in restraints. He remarks:

> The knight had pushed the vizor of his helmet back to be sociable, and he was fiddling with the knots on the ropes that tied the lady to the tree and not getting anywhere. I stood there and thought that if I lived in the house, I would sooner or later have to climb up there and help him. He didn't really seem to be trying. (Chandler 3-4)

[138] While I am primarily focusing on Chandler's Marlowe, all of his detectives derive from a familiar character type. Detectives Carmady, Malvern, Dalmas, Evans, and Mallory are all relatively similar and represent the foundation for Marlowe who figures not only in Chandler's short stories but also his novels.

The effect of Marlowe's commentary is two-fold: first, he aligns himself with the intentions of the knight to rescue the lady by wanting to help the static knight in his task; second, his aid is prompted by frustration at the knight's lack of progress. Marlowe is traditionally characterized by critics as a modern-day knight.[139] This scene exemplifies this opinion and is oft-cited by critics, in addition to foreshadowing events within the novel.

However, critics often overlook the discrepancy between the chivalric knight and Marlowe that the scene highlights. Marlowe qualifies the exposure of the knight's face as a "sociable" act – one that he believes delays the job he has come to do. It reveals Marlowe's pragmatism in a world that rarely requires little formality,[140] thus inverting the importance placed upon etiquette and proper procedure and in medieval romance. Marlowe sees through the image clearly, or rather, darkly. He qualifies the knight's armor as "dark," which does not necessarily exclude the possibility of "knight in shining armor" status. It simply reflects how Marlowe sees the world. More than likely the knight depicted in the glass is intended to display shining or brightly-lit armor. While the image is medieval and romantic in inspiration, the lighting of the image (that which passes through the stained glass) comes from Marlowe's hard-boiled world, which is metaphorically and at the time of the scene, dark.[141] Marlowe's perception of the image reveals a division between himself and by extension his world, and the one portrayed in the glass.

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[139] E.g. see Robert Merrill's "Raymond Chandler's Plot and the Concept of Plot" and Peter J. Rabinowitz's "Rats Behind the Wainscoting: Politics, Convention, and Chandler's The Big Sleep."

[140] The issue of formality parallels Marlowe's dressing up to meet his important client, but the gesture is unnecessary and proves ill-advised when Marlowe meets with General Sternwood in the stifling greenhouse. In the hardboiled world, such gestures usually prove impractical and unnecessary.

[141] "It was about eleven o'clock in the morning, mid October, with the sun not shining and a look of hard wet rain in the clearness of the foothills" (Chandler *Sleep* 3).

Chandler's private detective also admits to an impending and inevitable intervention on his part, motivated by frustration. While some might jump at the prospect that Marlowe's response to the artwork aligns the chivalric knight with the private detective and his innate desire to help those in need, it would be imprudent. In this particular case, there admittedly is no external incentive, monetary or otherwise, simply a sense of duty that casts him as a romantic hero. However, his motivation is not spurred by the lady held against her will. Instead, Marlowe says his climb would be to "help him," the knight. While it is arguable (questionably so) that he would climb to help a fellow knight, his critical view of the knight's presence and performance thus far suggests that Marlowe's involvement would be something other than chivalric in nature. As Chandler writes in "The Simple Art of Murder," his hero is a "man of honor without thought of it" (Chandler "Murder" 219). Knights of medieval romance entirely are aware of their knightly status, as well as the corresponding duties and responsibilities and do not attempt to hide their identity (whether genuine or implied). As was the case of Gawain in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the knight wears his identity on his sleeve (and the rest of his extensive armament). Marlowe's actions, which some would argue are reminiscent of the romantic knight, often are obscured or concealed deliberately due to his profession.[142] Although he is conscious of what he is doing, he internalizes his decision-making actions and does not take into consideration reputation and other matters of public opinion. This is an issue that has repercussions illustrated most regularly by the aforementioned courtroom prejudice. Ultimately, the scene with General Sternwood's stained-glass window perfectly encapsulates the difference between chivalric romance's

[142] Giving the "private" of private detective yet another meaning.

medieval knight and the so-called modern-day knight, whom Marlowe has come to represent.

It is difficult to reconcile Marlowe's "modern-day knight" label because the exaggerated verisimilitude used to create the hard-boiled world renders such an identity almost obsolete but certainly impractical. The apparent absence of any respectable authority, which gives the knight the lion's share of his identity, is absent in the hard-boiled world (or, at the very least, unworthy). That said, there are other aspects of Marlowe's "identity" that invert the chivalric romance tradition. Perhaps the most apparent quality is Marlowe's lack of self-regard or personal welfare. This, in and of itself, takes many forms. From a monetary perspective, to say that his profession leverages a meager existence would be generous. Marlowe does not flaunt his success publically nor does he pretend to lead a life of luxury. In those rare instances where he does find himself in possession of wealth, like at the end of "Finger Man," his conscience dictates that he turn the money in to the authorities. Although he acknowledges the possibility that the public administrator may have purloined the gambling winnings, he himself does not consider keeping the money for himself. Likewise in "Goldfish" regardless of the fact that he "never heard of the Leander pearls and don't have any money in the bank," ("Goldfish" 475), he honors the arrangement with his client/partner, Kathy Horne, despite the great risks he takes and her minimal contribution to the investigation.[143] Even when the financial stakes are low, he pursues the matter with the same conviction. His participation in "Finger Man" begins with a bodyguard job that is offered by a friend. The doomed Harder offers, "I have a little something for you. Not a

[143] It should also be noted that Marlowe is uncompromising with respect to honoring the agreements made with clients. In spite of Kathy Horne's sentimental and ill-fated reunion with her criminal acquaintance, Marlowe keeps his word and gives her promised cut of the reward.

hell of a lot. But there's carfare in it" ("Finger" 109). Marlowe's friend fails to offer his protector a cut of the winnings (which ends up being $22,000), instead the private detective is satisfied with the "possibility [he] might make a few dollars – legitimately" ("Finger 136).

The private detectives' disregard for their own well-being also takes physical form in Chandler's short stories as the compromising situations that they put themselves into often leave them gravely injured. In an effort to "get in touch with the right people," Mallory makes "a play" in "Blackmailers Don't Shoot" and allows himself to be beaten in an effort to extract information from the thugs. Nevertheless, he remains defiant to their verbal threats while at the same time, sacrificing his body and enduring their abuse.[144] Of course, some will probably disagree on the grounds that chivalric knights suffer their fair share of injuries during their quests. While it is true that Lancelot braves the Sword Bridge, sacrificing his hands to cross, he also admits to surrendering his Reason for Love. This also explains the beating he takes on the first day of the tournament. It is merely a gesture of Love rather than a demonstration of his fighting acumen. Similarly, the cousins' duel in the glade of "The Knight's Tale" is ended precisely because it is disrupting the natural order when Theseus arrives. That he takes advantage of the opportunity to expose the fight is secondary to their unreasonable actions.

The private detective's toughness or fortitude comes from years of experience on the job, not to mention his acceptance of its inherent dangers. It also helps that he is slightly over six feet tall, weighing nearly two hundred pounds and "can take care of

[144] While it is MacDonald (to an extent, covering for Mallory) who is conducting the beating, the punches the private detective takes are real in order to make their deception convincing.

himself." Marlowe uses this experience to his benefit. Unlike Hammett's detectives who discount the value of tough talk, Chandler's private eye utilizes it frequently. However, Chandler does not necessarily reverse Hammett's position; he only modifies it. Marlowe's use of tough talk is a prelude to action; he talks tough because he is prepared to back that talk up with action. Later in "Blackmailers Don't Shoot," Marlowe finds himself in a stare-down with an armed thug. Again, he does not hesitate from the threat. Instead he commands, "Stay right where you are, Henry. I need room to think. You might get a slug into me, but you wouldn't stop my gun from talking a little. The noise wouldn't bother me at all" ("Blackmailers" 48). In the face of considerable disadvantages, he does not yield control of the situation. In fact, the gun pointing at him, Marlowe threatens the assailant. The "room" he needs to think is really a warning about the impending action that he might be forced to take. Also, Marlowe adds that he doesn't care if he gets hurt or even shot in the process.[145] In the end, Marlowe knows he will be the one standing.

No matter how tough Marlowe's talk is, it is still a form of posturing, which rarely gets things accomplished in the hard-boiled world and is only a limited, short-term strategy. Assuredly, this is another reason that Chandler elects to arm his private detectives with guns during their investigations. While talk only gets the private detective so far, sometimes he must endure beatings like the one he receives in "Blackmailers" or even the occasional unexpected blunt force trauma like in "Finger Man" that causes Marlowe to lose consciousness. In other instances, Marlowe invites danger in his pursuit of doing what he thinks is right. Readers are given several

[145] Moments like this probably are why he later admits to his diminishing durability. Chandler's detective sheepishly admits, "I'm getting kind of frail" ("Killer" 167) and accepts the reality of his situation,"…not being bullet-proof is an idea I've had to get used to" ("Killer" 199).

reminders of the implications of Marlowe's testimony in "Finger Man." Fenweather warns, "I think they believed you…then is the time you being to watch your step" ("Finger" 107). The not-too-subtle point being made is that Marlowe's good deed and civic duty have consequences. Nevertheless, it does not cause the private detective to second guess his actions, even when he is threatened by Dorr with a murder rap for Harger. Avoiding compromising one's convictions is easier to do when the framework of those convictions remains relative to the situation or altogether ambiguous. The conflict for the medieval knight, whose principles are established, that is, fixed components of their character, stems from struggling to maintain those absolute convictions. Such conflicts are uncommon in hard-boiled detective fiction, where the detectives are not bound to such fixed ideals, given the world in which they operate.

Beyond the moral relativism that provides ethical and situational cover for the private detective, there is another aspect of the character that illustrates a disregard for self and diminishes his image. While it certainly is present in Dashiell Hammett's stories, Chandler creates a more pronounced relationship between his detectives and alcohol. While Raymond Chandler biographies do not hide the author's struggles with alcoholism and drug abuse in his personal life, the prominence of alcohol and the detectives' propensity for indulgence is a significant characteristic of his hard-boiled fiction. In fact, alcoholism may be tied in with or an extension of the detective's quasi-masochistic approach to his profession. There is hardly a case in which drinking does not figure into the detective's investigation. In the short story "Goldfish," whose events occur over a very short period of time, there are eight different episodes of drinking. It is an interesting coincidence that Chandler began publishing his detective fiction in 1933

("Blackmailers Don't Shoot"), the same year that Prohibition of Alcohol was repealed in the United States through the ratification of the Twenty-first Amendment to the Constitution.

