

4-2014

"Can't They Stop The Guns?" Trauma and Inter-War Detective Fiction

Kyla J. Ainsworth
College of William and Mary

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorsthesis>



Part of the [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#), and the [Literature in English, North America Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ainsworth, Kyla J., "'Can't They Stop The Guns?' Trauma and Inter-War Detective Fiction" (2014).
Undergraduate Honors Theses. Paper 95.
<https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorsthesis/95>

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Undergraduate Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.

“Can’t They Stop the Guns?” Trauma and Inter-War Detective Fiction

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English from
The College of William and Mary**

by

Kyla Ainsworth

“Can’t They Stop the Guns?” Trauma and Inter-War Detective Fiction

Dedicated to my grandmother, Sue Holmes, for introducing me to detective fiction

Raymond Chandler’s 1950 essay, “The Simple Art of Murder,” has long been revered as the distinguishing reference for the difference between British and American detective fiction. Chandler criticizes the Golden Age writing style still popular in British mysteries, citing a lack of expertise and realism as its major faults. He pokes fun at the implausible methods of murder used in such stories, which no reader could have guessed, and which remove the violent emotions of the actual killing act in favor of simple methodical ones. Using Dorothy L. Sayers as a main target, Chandler also argues that a lack of substantial character development and depth is often what makes the mystery genre weak. Finally, he draws a comparison between the British style of mystery writing and the new American hard-boiled, showing differences in the amount of emphasis on death, level of realism, and the author’s intended level of intellectual engagement for the reader. While these differences are clear in comparing these two types of mystery novels, I would argue that some Golden Age authors incorporated post-war realism into their books, but in subtler and often more inhibited ways than their hard-boiled contemporaries.

One main way in which the hard-boiled and the Golden Age authors deal with the same fundamental issues is through emotional distance. Chandler writes, “If the mystery novel is at all realistic (which it very seldom is) it is written in a certain spirit of detachment; otherwise nobody but a psychopath would want to write it or read it” (Chandler and Haycraft “Simple Art” 223). It is true that in a story like Dashiell Hammett’s *The Maltese Falcon*, which he later praises for being decently realistic, the detective encounters violence with a good deal of detachment. If Sam Spade were to react to murder in the way that the average pedestrian might react, the mystery might never be solved. In *Farewell, My Lovely*, we see Philip Marlowe struggle to compartmentalize his fears in this way, and it threatens to inhibit his investigation. Even real policemen must keep a certain level of distance from their work so as to be able to solve the case without being overwhelmed by emotion. However, I think those novels that Chandler dismisses as unrealistic are also dealing with death through detachment, just in a different way. In Golden Age books, the authors are the ones distancing themselves from the violence, more so than the main detectives. They avoid writing about blood and gore in a genre centered around death, which is quite a feat in itself. Instead of the violence occurring in front of the detective and the detective not allowing himself or herself to be affected by it, the violence barely appears at all. In *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, Agatha Christie’s main detective Hercule Poirot sees the body as a point of interest, but not really a body. The actual corpse is less interesting than alibis, secret feuds, and a controversial inheritance. Her focus is the scandal, not the slaughter. With this second layer of detachment, the reader doesn’t take the Golden Age

detective's composure as unusual, because the murder itself doesn't seem traumatic enough to merit any sort of breakdown.

Chandler also addresses Dorothy L. Sayers's claim that detective fiction is flawed because it is a "literature of escape" and not a "literature of expression" (Chandler and Haycraft "Simple Art" 231). Because of this point, for Sayers, it cannot amount to other, higher forms of literature. Chandler disagrees with this point vehemently, stating, "All men who read escape from something else into what lies behind the printed page; the quality of the dream may be argued, but its release has become a functional necessity. All men must escape at times from the deadly rhythm of their private thoughts....I hold no particular brief for the detective story as the ideal escape. I merely say that *all* reading for pleasure is escape" (Chandler and Haycraft "Simple Art" 232). While Chandler has a strong point, I think more "private thoughts" make their way into pleasure reading than he realizes. The act of reading may be escapist, but the act of writing, whether it is poetry or detective fiction, comes from the mind of the author and therefore involves expression. Detective fiction expresses societal fears and psychological dilemmas, reflects on ideas of good and evil, and reinforces social norms. I agree, then, with how Chandler groups the genre with the rest of literature, but I am not sure that necessitates that it is escapist.

Because detective fiction deals primarily with solving murders, essentially coming to terms with traumatic events, it can instead serve as a lens through which we can understand personal and social reactions to violence. This had been going on before the Great War, since Sir Arthur Conan Doyle served as a doctor in the Boer Wars. In Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, nerves and trauma are a major part of the

plotline. In the case of Chandler and Sayers' own writing, the connection between World War I and the detective fiction genre should not be ignored. They both had experience with shell shock – Chandler directly from his time in the trenches, and Sayers indirectly from returning veterans, including her husband. While puzzle games and fast-paced excitement can be viewed as escapism, coming face-to-face with death and then finding an understanding and rationality about it, especially after the war, is not. Although this process may be an individual murder viewed through the eyes of a fictional character, it may have provided a way to work through the conceptualization of violence for the generation reading this fiction, and the authors writing it.