The private detective's use (or perhaps, more accurately, abuse) of alcohol seems to go hand-in-hand with his profession. Whether it is a means of compensation for dubious behavior,[146] an expression of masculinity,[147] an unrestrained indulgence,[148] or merely another narrative example of exaggerated verisimilitude that overstates historical and biographical reality, the overwhelming presence of alcohol has a degenerative effect on the image of the detective. Alcoholism serves as an authorial measure for curbing the identity of the hard-boiled detective, thus negating a romantic view of the character. From the detective's perspective, drinking, subconsciously, may serve as a coping mechanism for the harsh realities of the hard-boiled world.

While all manner of temptations (sexual, moral, ethical, physical, etc.) serve as the basis for the trials in medieval romance, the issue of alcohol abuse or any such vice is rarely associated with the chivalric knight. Consequently, the knight starts his quest from a position of importance and distinction and by failing his test can be humbled or lowered from this place of honor. Hard-boiled detective fiction inverts this dynamic by never initially elevating the detective's position (i.e. setting him on a pedestal), but instead, through the events and outcome of the case, the detective has the opportunity of elevating his position, albeit relatively. However, because of his unchanging public reputation,

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[146] E.g. After failing to adequately provide cover for Harger's casino play, Marlowe buys a pint of Canadian Club rye and proceeds to drink "plenty" ("Finger 119) after regaining consciousness.

[147] To regain his composure after Lou Harger's death, he forcibly compels Miss Glenn to drink with him. The violent, hyper-masculine scene illustrates Marlowe's frustration coupled with a sense of impotence at his inability to have saved Harger.

[148] In "Goldfish" not only does Marlowe accept an offer to drink "Too early" in the day, but proceeds to buy "three quarts of apple brandy at a dollar a quart…" ("Finger" 507). It is not a matter of being pleasant, obliging, or quaint; the detective simply is getting his fix of alcohol for his journey.

social constrictions, judicial prejudice, and certainly his personal behavior during investigations, the private detective struggles to avail himself of these restrictions and improve his status. The abuse of alcohol, in all forms and circumstances, serves as another burden to the detective's identity, which he is unwilling or unable to cast off.[149]

I have elected to highlight the above qualities that distinguish Chandler's detectives from his literary predecessors. Nevertheless, Marlowe (and in all his incarnations) still exhibits the familiar sardonic humor, occupational expertise, superiority to law enforcement authorities, places masculinity at a premium, frequently dispenses with morality, and certainly expresses a cynical world-view as just Hammett's detectives did. However, what is most compelling about the Chandler's Marlowe is his internal struggle with his identity in contrast and conflict with the world around him. Where Hammett's Continental Op openly admits to enjoying his work, Chandler's detective is more introspective of his plight in the hard-boiled world. Returning to *The Big Sleep* and the symbolic role of the knight, Marlowe revisits the comparison during a game of chess. He contemplates resisting temptation after finding a young naked female in his bed, as well as other actions, their meaning, and their implications. He concludes, "I looked down at the chessboard. The move with the knight was wrong. I put it back where I had moved it from. Knights had no meaning in this game. It wasn't a game for knights" (Chandler 152). One requires no knowledge of chess philosophy and strategy to understand the meaning of Marlowe's deduction.[150] The world is ruled and run by hard-boiled kings and queens, people of power and means. Consequently his inadequate

[149] I concede that, tonally speaking, this section comes across as judgmental. However, the significant place that alcohol and its consumption have in these stories forms another characteristic of the genre and fair game for critical analysis.

[150] Marlowe's deduction challenges the chess aphorisms, "A knight on the rim is grim" and "A knight on the side cannot abide."

gestures and futile attempts at knightly behavior are rendered obsolete given these conditions. To bestow the title of modern-day knight upon Marlowe is to ignore the conclusion to which he comes. Knights are essentially another form of pawns, insignificant and expendable (if not entirely obsolete) in the grander scheme of the game (which belongs to the kings and queens). The knights' expendability within the confines of the chessboard suggests the futility of Marlowe's own knightly behavior in the hard-boiled world.[151]

Gender in Chander's Hard-boiled Society:

My resistance to Marlowe's designation as modern-day knight is aided by the familiar, jaded relations between the genders. I have alluded to the importance of masculinity in Chandler's stories and the revision to Hammett's position on tough talk. Correspondingly, Chandler maintains a critical view of the female gender exemplified by the portrayal of women in his stories. The characteristics of the femme fatale regularly figure into his short stories; however, Marlowe does not cautiously indulge like Spade or reject on the basis of incompatibility like the Continental Op. Instead, he simply resists and accepts an almost chaste-identity by keeping things professional. This is not to say that he maintains unbridled and unbreakable respect for women; far from it. Marlowe simply has a better eye for the inherent temptation and danger that these women embody.

In Chandler's first short story, "Blackmailers Don't Shoot," the insecure actress, Rhonda Farr, fulfills the role of femme fatale, despite posing as the victim earlier in the story. When she reveals her complicity in the blackmail scheme, she confesses, "Publicity, darling. Just publicity. Any kind is better than none at all. I'm not so sure

[151] Further evidence of this position is provided by Marlowe killing Canino, because he is unwilling "to be a gentleman of the old school" and give Canino time fire back.

my contract is going to be renewed and I'll probably need it" ("Blackmailers" 38). The plan is nothing more than an opportunistic venture carried out by a ruthless woman desperate for attention but ultimately, aware of the fading limelight. This scene modifies the design in *The Knight of the Cart* where Guinevere's demands of Lancelot during the tournament puts the knight in danger. Where the Queen's motivations are a flight of fancy, a trivial contrivance for her own amusement, in the hard-boiled world, desperate women equate to dangerous women. When Mallory states the damage she has caused, he does so "carelessly" because he knows it will have little effect on her, and therefore it is a moot point.[152] It follows then that Mallory feels no chivalric need to come to the woman's aid. He asks, "Why the hell should I protect you? I don't owe you anything. And you're too damn tight with your dough to hire me…why should I front for a chiseler like you?" ("Blackmailers" 41). While Lancelot abides his Queen's request, Mallory rejects Farr's damsel-in-distress routine, outright. In fact, he turns the tables on her and puts his response in terms of business; there is no money in defending Farr, and he is not in her debt. For his troubles (and in hindsight, a down payment on future injury), he proceeds to take a kiss from Farr, forcefully.[153] There is nothing consensual about the act; he just feels it is owed to him. The hard-boiled detective, unlike the chivalric knight, resists playing the submissive role to the female, regardless of circumstances.

One of the ways in which Chandler's detectives are able to distance themselves from female danger is objectifying them, and by that I mean desexualizing them.

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[152] Farr simply disregards the value of the lives lost by saying, "Two crooks, a double-crossing policeman, make three of them. I should not lose sleep over that trash!" ("Blackmailers" 39) She even rationalizes guilt over the regrettable death of Landry. She admits, "…he chose another business, and in that business he was bound to stop a bullet some time" ("Blackmailers" 39). Her cold-hearted response is devoid of emotion; the inevitability of the outcome, in addition to his poor choice, frees her from responsibility or regret.

[153] "He leaned forward suddenly, put his left hand behind her head and kissed her on the mouth hard" ("Blackmailers" 42).

Mallory pilfers his kiss from Rhonda Farr; there is nothing consensual about the act. The private detective just feels it is owed to him, and now that he has mastery over the situation (she is no longer a threat to him), he can act as he wants. Additionally, Mallory takes liberties with the manner in which he addresses her. He snidely remarks, "You're a hell of a guy…" ("Blackmailers" 42). Mallory's defeminization of Farr is one of the common ways in which Chandler's private detectives escape entrapment by their femme fatales. This ability is an inversion of medieval romance where Sir Gawain is unable to resist the advances of Lady Bertilak. The trap caused by this "renoun" is self-made and his courtly ideals put his reputation and his safety at risk.

In other instances, the private detective receives authorial aid. The femme fatale character in "Finger Man" conveniently is named "Miss Glenn," as if to warn associates of her androgynous nature. While the name is unassuming in and of itself, the fact that her surname is a common male first name suggests a kind of masculinity to her and by extension, her intentions.[154] Marlowe describes her face as "…white and composed, but as expressionless as plaster" ("Finger" 126), which gives her a mannequin or doll-like quality and definitely dehumanizes her. The name "Miss Glenn" also is appropriate for a woman who frequently (that is, when convenient) flip-flops between male and female roles, suggesting her duplicity. Other times, she is perceived as altogether asexual. Upon entering the meeting with Marlowe and the politico Frank Dorr, "She looked dark and drawn and spiritless, and she went past me as though she had never seen me before" ("Finger" 156). Here, Marlowe sees neither male nor female; she is like a wraith, genderless and almost inhuman. This asexual form may reflect her desire not to be

[154] Marlowe witnesses first-hand what he perceives as "plenty wrong with [the] broad's manners" at Canales' casino. For instance, to the apprehensive croupier she aggressively demands, "Get busy and spin that wheel! You take it away fast enough, but you don't like to dish it out" ("Finger" 116, 114).

viewed as female in her dealings with men. The facade is short-lived; however, as Miss Glenn is quick to assume the role of the damsel in need of rescuing if need be. When she loses the upper hand in the meeting, "Miss Glenn turned her head towards me and spoke very gravely, as if it was important to the future of the human race for me to believe what she said…" ("Finger 157). Glenn, now acknowledging Marlowe, overplays her position and reveals her true nature. Marlowe, already wise to her mode, is able to disregard her dramatization and resist her manipulation. The hard-boiled detective's insight and awareness represents another inversion of medieval romance where the knight fails to acknowledge motive. Gawain does not interpret Lady Bertilak's advances as anything more than sexual aggression. Lancelot, too, blindly obeys and does not bother to determine motive when instructed by Guinevere. His adherence to Love (at the sacrifice of Reason), not only endangers him but the ideals that the chivalric knight is expected to maintain.

In "Killer in the Rain" Chandler introduces another version of the femme fatale – one who completely capitalizes on sexuality. In the story, which Chandler "cannibalized" for *The Big Sleep*, the absentee step-daughter is caught in a pornography ring. To describe the unruly girl, Dravec says, "She's what you call man-crazy" ("Killer" 169).[155] To combat the hyper-sexualized character, Marlowe chooses to exert his masculinity upon the girl, admittedly to little effect. "I slapped her face, not very hard" ("Killer 175). The private detective figures this is the best course of action after finding the girl in a stupor over the dead body of the pornography shop owner. The blow is mild at first, with the intent of rousing her consciousness. However, her continued antics and

[155] Chandler does not change Carmen's nature or kind of threat she poses to the detective in *The Big Sleep*. However, a more complete psychological explanation of her condition is provided by her sister, who shares the femme fatale role in the story.

his mounting frustration seem to increase the intensity with which he strikes her. During a later encounter, Marlowe is made uncomfortable by the woman and her unnatural reactions that, in Marlowe's opinion, do not register within the range of normal human emotions:

> She giggled. That gave me a nasty feeling. If she had screeched, or turned white, or even keeled over, that would have been fairly natural. But she just giggled. I began to hate the sight of her. Just looking at her made me dopey. Her giggles went on, ran around the room like rats. They gradually got hysterical. I got off the desk, took a step towards her, and slapped her face. ("Killer 194)

Throughout the story, Carmen continually surprises Marlowe. She is a wild card, impossible to read and hopeless. Marlowe's frustrations that manifest physically, even violently, toward her demonstrate his inability to comprehend and handle her.[156] However, his frustration is understandable and goes to show that in the hard-boiled world, men can never be sure of what women are capable of doing.[157] Nevertheless, such a reaction is unthinkable in medieval romance. Although such female aggression is absent, courtly ideals preclude the knight from behaving in such a manner. This provides some excuse for Gawain's inability to resist Lady Bertilak's advances forcibly. Hard-boiled detective fiction changes the gender dynamic, making its female figures more

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[156] "The blonde took her teeth out of my hand and spat my own blood at me. Then she threw herself at my leg and tried to bite that. I cracked her lightly on the head with the barrel of the gun and tried to stand up. She rolled down my legs and wrapped her arms around my ankles. I fell back on the davenport again. The blonde was strong with the madness of fear" ("Killer" 208).

[157] Of course, the addendum to this point is that the extremity of the psychosis with which Chandler portrays her, it is difficult to identify her as a woman. Her habits and tendencies reduce her at times to an infant (illustrated by her tendency to chew on her thumb) and others times expose her as feral-like being ("Carmen Dravec went down beside him and began to wail like a frightened animal"). And yet, Marlowe's inability to control her suggest that she is almost entirely "other."

formidable. In turn, the private detective's response is intensified to meet that threat, almost regardless of gender.

Finally in "Goldfish," Chandler's detective faces a pair of femme fatales, who threaten the protagonist in different, equally dangerous ways. More prominently featured is the character, Carol Donovan, who, despite her diminutive size, inspires fear and causes havoc. During insincere negotiations with the shady shyster, Madder, Marlowe learns, "She's too damned rough, Marlowe. I've see hard women, but she's the bluing on the armor plate. And you'd never think it to look at her, would you?" ("Goldfish" 488).[158] Madder reveals his first mistake in judging Donovan based on her appearance. Superficial impressions are the first mistake when interacting with femme fatales. Although Madder implies that it is his decision to cut his dangerous partner out, it is an act driven by fear. As the rest of the story demonstrates, Madder simply cannot keep up with Donovan (in resolve or even physically), which makes her unassuming demeanor all the more unnerving. During an encounter with Marlowe, the detective remarks, "She was a girl, about five feet two inches tall, and weighed around a hundred and twenty. Just a girl. I was six feet and a half-inch, weighed one-ninety five. I put my hands up and hit her on the jaw" ("Goldfish" 514). The fact that Marlowe lays out the physical inequality between himself and Carol Donovan before he hits her is a deliberate narrative technique. When all else fails, the private detective has one glaring advantage, and he is not afraid to make use of it. It doesn't matter that she is a woman or that she is much smaller than he

[158] Madder choice of phrase, "bluing on the armor plate," which refers to the grayish-blue finish on metal produced by heating, is interesting as a built-in reference to medieval metallurgy and armament.

is. He hits her regardless.[159] It is an act provoked by frustration (like with Carmen) and, to some extent, desperation, given the situation. Ultimately, all is fair in the hard-boiled world, and in this case, cooler heads do not prevail. In the absence of courtly codes of behavior or chivalrous notions of proper conduct, the hard-boiled detective is free, according to his moral temperament.

The short story's other "sleeper" femme fatale is the elusive thief's wife, Mrs. Sype, who attempts to hide her true nature by masking her intentions until the story's last page. In an attempt to swindle Marlowe, she plays the innocent mourning wife and asks the detective for the fake pearls as a keepsake of her recently departed husband. However, Marlowe discerns the act and says, "'Yeah, you were pretty good in there for a while,' I said. 'I damned near fell for it… "Phony" was a shade out of character for you. Your work with the Colt was fast and kind of ruthless'" ("Goldfish" 520). Marlowe uncovers the wife's duplicity, ironically by her use of the word "phony" because she has been playing the phony the whole time. Furthermore, his professional expertise informs him that her mastery of the revolver is unbecoming of the role she played. Marlowe's ability to identify potential threats, particularly those posed by female figures, are nearly as important as his capacity for solving his cases. Consequently, it is not unusual for the two to be related in some way (as with the Leander pearls of the "Goldfish" case). The private detective's resistance to the temptations of the femme fatale is something separates him from the knight whose chivalric code and courtly manners demand that he serve the females he encounters. This is certainly the case for Gawain, who's three-day trial demonstrates he is unable defend himself in service to the lady of the enchanted

[159] Marlowe almost immediately admits that his actions were out of character for the detective: "That was crazy, but I had all I could stand of the Donovan-Madder act, the Donovan-Madder guns, the Donovan-Madder tough talk" ("Goldfish" 514).

castle. In addition, Lancelot is subservient to all kinds of secondary female desires in *The Knight of the Cart,* all the while remaining committed to rescuing Guinevere.

Authority in Spillane's Hard-boiled World:

Mickey Spillane's contribution to crime fiction represents the next generation in the development and evolution of the private detective story and the culmination of the genre's inversion of medieval romance to formulate detective fiction.[160] While Hammett outlined a hardened persona to compliment the exaggerated verisimilitude of the hard-boiled world, Chandler literally measured the private detective against the chivalric knight to illustrate the inversion. Finally, Spillane's contribution to hard-boiled detective fiction provides the most vivid and fully realized inversion of medieval romance. His private detective, Mike Hammer, puts any remaining notions of the private detective serving as a modern day knight to rest, and true to his name, he smashes any lingering doubts of their likeness. The thematic inversion is so severe, and the protagonist's moral standing is so ambiguous that he straddles the line between hero and criminal. As a private detective, Hammer operates autonomously, that is, without regard for outside authorities. This autonomy also is reflected in his identity where his subjective views govern all thoughts and actions. He is unlike Hammett's and Chandler's detectives, who represent the inversion of the chivalric knight's identity (determined by external ideals) by allowing circumstance and situation to determine a course of action. With Spillane's Hammer, external circumstances are even ignored creating a single-minded, self-determining entity, resolute and tenacious in his endeavors. Also, Hammer establishes a

[160] As I mentioned earlier, others may contest that Ross MacDonald, John D. MacDonald, or even Walter Mosley should be the literary successor in the line of Hammett and Chandler, and I recognize the merit of each's case. However, I am suggesting that Spillane is the next logical offering for my particular argument, given the parameters of my research and the thesis that I have set forth.

new precedent for gender relations in his stories. While the same unsteady play between misogyny and apprehension are at work in Spillane's first novel, *I, the Jury*,[161] particularly with regard to the femme fatale figure, his private detective takes masculinity to an extreme. The admiration and unadulterated devotion to the female gender demonstrated by characters like Lancelot and Palamon and Arcite in chivalric romances are terminated abruptly and without regret. Female expendability is the ultimate sign of contempt on the part of the private detective. Despite his critical reputation, Spillane's detective fiction fulfills the genre's rejection of Victorian medievalism and the inversion of medieval romance's central tenets.

In contrast to the prior detectives' antagonistic attitudes, Spillane puts forth a constructive and sympathetic view of law enforcement authorities in *I, the Jury*. Mike Hammer frequently reiterates his positive regard for the police; there is no of the animosity between the private detective and his law enforcement counterparts, particularly Captain Pat Chambers. In spite of their competitive pursuit of the killer, Hammer is gracious in his opinion:

> It constantly amazed me that there were men like him (Chambers) on the force. But then, when you get past the uniforms and into the inner workings of the organization you find the real thinkers. They have all the equipment in the world to work with and plenty of inside contacts…Not much went on that they didn't know about. There was vice. As much as any outfit, but there were still men like Pat that no money could buy. (*Jury* 94)

[161] All references to Spillane's *I, the Jury* are from *The Mike Hammer Collection Vol. 1* (New York: New American Library, 2001).

The private detective presents a more pragmatic view of law enforcement than his literary predecessors. I would not go so far as to say that Hammer admires them, but he accepts their strengths, as well as their weaknesses.[162] By differentiating Hammer in this area, Spillane separates his protagonist from past incarnations; he is not a replica of the Continental Op, Sam Spade, and certainly not Marlowe. Their professional superiority to the police affords them a certain degree of condescension. However, the disparity between law-enforcement and the private detective has narrowed, apparently, and Hammer does not feign to associate himself with Chambers. He does not resent their cooperation despite his personal agenda. On one hand, his actions suggest that he is a vengeful manifestation of willpower and unbridled emotion and on the other a realist – one who sees the world for what it is and equally importantly, what it offers.

The private detective is not alone in his positive view of law enforcement. Rarely in previous hard-boiled texts do readers get a sense of the public's perception of law enforcement (although it is sometimes insinuated by private detectives and is rarely favorable). However, Spillane presents the marginalized point of view, which is in keeping with the private detective's impression of law enforcement. When Hammer's private detective identity will not suffice, and he must impersonate a police detective, he is met with the welcoming and gracious arms of the public. For example, in an effort to gain access to Williams' apartment, Hammer utilizes the adjacent neighbor's window.