Despite the apparent antagonism, Sayers and Chandler are more in dialogue with one another than they might admit. They both reach toward the invincible world of detective fiction that Christie and Hammett adore, with characters impervious to trauma or terror, but they both fail to commit to it. Reality breaks through in a way that other mystery writers do not experience. Even with the gender barrier, the opposing writing styles, and their general distaste for one another, Chandler and Sayers succeed in bringing the detective novel to a new level. Mystery novels are always about a search for answers – these two authors make that search for something beyond “whodunit?” They want to process the hell the world has been through during the war, in a way that still manages to shield from the hardship of saying it outright. There is still a level of suppression with both of them, but the fact that trauma appears at all, when it is not a necessary tactic of telling a detective story, sets them apart from their contemporaries. Through this thesis, I will attempt to show that Dorothy L. Sayers and Raymond Chandler use the detective

fiction medium to work through the trauma of World War I, and their books are just as much postwar literature as post-Sherlock Holmes.

In 1914, many countries were thrust into a style and level of violence that the world had not experienced before. New technologies like tanks, flamethrowers, poison gas, and the style of trench warfare made the battlefield a hellish nightmare for those serving their countries. Not only did these new inventions prove extremely deadly, but German actions like attacking hospital ships with torpedoes and sinking neutral boats with no concern for the crew members also violated previous conceptions of what was and was not acceptable in war (Graves 13). However, “the main business of the soldier was to exercise self-control while being shelled” (Fussell 46). When the artillery shells fell, soldiers could only make themselves as small of a target as possible by ducking and covering in a dugout. Dawn and dusk were primary shelling times, and since the bombardment was inevitable, self-control became a struggle – not only with the enemy, but also within the soldier’s psyche.

Because the war effort was relatively carefree near the beginning, advertising that the boys would be home by Christmas, many soldiers experienced shock and trauma when confronted with the reality of war. The U.S. Army’s Office of Medical History (1929) described the experience: “The frequency of mental and nervous affections was remarked by medical writers in every combatant nation, and all agreed that the terrible conditions of modern warfare, with its new methods of fighting – high explosives, liquid fire, tanks, poison gas, bombing planes, the ‘warfare of attrition’ in the trenches – contributed to the creation of a novel disease entity” (Williams). This “novel disease entity” was first described as “shell shock,” for the artillery shells that bombarded those

in the trenches – later, it was dubbed “war neurosis,” and today we refer to it as post-traumatic stress disorder. Many of those who did not experience the war firsthand, and even some of those who did see the battlefield, did not fully understand the symptoms of shell shock that they saw in these veterans, and did not know how to treat it fully. The common cure on the battlefield was government-rationed rum: “In 1922 one medical officer deposed before a parliamentary committee investigating the phenomenon of ‘shell-shock’: ‘Had it not been for the rum ration I do not think we should have won the war’ (Fussell 47). However, some emerging psychiatrists, such as Sigmund Freud and W.H.R. Rivers, took the opportunity to learn as much as they could about shell shock and treat it to the best of their knowledge.

Originally, when soldiers began displaying symptoms of trauma, they were met with instant stigmatization. Since they would often not be able to fight due to their mental state, they would be seen as outwardly defiant for not following orders and were treated as criminals. In a BBC interview with Harry Patch, Britain’s oldest veteran of the Great War, he described the suffering of his comrades: “An officer would come down and very often shoot them as a coward. That man was no more a coward than you or I. He just could not move. That’s shell shock. Towards the end of the war they recognized it as an illness. The early part of the war – they didn’t. If you were there you were shot. And that was it” (“The Last Tommy Gallery,” *BBC History*). While a fellow soldier in the trenches might sympathize with someone experiencing shell shock, it was difficult for authority figures to know how to handle someone refusing to obey orders, no matter the reason. If every soldier were unable to fight, the army’s goal, and therefore the country’s

goal, would not be accomplished. It was therefore treated as cowardice, a serious deviation from the brave and masculine norm they were trying to project in the Army.

British media in particular also glossed over much of the war violence since they were not allowed to film or photograph dead bodies, so those who did not fight lacked a true understanding of what the men had been through (Booth 21). Where Britain had once been divided by the class system, whose divisions lessened greatly during and after the war, levels of experience now divided it. As Robert Graves describes it in *The Long Week-End*, “The two Britons were: the Fighting Forces, meaning literally the soldiers and sailors who had fought, as opposed to garrison and line-of-communication troops, and the Rest.... They talked such different languages that men home on leave after months on active service felt like visitors in a foreign country” (Graves 14). The war experience was repressed both in the media and in the soldiers themselves. Popular British fiction in the immediate years after the war, like Agatha Christie’s, mirrored the newspapers in their lack of description of murder and violence. Because the public did not see the horrors the soldiers had experienced, many concluded that the “cowardice” was not caused by external, environmental factors but by internal flaws, which increased the stigma surrounding shell shock. They did not understand the social causes, so it was defined as a personal weakness instead. With the label of coward came a good deal of stigma, which, since the offense was punishable by death, sometimes fell on the soldier’s family rather than the man himself. Suddenly their father or husband would be viewed by society as weak, dishonorable, womanly, and unpatriotic. Often family members of those labeled “cowards” would keep such details a family secret out of fear of being stigmatized by association (“Tribute to WWI ‘Cowards,’” *BBC News*).

Although progress was made in the clinical definition of shell shock by the end of the war, it was still stigmatized as a mental disorder. Many veterans suffering from symptoms would be placed in the same hospitals as those with physical injuries, which did not always bode well. Dashiell Hammett was hospitalized for TB during and after the war, and described his experience in a hospital that was half flu and half shell shock patients (or “goofs,” as he refers to them earlier): “There had been a newspaper story of a campaign: Visit the wounded veterans. Ungratefully the veterans terrified the visitors with gruesome stories, or they threw pie pans over the curtains of their wards to frighten shell-shocked men. They were cruel to their comrades because their situation was cruel...” (Johnson 26). This description shows the true depth of the stigma surrounding mental illness. All those in the hospital were seen as deviants because they were unwell and separated from society, but those with physical illnesses still saw those with shell shock as more deviant. One may recover from tuberculosis (as Hammett later did) but recovering from shell shock seemed less likely. This is one reason why Hammett may have been quicker than Chandler to enter the violent genre of detective novels as an author – Hammett’s first short story was published in 1922, and Chandler’s wasn’t published until 1933. Hammett’s remaining effects of World War I were physical, whereas Chandler’s were mental. Chandler, then, had a much longer recovery process, since his trauma was more liable to remain and be repeated without much treatment. Shell shock also had a more damaging effect on one’s social image because it is more difficult to understand than a physical illness. Society can visually see when someone becomes physically well again, but since it is not as obvious of a change for those suffering from mental illness, they were often trapped with the stain of stigma for years

after they stopped displaying symptoms. Being seen as a “goof” discredits an individual more than suffering from tuberculosis. In this environment, even though neither form of deviance is intentional, mental weakness is far less desirable than physical illness.

In W.H.R. Rivers’ 1924 article “The Repression of War Experience,” he describes the soldiers he treated after the First World War, which included two major World War I poets: Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. Rivers focuses on the concept of repression as being a detrimental after-effect in processing one’s war experience, thus causing the shell-shock symptoms so many veterans were subject to. His first point is that soldiers were not adequately trained to handle the psychological effects before entering the battlefield. Rivers writes,

The training of a soldier is designed to adapt him to act calmly and methodically in the presence of events naturally calculated to arouse disturbing emotions....

The most important feature of the present war in its relation to the production of neurosis is that the training in repression normally spread out over years has had to be carried out in short spaces of time, while those thus incompletely trained have had to face strains such as have never previously been known in the history of mankind. Small wonder that the failures of adaptation should have been so numerous and so severe. (Rivers 186)

Training ran short because of the extremely high amount of deaths on the Western Front. Requirements like height were lessened as the armies grew more and more desperate for able-bodied men to serve (Fussell 9). According to Rivers, physical training overshadowed psychological training, which meant that soldiers were more prepared to deal with physical ailments and injuries than mental ones, much like the previous

distinction between Hammett's tuberculosis and Chandler's trauma. Rivers has a more sympathetic reaction to those suffering with "war neurosis" than many other people did at that time. Unfortunately, shell shock was often seen as a sign of weakness of the individual mind rather than weakness of the training system.

Rivers goes on to say that the repression is not only instigated by the soldiers' own inability to deal with their experiences, but also "fostered by their relatives and friends, as well as by their medical advisers" (Rivers 187). Since the soldiers themselves were often incapable of processing the traumatic memories, there was no way their support systems would understand that difficulty either, so they were encouraged not to think about it. Repression, however, does not help in coming to terms with trauma; it simply prolongs the symptoms of "war neurosis." By putting aside the negative emotions like fear, horror, or sadness, in favor of a forced and false sense of calm, veterans might be able to make themselves and those around them comfortable for that moment, but they were still susceptible to flashbacks, nightmares, and other symptoms. Raymond Chandler's detective Philip Marlowe later exemplifies this breezy and determined outer shell, and the more vulnerable, damaged, and rarely seen inner core, in *Farewell, My Lovely*.

Some of the patients that Rivers attempted to treat paralleled figures from detective literature. For example, the first case Rivers goes into detail on is about "a young officer who was sent home from France on account of a wound he had received just as he was extricating himself from a mass of earth in which he had been buried" (Rivers 188). While most likely a fairly common occurrence due to the nature of trench warfare, the situation is similar to that of Lord Peter Wimsey. Wimsey was not

physically injured as this man was, but they both experienced the terror of being nearly buried alive. Being covered in dirt, most likely with bodies of fellow soldiers, would probably be as close to conscious death as possible, and it would not be something to take lightly. The fact that someone was hospitalized and under the care of a psychologist like Rivers for such an experience shows that Wimsey dealt with similar symptoms as some of his readers.

Freud also discusses his experience treating World War I veterans in his 1920 essay, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." In it, he describes treating them for what he calls "traumatic neurosis," one of the many preliminary terms for post-traumatic stress disorder. His theory of treatment is one that can be applied to the medium of fiction. Freud says that those suffering from traumatic neurosis go against his original idea that dreams serve as a form of wish fulfillment, because one of the major symptoms of the illness is to relive horrifying experiences while asleep. In dreams, he says, the patient is forced to "*repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, *remembering* it as something belonging to the past" (Freud 11, emphasis in original). The nightmares continue because it seems like the events occurred purely in the unconscious, never in reality. The ego fights to keep these experiences in the repressed dream state to protect the conscious mind from having to accept them as truth. This is the same struggle we see with Wimsey, and more subtly with Marlowe, when they are trying to solve murders. The unconscious mind is clearly disturbed by what they are investigating, but the conscious mind is unable to recognize it. Helping the patient to realize that these events did happen and are not just recurring nightmares is what Freud suggests to treat shell shock, although it is a difficult process to

go through. Facing the facts about one's own terrifying experiences is admitting that such horrors are possible in real life. This is why authors and readers after World War I may have been seeking a method to come to a similar conclusion within the safer realm of fiction.