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[162] Despite Spillane's rehabilitation of the law enforcement image, the exemption to this alteration is the familiar rivalry between urban and rural police, with criticism still directed towards the latter. Hammer briefly encounters "hayseed county cops," and is openly critical of their actions. He explains, "The county police arrived with all the pomp and ceremony of a presidential inaugural address. The chief, a big florid-faced farmer, pranced into the room with his hand on the butt of a revolver and promptly placed me under arrest for murder. Two minutes later, after a demonstration of arm waving, shouting and bulldozing of which I did not think myself capable, he retreated hastily and just as promptly unarrested me…These county cops have no respect for authority outside their own limits" (*Jury* 105). While his criticism of their actions is a bit hypocritical, (he respects but doesn't always follow outside authorities), Hammer's view is consistent with previous representations of rural authorities.

The man is happy to oblige and assist the officer: "'Police,' was all I had to say. He didn't bother looking the badge over, but opened the door in haste. A good respectable citizen that believed in law and order" (*Jury* 58). Despite the cynicism that Hammer projects,[163] the neighbor's willingness to help demonstrates the positive and productive relationship between law enforcement and civilians.[164] There is even a measure of pride in the opportunity that the neighbor has to assist the detective. He explains to the woman who later enters, "Police…they want me to help them" (*Jury* 58). The implied emphasis would stress the "me" and "them" to reflect the police's need for his help. Regardless, the scene punctuates the reformed image of law enforcement in Spillane's hard-boiled world and further stresses the private detective's unwillingness to acknowledge them as an authority.

This revision of law enforcement authorities represents a significant change in the hard-boiled subgenre. Previously, authors like Hammett and Chandler imagine the secondary world of hard-boiled detective with an emphasis on the world, itself, using exaggerated verisimilitude to establish the urban landscape as crime-ridden and corrupt – a place that the law enforcement has neither the means nor ability to control. It is within this setting that the private detective moves, often remaining literally and metaphorically in the shadows. Having this literary foundation, Spillane shifts the emphasis, that is, he mutes the setting and imparts a greater or more pronounced identity upon the private

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[163] Hammer insinuates the man is only "looking innocent" and will undoubtedly attempt to cash in on the voluntary goodwill gesture. Ironically, the encounter is all a part of Hammer's own charade, an act of public and professional disobedience that allows the detective to enter Williams' apartment illegally. The scene reflects the private detective's cynicism and his indictment of society. While Chambers recognizes citizens as "taxpayers," whom he serves, Hammer is skeptical of would-be do-gooders and quick to assume they have ulterior motives.

[164] This is reiterated by the neighbor's farewell: "Any time we can be of service, officers…Let us know. Glad to help" (*Jury* 60).

detective.[165] As I will demonstrate, the private detective now exists beyond or even above the law (despite its newfound virtue). Spillane's private detective is bigger than life,[166] now an exaggerated figure, himself, and the tenuous position between good and evil is even more ambiguous, consequently.

The comment that immediately follows Hammer's defense of law enforcement is an acknowledgment of what differentiates or separates him from joining this authority. He adds, "I would have been one (police detective) myself if there weren't so damn many rules and regulations to tie a guy down" (*Jury* 94). How can Hammer be a part of a structured and ordered organization when he operates autonomously? It is an impossibility.[167] He follows his own rules and regulations and any external constraint or influence that contradicts his interests are summarily ignored by Hammer. Previous hard-boiled detectives will not follow established authorities (law enforcement, justice system, politicians, etc.) because they are corrupt and inept. Hammer chooses not to follow them because of who he is and more immediately, what he wants to do. These authorities that come with rules and regulations prevent Hammer from exerting his own will and fulfilling his own needs. Furthermore, he does not make excuses for his autonomy; rather, he embraces it as a means of efficiently doing his job.[168] In contrast to law enforcement, he asserts, "You're a cop, Pat. You're tied down by rules and regulations. There's someone over you. I'm alone. I can slap someone in the puss and

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[165] This is not to say that the urban landscape has change or that there is any significant change to the exaggerated verisimilitude at work in the hard-boiled world. Rather, there is a noticeable shift in focus. With the landscape understood and established by previous imaginings, greater attention and license can be given to the protagonist who operates in the world – his identity, his perspective, and his actions.

[166] He is even bigger than the authorities that surround him.

[167] Chandler proposes such a conflict of interest as Marlowe used to work as an investigator in the District Attorney's office before being fired for insubordination ("talking back").

[168] Ironically, Hammer's actions in *I, the Jury* are not part of the job. His revenge scheme is a personal not professional task.

they can't do a damn thing. No one can kick me out of my job" (*Jury* 7). Hammer's brash declaration underscores the private detective's freedom to act with impunity.[169] In Spillane's novel, impunity is pushed to its limited as Hammer commits homicide in the name of justice. Moral absolutes, like medieval conceptions of chivalry and courtly behavior are absent, and instead the void is filled with relativism.

What drives Hammer to exercise his subjective autonomy is the cold-blooded murder of his friend, Jack Williams. The death and the unsettling circumstances surrounding it, drive the private detective into a murderous rage of his own – one that he does not attempt to hide. Hammer comes right out and informs the police of his intentions to kill the killer in the same manner in which Williams died. Chambers' attempts to talk Hammer down are emphatically dismissed. Hammer proposes, "From now on, it's a race. I want the killer for myself. We'll work together as usual, but in the homestretch, I'm going to pull the trigger" (*Jury* 6). In this situation, Hammer does not distinguish between justice (allowing the police to resolve the matter) and vengeance (killing the killer). Because of his autonomy, he defines what justice is, and in this case, justice and vengeance are synonymous in his own mind. Now, it is essentially a race between himself and the police, who, because of "rules and regulations," have a different definition of justice that does not follow the Old Testament principle of an eye for an eye.[170]

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[169] During an interrogation with a suspect, Hammer "swung on him with all of my hundred and ninety pounds" (*Jury* 20). Hammer commits this assault in the presence of Capt. Chambers, whose unresponsiveness suggests that he condones the private detective's act. This scene illustrates the distinction that Hammer makes between himself and the police.

[170] Hammer states, "All he could do was to try and beat me to him (the killer) and take it from there" (*Jury 8*).

While it certainly is appropriate to call Hammer's approach to the case untempered or even reckless, it clearly exemplifies the disparity between the police and the private detective as figures of authority. The former's approach is controlled by the same "rules and regulations" that Hammer frowns upon, and yet does not necessarily hinder their progress (ironically, it is Chambers who stays a step ahead of Hammer for most of the investigation). Where the private detective distinguishes his mode from law enforcement is his ability to do "the dirty work." He is willing to "break a guy's arm to make him talk" and "shove his teeth in with the muzzle of a .45 to remind him you aren't fooling" (*Jury* 10). That Hammer unabashedly qualifies his approach as "dirty" and makes no amends for this questionable methods is the fundamental point of distinction between the private detective and law enforcement.[171] Furthermore, it distinguishes him from the chivalric knight. As I illustrated in the first chapter, the failure of the knight's quest is a matter of abandoning traditional authorities (and public duties) and indulging in personal desires. For example, Lancelot favors Love over Reason in his pursuit of Guienevere, Gawain's sense of mortality leads him to accept the girdle (sacrificing his promise and by extension, his chivalric duties), and finally, Theseus' objection to the duel is the fact that it is private. The message conveyed in each of these romances is the importance of authority and how the knight must bend his actions towards that authority (whatever form it takes). From a medieval perspective, Spillane's private detective is fallen before his quest begins, because there is no authority beyond himself. Authority in medieval romance emphasizes how the knight completes his task as much as (and in some cases more so than) that he completes his task. As his own authority, forsaking all

[171] It also makes the reader question just what *kind* of authority the private detective is.

outside influence, Spillane's protagonist does not distinguish between the two or more accurately, disregards the "how" entirely.

Another familiar form of authority receives an improved image in Spillane's *I, the Jury*; namely the legal system. Like Hammett and Chandler, Spillane concedes that the same insufficiencies and pitfalls are in existence. Interestingly, most of the criticisms are revealed by an enraged Hammer, who uses the potential flaws in the system to justify his vendetta. After acknowledging the impartiality of juries ("as they are supposed to be") he quickly counters, "…But this time I'm the law and I'm not going to be cold and impartial" (*Jury* 7). Hammer attempts to redefine his emotionally compromised state as the proper mode of delivering justice in this particular case. He even indicts the public's lack of discernment at the hands of manipulative lawyer, who can "screw up the whole thing" (*Jury* 6). Hammer seems ready to dismiss the part of the Bar Association's Code of Professional responsibility that states, "The duty of a lawyer, both to his client and to the legal system, is to represent his client zealously within the bounds of the law" ("Canon 7" 701-702). He takes his abhorrence to the next level when he states, "People. How incredibly stupid they could be sometimes. A trial by law for a killer. A loophole in the phrasing that lets a killer crawl out. But in the end the people have their justice. They get it through guys like me once in a while" (*Jury* 14). In questioning the validity and rationality of the system, Hammer adopts a savior-mentality. Society's problems are now his responsibility to fix where and when he can as the justice system cannot be relied upon.[172] It should be noted that Hammer's frustration stems from the mere possibility of Williams' killer escaping justice and not necessarily from the legal system's ability to find perpetrators guilty. He is using the possibility of a potential outcome to condemn the

[172] Admittedly, Spillane is not as critical as Hammett's detectives in this regard.

entire system. Furthermore, he is using this off-chance to validate his own behavior. In essence, he is justifying the relativism his using to determine his course of action. In short, killing Williams' killer is a necessary evil to guarantee "justice" is served.

Hammer is alone in his prejudice toward the legal system, as it pertains to this case. When Hammer presses the psychologist, Charlotte Manning, for an answer as to a suspect's guilt or innocence, she avoids passing judgment: "You are asking me to do a difficult thing, pass judgment on a person. Usually it takes twelve men and a judge, after hours of deliberation, to do the same thing…I'm afraid I'd be passing a sentence of death on a person. No, I won't tell you that, you'd be too quick to kill" (*Jury* 53). Ironically, it is Williams' killer who expresses the necessary restraint and sound judgment (when to not do so might ensure her safety). However, what Hammer proposes ("passing judgment") is exactly what he has assumed the responsibility of doing in the wake of Williams' murder. In fact, he has already passed judgment; it is only a matter of finding to whom judgment will be passed. The meaning and significance of the novel's title becomes clear as justice is pilfered from traditional authority (law enforcement and the legal system) and taken on by the private detective. Where in Chapter 1 we see that the medieval knight attempts to serve external authorities in a variety of forms (e.g. Chivalry, Christianity, Reason, Love, etc.), now Spillane's detective has internalized authority, giving himself subjective power to act as he deems best.

I, the Jury also presents a new type of authority, the newspapers, whose power is derived from the influence that they have over public opinion. However, it is never entirely clear exactly what their perspective is. In other words, it is unclear if they are writing with an agenda of their own or merely one with which the narrator, Hammer,

does not always agree. The private detective informs readers that in the wake of Williams' murder, "The papers make me look like a kill-crazy shamus…" (*Jury* 14). In this instance, because readers are privy to Hammer's inner dialogue (as well as his public statements) at the crime scene, a "kill-crazy shamus" is a fairly accurate portrayal. That the case is personal to Hammer (because the victim is a fellow-veteran, who saved his life in World War II) is notable; however, it does not detract from the facts. Hammer has taken the vendetta on with audacious conviction, not to mention with violent intentions.[173] Therefore, the newspaper's article is accurate and unbiased. News reporting also unfavorably targets law enforcement. Unlike the positive stance that Hammer conveys frequently, police are called "saps" in the newspapers. However, it is also a matter of frequency as it is quality. Coming to law enforcement's defense, the private detective believes, "The papers rag the cops too much" (*Jury* 94). It is likely that Hammer's opinion differs from that of the newspapers because he accepts the police's flaws, knowing their limitations, which might suggest that he is forced to reflect upon his own flaws. Whether or not the critical portrait of law enforcement is warranted, the newspapers retain the potential to influence the public and even other authorities in Spillane's novel.[174]

Although Spillane does not imitate the precedent set by Hammett and Chandler when it comes to condemning traditional forms of authority in the hard-boiled world, the

[173] Hammer later admits, "I hate too hard and shoot too fast. That's why people say the things about me that they do" (*Jury* 140). This admission to the use of excessive force is the basis for the reputation that newspapers print. There is no defense or argument to the contrary; the reputation is well-established in the novel.

[174] While it is necessary to recognize newspapers as another form of authority in the text, I should also add that the affect of their authority tenuous. Upon reading his depiction at the crime scene (with the benefit of some temporal and spatial distance), Hammer is unmoved and maintains his vengeful rage. Furthermore, the negative criticism of law enforcement does not seem to sway Williams' neighbor, who is eager to cooperate with the "police."

effect remains the same. In other words, Spillane omits criticism because his detective, while cooperative, is separate from these authorities. His autonomy renders his relationships to authority obsolete; they have no influence on his behavior or his methods. The inversion of medieval romance is accomplished by his self-determination. If nothing else, his subjectivity is enhanced by his fair and balanced view of traditional authority.

Identity in Spillane's Hard-boiled Detective:

Of the three private detectives presented in this chapter, Mike Hammer's identity is the most liberated from the medieval, chivalric model. As *I, the Jury* demonstrates, he is a man of singular purpose, autonomously driven, without restraint or acknowledgement of external authority. There is one scene in particular that highlights the division between the medieval and the modern and leaves little doubt that the two figures, the chivalric knight and the private detective, are not to be confused. While pursuing the true identity of John Hanson (Hal Kines), Hammer and Chambers enter a library to find additional collegiate yearbooks. Hammer's experience in the library illustrates my point:

> The place was worse than a morgue. It's high, vaulted ceilings were never reached by the feeble light that struggled to get out of the bulbs. Our footsteps echoed hollowly through the corridors and came back to us in dull booming sounds. The statues seemed to come alive as our shadows crossed them. The place was a bad spot to be in at night if you had the jitters. (*Jury* 77)

On one level, Hammer's discomfort in the library could be reflective of the anti-intellectualism that is often found in hard-boiled detective fiction.[175] The scene also

[175] Most critics would argue that Chandler's Marlowe is not portrayed as anti-intellectual given his time in college, his knowledge of philosophy and aptitude for chess. However, Marlowe's intellectual status is

counters attempts to identify the private detective as the modern equivalent to the medieval knight (as commonly occurs with regard to Philip Marlowe). The kind of uneasiness that Hammer feels in this "Gothic" building underscores how out of place he is in this medieval, castle-like structure. The space is almost oppressive to his presence, as well as the light. From an audible perspective, even his footsteps are drowned out or suppressed by the setting. Admittedly, the perceived reanimation of the stone figures is my favorite detail that Spillane adds. While the effect is not unique in romance literature, it serves as an appropriate metaphor for my comparative analysis of medieval romance and hard-boiled detective fiction. The gothic statues are reanimated by the presence of the detective, as if to exert their identity for comparison's sake. Even Hammer's unsettling perception of the setting ("worse than a morgue" and "bad spot"), suggests that he does not belong in this space where meta-critical comparisons to his literary ancestors can be made.

In the previous section, I mentioned that the private detective operates autonomously, that is, he is his own authority. Because so much of Mike Hammer's identity is connected to the imposition of his authority in *I, the Jury*, it is necessary to examine further exactly what kind of authority he represents. To say that he is vengeance personified is not a difficult interpretation to reach because he commits himself so completely to killing his friend's killer. In previous representations of the private detective, the sleuths customarily are satisfied identifying the guilty party. But, as the

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played down by the character himself who, regarding his verbal skills sarcastically admits that he can speak English, "if he's required to." Similarly, in "Too Many Have Lived," the story's victim is ridiculed for his academic pursuits: "He's a bad egg. He doesn't do anything. Writes poetry or something" ("Too Many" 1). Hammer, too, exhibits a similar intellectual-phobia while looking over Manning's collection of books. He observes, "This one was titled, *Psychology of Marriage.* Brother, it was a dilly. If it weren't for the big words I would have enjoyed it. I wished they would write stuff like that in language for the layman" (*Jury* 109).

title of Spillane's novel and the disposition of his protagonist suggests, this does not suffice. Finding Williams' killer is only half of the undertaking. To exact revenge, however, Hammer also assumes responsibility for carrying out justice, which he defines, and sees fit to deliver.

Furthermore, more questions are raised by the "fitness" or suitability of Hammer's vengeance. The aforementioned Old Testament classification, while disturbing for some readers, is justifiable to others (and seemingly so for other characters, including police authorities, who take notice of Hammer's declaration). It is reminiscent of the exchange of blows at the center of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* where maintain a *quid pro quo* arrangement is required by the knight to maintain his honor. As we learn, Gawain is not up to the task and arguably fails to live up to his side of the bargain. Conversely, Hammer's volatility gets the best of him during the story. At times, he seems willing to carry out a disproportionate response. In defense of his position, he explains, "They (bad guys) hate me because if they mess with me I shoot their damn heads off. I've done it before and I'll do it again" (*Jury* 7). Similarly, he extends his vendetta by adding, "I'm going to plunk one right in his gut, and when's dying on the floor I may kick his teeth out" (*Jury* 8). Of course, these statements are made during Hammer's initial encounter with Williams' body so the argument could be made that his emotions are getting the better of him. However, these are not isolated incidents.

The private detective maintains the same self-righteous and empowered approach throughout the story. During his preliminary interrogation of Kalecki and Hines, he states, "If you're under suspicion it's to me. I'm the one that counts, because when I find the one that did it, he dies. Even if I can't prove it, he dies anyways. In fact, I don't even

have to be convinced too strongly" (*Jury* 18). While Hammer is presenting a threatening front to intimidate the two men (also to reflect his urgency in the matter), readers have every reason to believe that he is telling the truth.[176] He needs to believe he has found the killer. I am careful not to use the word "know" in this instance because it implies evidentiary proof. Such proof is what the courts require (the phrase "beyond a reasonable doubt" comes to mind) but not the private detective with a vendetta. He also adds that he will kill those that get in his way.[177] This is reminiscent to the previous comment made by Hammer about bad guys that "mess" with him. Ultimately, Hammer is revealing the Machiavellian nature of his investigation by acknowledging the potential for collateral damage (which is of little consequence to him). The scene also confirms narratively the private detective's intentions and how morally compromised this protagonist is. This is, by design, the risk he runs when he is not dependent on or in service of another authority. The character is unable to recognize when he has gone too far. By contrast, Gawain's betrayal of his chivalric ideal is evident, not only to the reader, but, most of all, to Gawain, who is overcome by the implications of his failure. Because of the inversion built into Hammer's identity, there is no such moral gauge.

The nature of Hammer's rage and his readiness for violence also raises the possibility that it is a symptom of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder caused by his experience in the war.[178] Hammer identifies the war as a turning point in his perspective

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[176] It could also be argued that Hammer is attempting to supersede/supplant the authority of the police as his suspicions should be of greater concern to potential suspects.

[177] "Before I'm done I may shoot up a lot of snotty punks like you, but you can bet that one of them will have been the one I was after, and as for the rest, tough luck" (*Jury* 18).

[178] According to the National Institute of Mental Health, PTSD can occur in individuals who may have witnessed a harmful event that happened to a love one. This certainly applies to Hammer and Williams's relationship during the war when the latter "…said he'd give his right arm for a friend and did when he stopped a bastard of a Jap from slitting me in two. He caught the bayonet in the biceps and they amputated his arm" (*Jury* 5).

regarding the dregs of society: "After the war I've been almost anxious to get some of the rats that make up the section of humanity that prey on people" (*Jury* 14). Hammer is hell-bent on addressing social problems that plague the city. His intentions are upright, if not commendable; however, the assumed manner in which he would accomplish this task (presumably, similar to his manner of finding Williams' killer) is morally questionable. It opens the possibility of Hammer transforming from private detective to vigilante. When he reveals these impulses to Charlotte Manning, a psychologist, she asks him directly whether or not the war has inspired such attitudes, his response is alarming: "'I've always been like that,' I said, 'as long as I could remember. I hate rats that kill for the fun of it. The war only taught me a few tricks I hadn't learned before'" (*Jury* 90-1). Whether or not there Hammer is suffering from PTSD or his outlook reflects a preexisting sociopathic condition (that that the war evidently drew out) is unclear. What can be said, with some definitiveness, is that Hammer is morally and potentially mentally compromised by the death of his friend, Jack Williams.