Detective fiction serves as a safe space to explore difficult subjects such as violence and death without it having an impact on the lives of those experiencing it. Much like how a patient's dreams would focus on reworking war incidents without them seeming like memory, the books focus on coming to conclusions about how and why someone has been killed. The author, the readers, and the characters are not terribly attached to the victim, or openly traumatized by the violence surrounding the plot of the novel. Instead, it remains in a safe fictional realm, the dreamlike state of imagination that results from reading. The one problem is that, much like the recurring dreams, detective fiction does not come to terms with society's real experience of violence. Therefore, the genre continues reworking violent experiences over and over again, attempting to process something that cannot be processed until it is accepted by the conscious mind.

Seeing detective novels as a method to work through wartime trauma, rather than a simple, pulpy, light-hearted piece of popular culture, gives the context of these novels the recognition it deserves. Many critics seem to only contextualize inter-war fiction as a popular era between Sherlock Holmes and the rise of the police detective, forgetting that these novels are also in between two of the most deadly global conflicts of all time. The rise of violence in the mystery novel is not a coincidence – it is a result of the rise of violence in the modern world. Reading the symptoms of shell shock and trauma within the genre elevates it from light entertainment to true post-war literature.

Even though detective fiction novels read very differently than *All Quiet on the Western Front* or *A Farewell to Arms*, they still respond to a generational experience of war. Sayers and Chandler, as well as Christie and Hammett, each lived through war in a different way, and those years impact how they chose to write mystery novels. Since this genre is primarily about violence and violent acts, these differences appear in various degrees of the act's visual representation – whether it appears in view of the reader or protagonist, and how graphic it is. Beyond the way they personally were affected by World War I, these authors also respond to the milieu of the postwar world. The choices they make in determining how to discuss violence are what break down the typical binary divisions of English versus American and Golden Age versus hard-boiled.

Authors like Christie and Sayers show the social climate of the time in a number of ways. For example, anxieties about the class system, women's rights, and the construction of "Englishness" crop up fairly frequently in both authors' works. On the darker side of things, elements of the recent war leak into the stories, either to be relatively ignored (as with Christie), or to cause distress (as with Sayers). In comparing Christie's *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* with Sayers' *Whose Body?*, we can see the difference between an author who does not choose to address the war and one who does. Hastings, Christie's narrator and Poirot's admiring counterpart, is a war veteran just like Lord Peter Wimsey. He is sent to Styles to recover from being wounded in battle. However, he does not seem troubled by his past experience at all. He even tells stories about it to amuse his companions. The war in Christie's world seems extremely far removed from the mystery at hand. This is a major contrast to Wimsey, who rarely talks about his wartime experience except when having an emotional and horrifying flashback,

as we shall see later. He is more amused by the dead body in front of him than by the memories of those he saw in the trenches. For Hastings, the trenches seem relatively empty except for tales of camaraderie and heroism.

Given that Christie's story, rather than Sayers', took place during the war, the opportunity to discuss mass violence in relation to personal violence seemed available but ignored. Patrick Anderson offers an explanation: "We could laugh at Poirot and still reluctantly admire his alleged genius. He provided comedy and intellectual fireworks in the same package. It is true, too, that Christie began writing in the immediate aftermath of WWI, with its unspeakable loss of life, and she may have felt that people needed to laugh" (Anderson 23). This supports Chandler's claim that detective fiction, as with all literature, is escapist – in this case, providing light-hearted humor in the face of death. With Christie's novel written in closer proximity to the war, and with her firsthand experience of war violence through her time as a nurse, she may have chosen to remove the audience even further away from it than later authors, like Dorothy L. Sayers, did, because it was too emotionally difficult to discuss at that point, especially in a genre geared toward pleasure.

While Sayers herself did not really experience the trauma of war, she was traveling in France when the war started. She wrote to her parents from Tours, "You have no idea how frightfully exciting it is being here, right in the middle of things...where a defeat on the frontier might land the enemy in the capital in a few hours or so" (Sayers and Reynolds 93). At age 21, and with all the pro-British news coverage, she saw the beginning of the war as an adventure. She worked briefly as a nurse before leaving for Oxford. Further into the war, Sayers began to see more direct effects on those

in combat, especially on her cousin and uncle, who both visited and exhibited signs of “nervous breakdown.” She said after they had left, “I’m rather glad they’re gone, because I do so hate everlasting war-talk” (Sayers and Reynolds 110). The aftermath, however, was more difficult to avoid, with the influx of traumatized veterans back to England and the general shock to the country. Sayers married Captain Oswald Atherton Fleming, who is thought to have suffered greatly in personality and nerves from his time in service. According to a biographer, “...it is clear that Fleming was damaged psychologically by the war...it would appear he was the husk of a man by the time Dorothy L. Sayers met him – already middle-aged, careless about his family, floating from job to job, confused by the horrors of war, and alienated from his former self and his society” (Tischler 68-69).

Like many women after World War I, Sayers struggled with Fleming’s emotional isolation that resulted from his shell shock. Without seeing the front lines herself, it was impossible to understand exactly what he had been through – and yet in writing Peter Wimsey, she displays an empathy for such soldiers. She may have seen a flashback episode firsthand from her husband or relatives, or she might have related post-traumatic stress disorder to her own experience with mental illness in her youth (Tischler 71). In one of the many biographies of Dorothy L. Sayers, her relationship with her husband is described as follows: “As time went on, Dorothy Sayers apparently came to see her husband less as a lover and more as a responsibility. (She once noted that the pleasure of the detective story was that it posed a problem that could be solved and provided the materials for that solution. Unfortunately, her life did not follow such a tidy pattern)” (Tischler 76). There was no simple way to rid someone of the symptoms of shell shock,

or assign blame to any person or thing, so catching a criminal was wonderfully simple in comparison.