Hammer's reaction to the evidence found inside Kalecki's safety-deposit box supports my previous assessment of his volatility and his inability to measure justice in this case. He states, "It was there, all of it. Evidence (for 'every vice charge there is') enough to hang George Kalecki a dozen times over. I was really grateful now that I had put a slug into him. The guy was a rat, all right" (*Jury* 113-4). There is an interesting juxtaposition at play here with Hammer confirming the evidence needed to convict Kalecki within the confines of the legal system after the fact. However, it is followed by his delight in having killed him. Traditional justice is insufficient (and apparently irrelevant) in the matter; only justice that he deems appropriate and deals himself are

suitable. Furthermore, Hammer's murderous intentions have spread beyond Williams' killer, and now he has fulfilled his desire to seek retribution against those that plague society (in this case, vice crimes). He even identifies Kalecki as one of the "rats." His morally compromised position makes it very difficult to distinguish between the private detective and the criminal. It is the risk he assumes when he identifies himself as a figure of authority. Hammer has sacrificed any sense of objectivity.[179]

I have previously suggested that the private detective's place along the social spectrum of the hard-boiled world is difficult to determine by design. Professionally speaking, he is a defender of the law in title; however, his attitude and his propensity for flaunting the law for his own benefit suggests otherwise. Like his hard-boiled predecessors, Spillane resists categorically classifying or locating the private detective in society. Instead, he places Hammer in varying social scenarios to illustrate his ability to transcend traditional classification, as well as varying degrees of legality and criminality. The effect of this experiment, in Hammer's case, is a man who is markedly more comfortable beyond the law than within it. While visiting the Hi-Ho Club, Hammer explains, "It used to be a bootleg spot during Prohibition, but changed into a dingy joint over the years. It was a very unhealthy spot for strangers after dark…In this racket it's nice to have connections in places like that" (*Jury* 44).[180] Hammer's insight reveals his knowledge of the inner workings of the streets. However, it is setting in which he is comfortable, familiar, and where his reputation precedes him. For example, he notices how two fellow patrons react to his presence: "When they heard my name mentioned

[179] I should also add that because of the generic tradition, specifically, the private detective's position as the protagonist, it is arguable that the reader's objectivity is also compromised by the inherent structure of the story.

[180] The apparent socio-economic changes that Hammer alludes to might make this scene appealing to cultural criticism, not to mention the prevalence of racial slurs.

they both moved their drinks six feet down the bar" (*Jury* 44). Hammer inspires fear and caution from those around him in the gutters of the hard-boiled world. It is reasonable to assume, given his interactions with the bartender and his recurrent drinking, that his relationship to the establishment is not purely utilitarian. However, he is not a shining knight, but accepts his identity as one who operates on the streets among (and at times with) criminals. To do so, it requires that be well-acquainted with the other side of the law.

A comparison of Hammer's comfort in the Hi-Ho Club to Lancelot's ride in the cart will best illustrate the inversion at work. The private detective's presence in this dump does not evoke surprise or shock; in fact, patrons and employees alike know him. The familiar description he provides, as well as the violent behavior that he is subject to during his visit (which he neither seriously protests nor objects to), suggest that the bar serves the dregs of the society. Conversely, Lancelot's willingness to enter the cart to find the Queen, is an unthinkable act, unbecoming of a knight. Therein lies the distinction. While it is an absolute debasement of the knight's identity to enter a cart, it is not a degrading act for the private detective to enter this dive. The chivalric knight is always a knight regardless of where his quest takes him, and it is his duty to maintain his knightly identity without fail. On the other hand, the private detective does not carry such a lofty reputation. Perhaps because of his moral latitude, or even the ambiguity depicted in his literary predecessors, the private detective is viewed with skepticism, neither completely condemned or commended socially. More accurately, this mutable identity is revealed when the private detective enters the brothel.

However, there is an exception or limit to the private detective's willingness to debase his identity. Despite his aggressive sexual nature and his arguably illicit inclinations,[181] Hammer is quick to condemn those he deems sexual deviants. He is in keeping with Marlowe's criticism of this ilk. While observing the shady brothel visitors, Hammer gives voice to his opinions: "I knew the kind. Fat greasy people from out of town. Slick city boys who played the angles and were willing to shell out the dough. Rich jokers of both sexes who liked smut and filth and didn't care where they got it. A pack of queers who enjoyed exotic, sadistic sex. Nasty people…" (*Jury* 69). While Hammer is quick to denounce these people, he admits to his knowledge of "the kind"; regrettably, it would seem. This social and moral condemnation does not diminish the fact that Hammer is more than aware of their existence, but exemplified by his ability to specifically call out and identify each group. As a private detective in the hard-boiled world, he is professionally associated with them.

The final example of the private detective's variable place in society is during his visit to the Bellemy's suburb estate for a day of sport and leisure. Every aspect of Hammer's presence at the comically bourgeoisie affair, points to the fact that he does not belong, not the least of which is his ill-suited attire (for which he is mocked by the hostess). In fact, he explains, "…all the sports I intend to indulge in will be done at the bar" (*Jury* 123). When he does make an attempt at tennis, he describes it as a "hectic ten minutes." Hammer is out of his element throughout the excursion, and the only relief he gets is from the frequent visits to the bar, criticizing other spectators, and presumably, while having a tryst with the nymphomaniac. Finally, it is only when he changes out of

[181] E.g. his illegal-entrance into Williams' apartment or the way he threatens the elevator operator in Kalecki's downtown apartment.

the sport slacks and "back into [his] street clothes…patt[ing] old junior (his gun)" that he feels "normal" (*Jury* 125). Spillane proposes that Hammer's place in society is less ambiguous than previous incarnations of the private detective. He is someone that moves so easily in the underworld and yet is so uncomfortable in high society. Perhaps his profession provides sufficient explanation as to why he is more comfortable with scoundrels than with aristocrats.[182] Again, this design is an inversion of the medieval romance structure where the knight is the champion of nobility and aristocracy, respected and revered by all. As illustrated by Spillane's Hammer, the same cannot be said of the private detective.

Other aspects of the identity are familiar to Hammett and Chandler's writing: the world's duplicity, the employment of tough talk, and the prevalence of sex and sexuality. However, much in the same way that he develops the private detective, Spillane deliberately amplifies these other elements to create a more visceral experience for his reader. This is particularly true as it pertains to the hard-boiled language used in the novel. Spillane adopts Chandler's perspective and substantiates the use of tough talk by all characters, including Hammer. Again, like Marlowe, Hammer's verbal threats carry greater weight specifically because he has the means (and often the intention) of delivering on those threats. For instance, when the private detective arrives at Kalecki's residence to question him as a witness, he dispenses with the formalities and responds to the butler frankly: "Well, you tell him to un-dispose himself right away and get his tail

[182] This is also illustrated by Hammer's demeanor on his day off. He says, "This was one day when I didn't have to shower or shave. I burned my breakfast as usual and ate it while I was in my underwear. When I was stacking the dishes, I glanced at myself in the mirror, and a dirty, unkempt face glared back at me. On days like this I look my ugliest" (*Jury* 137). Spillane provides an image of Hammer au natural. Because of his isolation, he does not conform to any public image or expectation. Here, his true self is revealed; a brutally honest representation of who he is filled with self-loathing.

down here or I'll go get him. And I'm not kidding, either" (*Jury* 17). Hammer, true to his word, forces his way into the house and begins to interrogate Kalecki. His actions are compounded by his poor opinion of the (supposed) ex-bootlegger, which, in Hammer's mind, justifies blowing cigarette smoke in his face and "step[ping] forward and gather[ing] a handful of his (Kalecki's) shirt" (*Jury* 18). Hammer's actions go beyond a lack of respect, but reflect the manner that is most in keeping with his intentions, in this case, getting obtaining information.

Of course, the integrity of Hammer's tough talk is most profoundly demonstrated at the conclusion of the story when he keeps his promise to Williams. Standing over the body initially, he declares, "I'm going to get the louse that killed you…He will die exactly as you died, with a .45 slug in the gut, just a little below the belly button. No matter who it is, Jack, I'll get the one" (*Jury* 7). Hammer announces his vendetta in the opening scene and repeats it periodically as a reminder to himself, as well as the audience, of his singular impulse. When he discovers that it is Manning who killed Jack, he does not hesitate or shrink from his responsibility.[183] Ironically, it is in this regard that Hammer displays objectivity and does not allow emotion to cloud his judgment or affect his actions. If simply doing the deed is the only measure of the private detective's quest, then Hammer indisputably succeeds. However, as in all medieval romances, there is a moral component to the quest, which is equally, if not more, significant than the task itself. For example, Sir Gawain's arrangement with the Green Knight did not make mention of a magical garment, just as his vow to Bertilak is based on the knights' integrity and honesty. The chivalric quest does not accommodate technicalities or

[183] "…I'm me and I always keep a promise. And this promise was to get the killer, and she was the killer. And I had promised to shoot the killer in the stomach" (*Jury* 141).

obfuscations. In Hammer's case, the promise he makes to Williams, presents an immediate moral problem to the detective's quest. By ignoring law enforcement's authority and circumventing the legal system by killing Manning himself ("…He won't sit in the chair. He won't hang"), arguably Hammer fails the quest because he ignores to the moral implications of his actions.[184] Yet, if the private detective is his own moral authority, how can he, through action or thought be in violation?

Nevertheless, the design presents another inversion of medieval romance. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the knight's concern for self-preservation trumps his pledge (which has inherent moral implications) to the Green Knight/Sir Bertilak. On the contrary, Hammer's efforts to fulfill his promise put his life into jeopardy and, consequently, disregard the moral implications of his actions. Sir Gawain's fear of death causes him to sacrifice his moral standing and his "renoun" while the private detective is willing to endanger himself to exact his brand of "justice." Again, the moral implications of knight's quest are a significant part the story and an integral element of medieval romance (instruction). However, because the private detective is his own moral authority in hard-boiled detective fiction, the sacrifice of that moral component is diminished and because instruction is devalued in the genre, the overall integrity of the work, as romance, does not suffer.

Duplicity takes many forms in *I, the Jury*, none more recognizable than with character deception. The manner in which characters represent (or misrepresent) themselves varies on the implied-to-literal scale. Representing the former is George

[184] Whether Hammer deliberately disregards or simply is aware of the moral implications of his promise is inconsequently. Also, I am purposefully omitting any discussion of Hammer's loyalty to Manning (considering they are engaged at the time in which he kills her) as a moral component of the story as it is far too subjective a matter (not to mention, irresolvable). The likelihood that Manning was manipulating Hammer by playing towards his vulnerability, as well as his sexual desire is high, admittedly.

Kalecki, who previously was a bootlegger but now pretends to have reformed his criminal ways and leads an upstanding life. However, Hammer suspects otherwise ("George Kalecki wasn't what people thought him to be) and is proven right in the end. Although he is being blackmailed, Kalecki remains a small yet integral cog in a larger syndicate while publicly projecting his legitimacy. On the other end of the scale is Hal Kines, whose own identity multi-faceted. Apart from being the actual "big wheel behind the syndicate" (*Jury* 106), he presents himself as a young, mild-mannered medical student under the care of Kalecki. The matter of being "young" is another dimension to Kines' duplicity. Hammer later determines, "Hal was one of these guys who looked eternally young. He helped nature a bit with a few plastic surgery operations" (*Jury* 80). Kines, a.k.a. John Hanson, physically manifests his duplicity by altering his appearance to support his prostitution ring as a procurer.[185] Finally, duplicity is not limited to the criminals portrayed in *I, the Jury*; the protagonist also participates in such deceptions of identity during his investigation. The entire scene in which Williams' neighbor aids Hammer in entering the dead man's apartment is predicated on the private detective identifying himself as a police detective. Assumedly, Hammer would not have a received such willing cooperation from the man without the authority that comes from law enforcement. Again, moral lines are distorted by matters of necessity and convenience, which make the private detective's moral identity more ambiguous.

Sex and sexuality in general hold a treacherous position in hard-boiled detective fiction. The Continental Op keeps a healthy distance from temptations, informed by his own pragmatism and awareness of self. In Philip Marlowe's case, his reluctance to

[185] Hanson's process, which Hammer uncovers too late, is radical if not altogether appalling/shocking, given the social and moral milieu of the 1940s.

indulge sexual appetites borders on abstinence, as he is compelled by experience, as well as his wariness toward female duplicity. This is not to say that the private detective is a saint when it comes to sex. In truth, Spillane's Hammer far exceeds Hammett's Spade in matters of sex. The issue of sexuality, like so many other components of Spillane's writing, is intensified and figures more prominently into the plot of story. In some cases, it becomes the defining quality of a character, like Mary Bellamy in *I, the Jury*. Spillane limits her identity to her sexuality, which is to say that she is classified and regarded as "strictly a nymphomaniac."[186] The effect of this revision is to deny another, albeit homicidal, dimension to the character. As a result, Mary is reduced to a purely sexual object. Other characters understand and are willing to accept that her entire identity is defined by this singular quality. However, it does not prevent Hammer from being manipulated (e.g. when she impersonates her sister or the late night rendezvous during the tennis match). Sex and sexuality are powerful agents in the hard-boiled world and Bellemy's character is effective, by that I mean influential character, is wholly defined by her torrid sexuality.

In other more significant ways, sexuality is utilized as a form of manipulation. While Mary Bellamy's tactics are obvious enough, the novel's femme fatale, Charlotte Manning, uses her sexuality to manipulate and even distract Hammer during his investigation. In addition to the physical desire she engenders ("…radiat[ing] sex in every manner and gesture"), her presence also reveals the private detective's own sexual proclivities. Their first encounter includes a detailed inner monologue describing her

[186] Spillane presents an differnt position on the matter compared to Chandler's handling of nymphomania in *The Big Sleep*. When denied sexual reciprocity, Carmen Sternwood becomes violent (killing Rusty and attempting to do the same to Marlowe). Conversely, Manning explains "...[When] rebuffed, instead of killing the one who spurned her, [Mary] simply finds another with whom to become emotionally entangled. It's quicker, besides being more effective" (*Jury* 108).

physical attributes in which Hammer admits, "…she could have sued me if she knew what went on in my mind" (*Jury* 27). This confession demonstrates that the private detective is not immune to sexual eccentricity and thoughts of perversion. Later while examining her professional library, he conceives a particularly debase use for a hypnosis manual: "That would have been a nice stunt for me to learn if I could do it. I pictured myself putting the eye on a beautiful doll and – hell, that was nasty" (*Jury* 109). Hammer begins to indulge in a fantasy that would allow him to gain control over women, where they are powerless to resist. Not even the private detective is above such chauvinistic and disturbing thoughts. Despite the fact that Hammer stops short of playing the scenario out in his mind, the suggestion is conveyed to the reader.

Hammer manifests his sexuality as aggressively as his anger in the story. In one particular embrace with Manning, there is a sense of domination and brutality: "I tilted her head back and kissed her eyes. Her mouth opened for me and I kissed her, hard. I knew I was hurting her, but she didn't pull away…I had my arm around her shoulders and my hands fastened in her hair, crushing her to me" (*Jury* 87). While Hammer admits that he "hates hard," this scene illustrates that he loves hard, as well. It is a violent embrace that he shares with Manning, as if to exert his masculinity over her. The description is devoid of tenderness and gentility, more physical than emotional. The sudden *amour fou* is almost imperialistic in its nature. Hammer is possessive and controlling; the use of "crushing" suggests that he is obliging her to submit to his

passion.[187] The private detective's unabashed hyper-sexuality positions Hammer as the antithesis of the courtly knight of medieval romance.

Gender in Spillane' Hard-boiled Society:

It would seem that sexuality and attraction function very similarly in medieval romance and hard-boiled detective fiction: they are an instrument of temptation to divert, distract, or disgrace the protagonist. However, what distinguishes the latter is the modification to the female figure from a passive to active agent. Where the knight is commonly held responsible for his actions, that is to say, his collapse,[188] the importance of the female figure remains of secondary importance to the knight's behavior in response to the temptation. This is illustrated in resolution to Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, as well as in "The Knight's Tale," where Theseus is less concerned about the cause of the brother's quarrel in the glade, as he is with the manner in which they are fighting. The knight's response (effect) trumps the cause in both instances. In hard-boiled detective fiction, the opposite is true; cause exceeds the effect. Hard-boiled detective fiction positions the female figure, particularly the femme fatale, as a primary agent in the story, with the ability to manipulate and influence the private detective. Consequently, characters, the private detective in particular, are satisfied declaring the female's culpability in conflict.[189] Rarely do they take responsibility for their susceptibility to female persuasion. Instead, anger, frustration, and blame are projected outwardly towards females and are often manifested violently.

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[187] While the scene depicts Hammer as taking the kiss from Manning, because of her ulterior motives, she willingly submits. I will also avoid the obvious phallic suggestion that the detective's surname carries, in addition to the more professional implications.

[188] E.g. Gawain with Bertilak's wife. Although Gawain releases a brief, ill-advised outburst regarding the deceitfulness of women, the fault and blame lay on his shoulders, exemplified by his donning the green girdle back to Camelot.

[189] The alternative is that they are discounted or ignored altogether; another form of sexism in the genre.

Spillane's *I, the Jury* is no exception in this regard. In fact, it epitomizes this inversion of the medieval romance model. The author has not only inverted it, but he has taken the unsettling nature of violence committed by females from the male perspective to its "reasonable" conclusion. The relationships between the genders figure heavily into the plot and support the reading of a biased male agenda in hard-boiled detective fiction. While this is certainly true when it comes to the femme fatale's role, it is also evident with some of minor female characters. For instance,I have already addressed the temptation posed by the character Mary Bellemy, a "flop" – someone who "only ha[s] sex" to offer (*Jury* 125). Yet this doesn't stop Hammer from indulging in such a limited temptation (on multiple occasions). When they slip away during the tennis match, Hammer assumes responsibility for his actions ("I couldn't push her away, nor did I want to now") in an effort to play down his weakness for sex and maintain his masculinity. Despite Mary initiating the sex, Hammer re-imagines the act as consensual or even male-dominated act rather than give her credit for the seduction. This is demonstrated by his repetitive personal pronoun use ("I") when referring to their encounter. The same male-usurpation of power is demonstrated when Hammer first arrives at the party. He claims, "Hell, I couldn't disappoint the hostess, so I kissed her (Mary)" (*Jury* 123). Hammer's recent engagement doesn't stop him from kissing Mary, who he knows is a nymphomaniac. While he characterizes (downplays) its significance as a customary and dutiful act of a guest (and the use of "I" personal pronoun), he also needs to maintain his virility in spite of the recent engagement to Manning. His masculinity is acting out. Hammer's need to prove his manliness explains why the kiss is followed by his overtly homophobic condemnation of two "pansies" fighting.

Not all interactions between genders are quite as mutually confrontational. The private detective's need to exert his masculinity also takes more "old-fashioned" forms. When Hammer submits and gets engaged to Charlotte Manning, he is quick to define the nature of their relationship. After she politely offers to continue her practice, he exclaims, "Nothing doing. No wife of mine is going to work. I want her at home where I know where she is" (*Jury* 119). Granted, the significance of this response is augmented by a more liberated, feminism-welcoming modern society; however, the point can still be made that Hammer is asserting his male authority over their future arrangements. He is chauvinistically preventing Manning from assuming an equal position, either professionally or financially and by extension maritally. Instead, she is relegated to a subordinate position in their relationship that allows him to gain control of the relationship.[190] Ultimately, this demonstrates the fundamental distrust between the genders. Of course, this is followed by an encounter in with a couple of jerks that mock Hammer's public displays of affection, to which he responds physically; again, he instinctively feels the necessity to exert his masculinity. For what she perceives to be a chivalric response in her defense (rather than a violent impulse), she dubs him, "My protector." However, Hammer predictably is uncomfortable with the label that portrays him as her "knight in shining armor." He quickly dismisses her suggestion by saying, "Aw shadup" (*Jury* 120). Whether Hammer is embarrassed by the label's implication, uncomfortable with the possessiveness of the suggestion ("My"), or simply feels compelled to react defiantly in his own defense, the encounter is more about maintaining

[190] Manning's willingness to accept this arrangement is a part of her manipulation of Hammer. The happier she makes him, the more distracted or altogether unable he will be to identify her as Williams' killer.

his virility than defending her honor. The implications to gender relations aside, the scene clearly demonstrates that Lancelot, he is not!

Although violence towards women is unthinkable in medieval romance, it, or at least the threat of violence, is commonplace in hard-boiled detective fiction. There is a noticeable progression what qualifies as aggression between male and female characters. In Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*, Spade allows Brigid O'Shaughnessy to be arrested for murder (where she will face execution). In "Black Rain," Chandler's Marlowe proceeds to physically abuse Carmen out of frustration and anger. Likewise, Mike Hammer threatens Eileen Vickers, the ill-fated prostitute, during his interrogation: "I could do it differently. I could slap it out of you. I could wreck this whole scam. But I'm not going to; it would take too long" (*Jury* 70). Hammer is more than willing to forcefully get answers from the young woman despite expressing pity for her situation.[191] Ultimately, his masculine impulse to avenge his friend supersedes any civility, or emotional attachment he may develop, let alone any notions of courtly behavior. It is simple an obsolete code of behavior in the hard-boiled world.