During the war, Sayers's role was primarily assisting in the creation of propaganda, whereas Christie worked with the Voluntary Aid Detachment, a British field nursing organization, in a war hospital, much like one of the characters in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. Christie's fantastic knowledge from poisons and medicines came from this era of her life and helped to make so many of her deaths sound believable, since over half of her stories' victims suffered from poisoning or overdose. She must have seen many shell-shocked victims in her nursing experience. Also, many of her patients were Belgian, since Belgium was hit particularly hard in the course of World War I. Britain widely publicized the German war crimes taking place there, referring to it as the "Rape of Belgium" because of the level of atrocities. Giving her main detective, Poirot, a background as a Belgian police detective and refugee garners sympathy for him, but it also gave Christie an option to have Poirot describe his situation for leaving, or some of the horrors he saw there. Allyson Booth explains,

Kriegsverrat [a German term for war treason] insisted that when Belgian civilians resisted an invading army, they were tampering in politics in the same way that a traitor does and playing according to the same high stakes. Germany used this policy to justify the killing of hundreds of Belgian civilians during its invasion, arguing that the civilians were, in essence, fair game. Britain, on the other hand, interpreted Germany's treatment of Belgian civilians as 'incontrovertible evidence...of German inhumanity' (Booth 23).

Surely with these war crimes occurring not long before this book was published, Poirot would have had to have fallen victim to treatment such as this. However, Poirot appears jolly as ever, and barely speaks about his wartime experience other than that he is a refugee. This lack of acknowledgement seems deliberate – why give a detective a past that sounds extremely traumatic and eventful, only for it to be ignored? The character growth available with that kind of story would have given Poirot depth and grounded him in the inter-war era. Either Christie figured those events would be filled in by the imagination of the public, since Belgium’s suffering was widely known, or she decided that real-world trauma had no place in the lighthearted puzzle of a murder mystery. Perhaps she was not looking for character depth because it was not the point of the story, as Chandler criticized in “The Simple Art of Murder.” One would think that with Sayers’ experience with propaganda writing, she would be the one to gloss over the more difficult aspects of war trauma. However, she is the one to take the opportunity to have a character who is believably affected by the war, as we will discuss later.

Dashiell Hammett also refuses to let trauma affect his characters in *The Maltese Falcon*. He started working as a Pinkerton detective at the age of 21 in 1915, before joining the army three years later. Hammett was trained for the Motor Ambulance Company in Maryland, although not for very long, since he suffered from tuberculosis and was hospitalized early on. However, he saw enough as an ambulance driver for veterans returning from the front that his life was changed by it. Sam Spade, on the other hand, is an invincible, hard-hitting hero who never lets blood or death get in the way of his ability to do his job. Where Agatha Christie’s world is impervious to violence

because it exists in the utopian English countryside, Hammett's world is a different kind of fairytale. In *Triumph of the Thriller*, Patrick Anderson writes:

Decades of war, recession, and political and corporate corruption have made Americans more cynical – or realistic – and thus more open to novels that examine the darker side of society. And yet most thrillers manage some sort of happy ending. They have it both ways, reminding us how ugly and dangerous our society can be and yet offering hope in the end. Thrillers provide the illusion of order and justice in a world that often seems to have none (Anderson 7).

Not quite the fluff novel that Chandler and Mandel detest, but in a similar way, hard-boiled thrillers still tack on the cheery idea of a man so brave that he is able to save the day, without emotional or psychological effects, every time. There is comfort in the fact that Spade always carries on, ever sarcastic, even after he has particularly violent encounters. Instead of ignoring trauma altogether like Christie does, Hammett declares that his main character is simply manly and tough enough to not be traumatized.

Hammett's personal attitude toward shell shock victims seems to have been in a similar vein, such as his letter about scaring them with pie tins and calling them "goofs." This comes from a man who, according to biographer Diane Johnson, "said later only that he had overturned an ambulance and people had been hurt. He decided he would never drive again, or only rarely" (Johnson 22-23). While this is not shell shock, of course, it does seem like Hammett was strongly impacted by his war experience, as is evident in his reluctance to be put in a similar situation. Sam Spade is the man he, and many other veterans, wished they could be – stoic and hard-hearted, and never breaking down.

The commonly accepted distinction between the hard-boiled and Golden Age is violence versus its absence. Allyson Booth's book can help explain why this discrepancy occurs, beyond stylistic or cultural differences. What it comes down to, oftentimes, is gender: Men were soldiers and fought in World War I, and women were civilians and did not. Women nursed and assisted the war effort in many ways and are not to be undervalued, but ultimately most women were not in the trenches in Belgium and France seeing shells explode before their eyes. Because British media was not allowed to show death, and with the new technologies unseen except in battle, the civilians had a difficult time imagining the violence of the trenches. As obvious as that sounds, Booth goes on to explain the idea of corpselessness:

...British policy dictated that the civilian bereaved would never have anything to bury. Soldiers inhabited a world of corpses; British civilians experienced the death of their soldiers as corpselessness. In England, then, World War I created two markedly different categories of experience, a discrepancy that complicated the gap that always separates language from experience. While verbal descriptions of war can never wholly convey the physical experience of war, the discontinuity between the experience of soldiers and of civilians – between death experienced as corpses and death experienced as corpselessness – meant that civilians were in a position to speak about death and to speak about soldiers without ever seeing dead soldiers. (Booth 21)

Although American media was not as conservative as British coverage of war, showing death and bodies more often in the news, I think that this clearly sets out the divide between female British citizens and American male war veterans. Agatha Christie's

bodies are barely described as dead, with little graphic detail about wounds or blood. Sayers's body in *Whose Body?* is an even more dramatic example – the body is displaced, stripped of identity, almost stripped of humanity. The lack of personalization turns the death of a random bum into a sick joke. We do not know his past, his family, or even his true name when the mystery is finally solved. We only know that his is just another death used to distract from the true victim. The number of bodies in Sayers' story, with descriptions involving dissections and dismemberment, parallels the countless number of bodies never returned to England. Although most of the bodies used at the hospital for medical purposes are not murder victims, the sheer amount of corpses brings to memory the title of one of Hammett's first short stories, "Bodies Piled Up." When we do discover the victim in Sayers' mystery, Sir Reuben Levy, his face has been dissected and must be covered with a sheet in order for his wife to identify him. Sayers, as a citizen who did not experience death on the front lines, sees death as an absence of a corpse, just like the missing Sir Reuben. Solving the mystery is a way of coming to terms with this corpselessness, and making those men a physical entity again.

On the other hand, Raymond Chandler saw plenty of bodies, both in his own experience in war and also through the eyes of Philip Marlowe. Chandler was born in the United States to an Irish mother and American father, although the latter left around seven years later. His mother moved back to the United Kingdom with him so that he could have a classic British public school education at Dulwich. Here he was taught that, "morality was foremost...followed by Englishness, followed by intellect" (Hiney 13). After moving to California for work, but being unable to find anything satisfying, he decided to join the Canadian Army in 1917. He fought in the trenches on the Western

Front until June 1918, when German shells hit his battalion and he got a concussion. The few survivors of that attack were transferred back to the Royal Air Corps for training in England, where he remained until the end of the war. This experience traumatized him deeply, and “it was during his four months’ training in Waddington...that the shell-shocked Chandler discovered his taste for alcohol” (Hiney 43). A common method of escape for soldiers with post-traumatic stress disorder, alcohol remained a coping mechanism for Chandler and his detectives for many years afterward. He began working in the oil business after his return to Los Angeles, but was eventually fired due to his excessive drinking. Chandler’s war experience is why Marlowe, unlike Peter Wimsey, has more of a sense of the people who die. He interacts with the characters and gets to know their personalities before they are killed, and when they are, their bodies are described graphically. His emphasis on these types of descriptions show that he tries to move away from the Golden Age’s lack of realism which he criticizes in “The Simple Art of Murder.” He is more aware than Sayers is that in modern, violent times, people die for many different reasons, sometimes for revenge, sometimes for love, and sometimes quite randomly – but they all die the same. Their deaths are shocking, bloody, and human. There is no displacement or eerie pile of faceless corpses – when someone is killed in *Farewell, My Lovely*, we have usually seen them alive moments before. We have watched it happen.

Because of Chandler’s war veteran status, his novel has some motifs common in war novels, even though his books were written years afterward. As Dawes states in *The Language of War*, “War is a world of friction, a world where human plans and organization are perpetually vulnerable to the predations of luck, and where the

individual will, like the body itself, is eventually broken down by the repetitive strain of the haphazard. The structure of war, and of existence in war, is accident” (Dawes 109-110). In *Farewell, My Lovely*, Marlowe randomly runs into Moose Malloy instead of being approached as a private detective and formally hired. Many of the major clues and interactions are the result of happenstance. This “repetitive strain” shows in Chandler’s writing style – Marlowe is constantly wandering around Los Angeles, rarely sleeping or eating, and when he does sleep it is fitfully. He must keep carrying on until the next part of the story is able to unfold through some chance breakthrough or connection. This is not to say that Marlowe is a talentless detective – he is certainly determined and intuitive when it comes to solving crimes. However, the mystery is never solved by the intellectual detail, as with Sherlock Holmes and his mental encyclopedia of tobacco ash.

British detective stories during the inter-war period read entirely differently than their American counterparts in terms of mood. When compared with the American detective novel, which is dark, brooding, and haunted by violent streets and siren-like women, the British detective novels of Dorothy L. Sayers can seem like a jaunt through a fairytale of traditionalism and light-hearted banter. However, beneath the comedic quips and flippancy lies a much darker side to Lord Peter Wimsey. As a World War I veteran who had seen men he led into battle die by his side, Wimsey suppresses his trauma in favor of music, the collection of rare first editions, and the distracting puzzle-solving lifestyle of the private detective. The latter is an interesting choice of occupation for someone who has seen the violence of war first-hand, made more interesting by the fact that Lord Peter, as someone of a high status, most likely does not have to work for a

living at all. Solving these isolated murders and bringing their killer to justice may serve as a coping mechanism for the many deaths during the war for which no man is punished.

* * *

At the beginning of *Whose Body?*, Dorothy L. Sayers's first novel featuring Lord Peter Wimsey, he seems like a fairly well-adjusted gentleman. Although confronted by the prospect of a murder to solve right from the first few pages, the death does not seem to bother him, or those around him, in the least. In fact, Wimsey seems more to be play-acting the part of the classic detective rather than truly embodying it. He even debates with his butler Bunter about what to wear for the occasion:

Can I have the heart to fluster the flustered Thipps further – that's very difficult to say quickly – by appearing in a top-hat and frock-coat? I think not. Ten to one he will overlook my trousers and mistake me for the undertaker. A gray suit, I fancy, neat but not gaudy, with a hat to tone, suits my other self better. Exit the amateur of first editions; new motive introduced by solo bassoon; enter Sherlock Holmes, disguised as a walking gentleman. (Sayers 5)

Wimsey is more excited to be dressed correctly at the scene of the crime than to actually inspect it for clues. This furthers the idea that the whole business of being a detective is partially just to enjoy the romance of appearing as one, something in which American detectives never really indulge. The choice of words he uses in saying "my other self" is intriguing. While to Bunter he is merely separating the book collector from the gentleman-detective, it could apply to more than just his hobbies. Wimsey has separated

the man who fought in the war from the man who solves bizarre crimes for fun. This compartmentalization, while most likely necessary in order to function in everyday life, ultimately breaks down when Wimsey is put under pressure later on in the novel.

The description of the body that was found is another instance where Lord Peter is confronted with death but does not really accept it as traumatic. Even though it is described as a “body” from the very beginning, it bears very little resemblance to the bodies most often found in the alleyways or hotel rooms of the American hard-boiled. Sayers writes:

The body which lay in the bath was that of a tall, stout man of about fifty. The hair, which was thick and black and naturally curly, had been cut and parted by a master hand, and exuded a faint violet perfume, perfectly recognizable in the close air of the bathroom. The features were thick, fleshy and strongly marked, with prominent dark eyes, and a long nose curving down to a heavy chin. The clean-shaven lips were full and sensual, and the dropped jaw showed teeth stained with tobacco. On the dead face the handsome pair of gold pince-nez mocked death with grotesque elegance; the fine gold chain curved over the naked breast. The legs lay stiffly stretched out side by side; the arms reposed close to the body; the fingers were flexed naturally. (Sayers 8)

The adjectives used here do not immediately tell the reader that this man is dead until the penultimate sentence, very unlike the shock and horror of bloodier murders. This body seems like it could get up and walk away at any moment. Flexed fingers and sensual lips are very lifelike phrases to use in describing a corpse. Focusing on minute details also prevents the full impact of the sight of a dead body from becoming overwhelming. By

breaking down the sight of death into eyes, a nose, lips, hair, etc., Wimsey is able to focus on the normal aspects of human appearance rather than the abnormal and potentially triggering concept of a cadaver appearing out of nowhere within the British home. The factor of its nudity, while initially providing more of a challenge for Wimsey because of the lack of information that could have been taken from the items of clothing, can also be taken in more of a metaphorical context. This naked body has anonymity without everyday clothing to show status, like the many soldiers on the battlefield that were all made to dress the same. He could be any man, and even turns out to be an “unknown vagrant” (Sayers 99) similar to the way that any soldier on any given day could be made a corpse. The body also hides behind nothing – its death is out in the open, on display for the public to find. This, perhaps, has the potential to be most troubling to Lord Peter, who hides his trauma under many layers of witticisms and expensive suits. While Wimsey does not appear bothered by this vision of death, even making up a song about how exciting the situation is (Sayers 11), this mystery eventually reveals his deep-seated psychological anxiety with death as a whole.

The constant allusions to literature solidify Wimsey’s determination to pretend like he is a fictional detective hero, making him unaware that he, in fact, is one. This self-referential quality is a complex technique used throughout the mystery genre, but it seems to happen more often than usual with Dorothy L. Sayers. Perhaps because Lord Peter collects rare editions of books in his spare time, or perhaps because Sayers knew that many, if not most, of her readers are familiar with the popular genre already, there are countless comments comparing the events of this particular mystery with those of the average detective story. Most often the allusions are to Sherlock Holmes, who, while

beaten out by Poe's Dupin for the title of First Serial Detective, was doubtless the most popular during Sayers's time period. The comparisons are usually made in order to show that in "real life" (or Wimsey's reality, anyway), things do not happen as neatly as in Conan Doyle's stories. For example, Parker the policeman tells Wimsey, "I looked for any footmarks of course, but naturally, with all this rain, there wasn't a sign. Of course, if this were a detective story, there'd have been a convenient shower exactly an hour before the crime and a beautiful set of marks which could only have come there between two and three in the morning, but this is real life in a London November, you might as well expect foot-prints in Niagara" (Sayers 25). While this quotation does not refer directly to Sherlock Holmes as most of the others do, the details resemble those most often found in Conan Doyle's mystery style. This reverence for the old-fashioned detective shows a longing for the simplicity of pre-War Victorian standards, before society was torn apart by the violence of World War I. Sherlock Holmes was one of the most quintessential characters of Victorian England – the embodiment of restoring a crime-ridden society to the comfort of an explanation at a warm fireside hearth. This comfort has been stripped from English society after a period of catastrophic death with very little explanation, and hearkening back to Holmes is a way of seeking that reason and rationality once again.

The villain of the novel is perfectly suited to drive Wimsey's memories of war to the surface. Sir Julian Freke, a nerve specialist during a time when many men suffered from nervous breakdowns, has the ability to draw out Wimsey's weakness. When Wimsey finally realizes that Freke is the murderer, it is suddenly too much for him to handle. He sinks into the very kind of nervous attack that Freke is known to treat.