Nowhere is the hard-boiled masculine impulse more clearly illustrated than in the novel's conclusion after Hammer has discovered that Manning, his fiancée, is responsible for the murders. Spillane wastes no time describing the emotional turmoil or personal conflict that Hammer experiences after this revelation, because quite simply, there is no conflict. No moral confusion or internal debate takes place. Hammer's desire to avenge Jack Williams' death renders all other interests, which includes his engagement (not to mention the legal ramifications), obsolete. All that remains is his vow. Consequently,

[191] Hammer explains, "…The same old story. I felt sorry for her even if she didn't feel sorry for herself" (*Jury* 71).

Hammer's final encounter with Charlotte Manning is characterized by Hammer's emotional detachment.[192] Once, he identifies Manning's actions as an elaborate charade, the scene's outcome leaves no doubt. His awareness takes physical form in the text as Spillane alternates formatting styles to reflect external dialogue (normal) and internal narration (italicized). This deliberate ordering also demonstrates Hammer's mastery over the situation; specifically, that he has control over his physical actions, as well emotional response to her. Hammer remains resolute in disposition and his intention.

Manning's desperate attempt to seduce the private detective are rebuffed, inevitability.[193] Her striptease, an austere appeal to his sexual desire, is futile. It is intended to stimulate his primal instincts; however, its failure reveals the singularity of her character. As the femme fatale, she is the one who is wholly defined and driven by baser impulses.[194] So not only is it a miscalculation and underestimation of her adversary, but it demonstrates the limits of her character (female) in contrast to the private detective (male). Hammer's ability to resist the femme fatale's ultimate temptation illustrates his resolve and ultimately, his superiority.[195] Despite moments of weakness, Hammer does not succumb to Manning's final temptation because to do so would be to break his word

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[192] The precision of the femme fatale's scheme almost beyond comprehension: "If it were anyone but me they'd never have known she was acting. Christ, she was good. There was no one like her. The play was perfect, and she wrote, directed and acted all the parts. The timing was exact, the strength and character she put into every moment, every expression, every word was a crazy impossibility of perfection. Even now she could make me guess, almost build a doubt in my mind, but I shook my head slowly" (*Jury* 140). Hammer makes sure to qualify his praising remarks (which effectively isolate his unique ability to see through her act) by using the word "almost" to demonstrate the futility of "the play."

[193] "She looked so pathetic standing there…So pathetic and so helpless" (*Jury* 141).

[194] To this issue, Hammer adds, "You no longer had the social instinct of the woman – that of being dependent upon a man" (*Jury* 141). By distinguishing Manning from the female gender, Hammer is desexualizing her because her identity is no longer determined by her relationship to men. Effectively, Spillane is identifying the femme fatale as an androgynous entity because of its autonomy from male restriction or influence.

[195] I refrain from qualifying the private detective's superiority as moral in the case of Hammer. While it is arguable in the cases of the ConOp, Spade, and Marlowe, Hammer does not demonstrate moral superiority (as evidenced by his infidelity and violent, bordering on sadistic, behavior). In *I, the Jury*, Hammer's superiority is the result of willpower, that is, his determination to avenge his friend.

and sacrifice his quest for vengeance. It is something that the reader is informed of very early on and several times after, that it is not something he is programmed to do: "My word is good just as long as I live" (*Jury* 7). Furthermore, it completes the inversion of the medieval romance and the figure of the chivalric knight. Where female temptation often contributes to the knight's fall, hard-boiled femme fatales fail to stop the private detective in hard-boiled fiction.

CONCLUSION:

Twentieth-century hard-boiled detective fiction not only fulfills the three goals of the romance genre, thus qualifying it as romance, but in accomplishing this, it inverts the principle themes of medieval romance. Because this modification of the medieval, which in itself is a reflection of lingering Victorian resentment after the Great War, hard-boiled detective fiction is less a continuation of detective fiction as it is a modernist reconstruction of romance. Although it maintains many of the structural features of early detective fiction, its Victorian ancestry is derived in medievalist literature. The exaggerated verisimilitude that its authors employ requires an emphasis on physicality at the cost of moral idealism. To label the hard-boiled detective as a modern-day knight not only ignores the generic idealism in medieval romance but discounts the literary objective of the literature – to condemn the idealism of romantic nationalism, to magnify its consequences, and illustrate the obsoleteness of those ideals in post-war American society.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has investigated the thematic relationship between medieval romance and American hard-boiled detective fiction of the first half of the twentieth century. It was designed to identify hard-boiled detective stories as a form of modern romance, and to that effect, examine how and why traditional medieval themes are inverted. The result of the hard-boiled literary analysis illustrates a thematic inversion in writers such as Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and Mickey Spillane. The importance of authority and individual identity, as well as the idealization of gender relations according to courtly traditions are paramount in medieval romance. However, hard-boiled writers challenge this perspective by consistently amending the medieval model.

The results of this analysis support the idea that hard-boiled detective fiction represents a rejection of Victorian medievalism consistent with Modernism's larger rejection of the influence of Romantic Nationalism, which preceded and arguably contributed to World War I. The rise of medievalism in the nineteenth century coincides with the rise of Industrialism. Medievalism, as a cultural example of Romantic Nationalism, adamantly opposed what it perceived to be the negative effects of Industrialism including urbanization, detrimental political upheaval, and an attack on Europe's cultural heritage, particularly in England. The cultural effect of World War I was a sense of betrayal and lost innocence. The growing resentment to the myths and ideals promoted prior to the war gave way to cynicism, even in America. In an effort to emphasize the struggles and anxieties brought on by Progressivism, Prohibition, and the

Great Depression in America, hard-boiled detective fiction adopts a cynical tone and employs exaggerated verisimilitude to illustrate a romantic agenda. It takes aim at medieval themes, revisited and reaffirmed in the nineteenth century, and creates an inverted vision of the medieval romance set in a re-imagined modern world.

This work contributes to existing knowledge of medieval romance by providing another goal of the genre. I maintain the view that romance texts are both entertaining and didactic; however, they also have inherent value to unintended audiences, those that are displaced by time and culture. In the case of medieval romance, its exaggerated verisimilitude not only allows these audiences to learn about contemporary (medieval) culture, but opens the door to possible re-visioning in the future. This dissertation benefits from this third goal of romance by identifying the way in which medieval romance is utilized in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Medievalists in the nineteenth century-re-envision the medieval romance, emphasizing the idealism that it proposes (but downplays the fact that it is rarely realized). In response, hard-boiled detective fiction replaces the nineteenth century's romantic idealism with cynicism. It inverts each of the essential themes of romance, consistent with post-war attitudes and exacerbated by contemporary events and social conditions.

The generic and thematic relationship I have identified therefore assists in our understanding intertextuality and the role of medieval studies in modern literature. In a very narrow sense, it provides another way in which medieval studies justifies itself in modern critical discourse. While the need to highlight the relevance of any critical work is important, it seems inherently more so when addressing that which is qualitatively medieval in context. Additionally, I hope that this study has gone some way towards

enhancing our understanding of hard-boiled detective fiction and increasing its literary value. At the very least, it presents a way in which to read the texts as something more than popular fiction or low art by suggesting a literary legacy to an established genre. While it may not be the first study that looks at comparatively at medieval and hard-boiled literature, it addresses the common misapplication of chivalric and knightly identities to the hard-boiled detective. Identifying the private eye as a "modern-day knight" is a convenient but flawed assessment, which fails to acknowledge larger thematic and authorial perspectives inherent to hard-boiled detective fiction.

I would like to recommend that the relationship between medieval romance and hard-boiled detective fiction is investigated in future studies. A greater focus on the presence of homosocialism in chivalric romance that suggests the erotic in could produce interesting findings, which account for the hyper-masculinity of hard-boiled detective fiction and the vilification of the femme fatale. Of course, this association maintains the same inverse relationship between the two forms of romance, but it presents another logical point of comparison, nevertheless. It also relates to gender studies insofar as post-war gender roles are concerned. Specifically, a study of the post-war reassertion of the masculine and the attempted subjugation of the female gender (as well as their socio-cultural reassignment) in the first half of the twentieth century is recommended.

While I have structured this dissertation as a comparative analysis of medieval romance and hard-boiled detective fiction, further research might investigate whether or not this is part of a larger devolution of the heroic protagonist. It would be interesting to assess whether or not this devolution is connected to the rise of the anti-hero in popular culture. In other words, does the attempted idealism of chivalric knight, re-imagined as

cynicism in the hard-boiled detective ultimately result in the creation of anti-hero character that litters modern television and film? This question, not surprisingly, has sufficient evidence to warrant such a hypothesis. The chivalric and courtly codes of behavior, those objective (public) cultural ideals that the knight attempts to internalize and manifest in his identity are translated in hard-boiled detective as purely subjective notions, defined individually without regard for external authorities. The next logical step in this devolution would be a character that capitalizes on this subjectivism, not just using it for distinguishing right from wrong, but applying it to all aspects of life. If the knight embodied the aphorism: "Might for right," it has since become "Might is right."

Focusing on television alone, the logical conclusion of such devolution are the Tony Soprano's (*The Sopranos*), the Dexter Morgan's (*Dexter*), the Walter White's (*Breaking Bad*), and the Don Draper's (*Mad Men*) – men for whom the rules of the society do not apply.[196] Not surprisingly, these characters exhibit characteristics and behavior more suited to a traditional villain than a hero. They have manufactured a code of behavior that unities their public duties and their private desires, effectively rendering them indistinguishable. The conflicting dynamic between public duty and private desire that serves as the tipping point for the idealistic knight is now obsolete – again, there is no conflict. The issue of the anti-hero in popular culture is an intriguing one, which could be usefully explored in further research.

The devolution that I propose does not negate the value or significance of medieval studies in the twentieth century. On the contrary, it is merely a single line of inquiry that progresses from the Middle Ages to modernity. It follows, then that I end

[196] Television is an appropriate medium for such a discussion because it represents the widening of the audience that consumes this content (as opposed to the narrower aristocratic audience of medieval romance).

this dissertation on the subject of the medieval with which it began. If nothing else, this dissertation signifies the continuing and seemingly limitless potential that medieval studies have once the alterity is addressed and accounted for. It also illustrates that the cultural values and interests of an erstwhile period of history can be relevant in the present. Intertextual studies of this kind amend another one of Edmund Burke's popular adages[197] into a useful truism: "Those who know literary history have the good fortune and sense to utilize it."

[197] i.e. "Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it."

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