Before this, we have no knowledge whatsoever of these breakdowns, but afterward, we are told that he has had several. He says to Bunter, “Hush! no, no – it’s the water...it’s up to their waists down there, poor devils. But listen! can’t you hear it? Tap, tap, tap – they’re mining us – but I don’t know where – I can’t hear – I can’t. Listen, you! There it is again – we must find it – we must stop it....Listen! Oh, my God! I can’t hear – I can’t hear anything for the noise of the guns. Can’t they stop the guns?” (Sayers 72). The Lord Peter we see here is very different from the one who made jokes about the body in the bath. This one does not take death lightly or as an interesting pastime – instead, it overwhelms him. It takes the book from an easygoing comedy of manners style to a darker and more troubled one.

While the rest of the book could have easily taken place within the Victorian period, just like Sherlock Holmes, Wimsey’s flashback to World War I places it distinctly in modern times. This was for a good reason. As Robert Kuhn McGregor states in *Conundrums for the Long Week-End*, “By placing him in the frontlines as a major who actually suffered shell shock, Sayers preserved the credibility of his lordly upbringing and education while giving him a real experience of horror shared by millions. And, in refusing to talk about it or dwell on it until forced to do so, Wimsey walked in step with just about every frontline veteran” (McGregor, 28). Gone are the puns and frivolity of a farcical gentleman-detective. In one conversation, Wimsey is taken from the impossible world of solving mysteries over tea and into the more complicated world experienced by many of the readers. He is suddenly weaker, less of a golden hero out to save the day and have a fun time doing it. This realization seems to occur to him as well, as he tells Parker he “can be no use to you in London” (Sayers 73). As much as Wimsey strives to be like

the old, carefree, and untouchable heroes of Victorian detective fiction, he is forced by his past to be fallible and need assistance. The frustration of trying to retain old-fashioned manhood and bravery while dealing with shell shock was a common one.

While her books do follow the pattern of many other detective authors of the time, presenting a mystery with little emotional investment and then solving it with wit and enthusiasm, I think some of Sayers's dissatisfaction with her personal experiences comes into play. Wimsey does solve the mystery, but some extremely troubling ideas about the psyche and morality are discovered along the way. He feels as though he is of little use to mystery-solving, and seems rather exhausted and defeated by the end of the novel. Sayers shows the impact that such psychological effects can have on one's spirit, which she may know personally through both her own personal problems and her husband's. Even though Peter Wimsey saves the day, he does it without the pizzazz that he had at the beginning of the book, and shows that dealing with such deep-seated anxiety from his wartime experiences has taken its toll. He is excited by his victory and goes back to making quips and acting posh, but in his journey to get there he has shown more human signs of weakness than characters like Poirot or Sam Spade ever did.

Doctors like Sir Julian Freke were struggling to treat this psychological condition as best as possible. However, what makes Freke a true villain is his view on morality. While most veterans had an extremely difficult time coping with the morals of war, Freke believes that morality can be removed. "Chop it out and you'll feel all the better," Wimsey thinks to himself (Sayers 86). Where men were trying to distance their consciences from the violence they had experienced during the war, Freke chooses the violence and disposes of his conscience. They seemingly cannot coexist – it causes too

much inner conflict. Men must either attempt to get rid of their traumatic memories, or the moral codes that cannot make sense of the memories. Wimsey chooses the former and struggles to keep his flashbacks at bay, while Freke chooses the latter and becomes a villain.

One of the few times Lord Peter Wimsey mentions the war before his breakdown draws a parallel between it and the types of violence found in detective stories. He says to Parker,

He was shaved after he was dead. Pretty, ain't it? Uncommonly jolly little job for the barber, what? Here, sit down, man, and don't be an ass, stumpin' about the room like that. Worse things happen in war. This is only a blinkin' old shillin' shocker. But I'll tell you what, Parker, we're up against a criminal – *the* criminal – the real artist and blighter with imagination – real, artistic, finished stuff. I'm enjoyin' this, Parker. (Sayers 18, emphasis in original)

This offhand comparison to war violence is interesting for a few different ways. First off, he does not mention the level of horror in war directly. He only refers to it as “worse” than a body being shaved after death, which is not specific at all. He does not even mention the fact that he has seen war violence firsthand, although the way he treats Parker in telling him to sit down suggests that Wimsey has a better idea of it than he does. The second interesting aspect of this is that Wimsey sounds like he admires the craftiness of this murderer. He finds pleasure in realizing how premeditated this crime truly was, including all the dark and gruesome aspects of it. It is unclear whether he is “enjoyin' this” because he is figuring it out and gaining on the murderer, or whether he simply is intrigued by the complexity of this murder. This isolated and somewhat bizarre

incident may provide a comforting and more interesting contrast to the ubiquitous and overwhelming deluge of violence during the war. In comparison to watching many men suffer and die from bomb blasts or gas attacks, especially men that he knew and for whom he was responsible as a major, having the violence happen to someone unfamiliar to him - in a way that most likely will not happen to other people - may be somewhat of a relief. In both singular murders and in war, the threat of further violence continues while the enemy is still out there. However, it is much easier to stop one man than it is to stop an army.

Lord Peter Wimsey's main affliction, his shell shock, is largely due to his sense of responsibility for the men who died following his orders as a major in the army. Sir Julian Freke points this out to him, saying, "You must learn to be irresponsible, Lord Peter" (Sayers 92). Wimsey responds jokingly that his friends say he is too irresponsible already, but his actions say otherwise. Peter Wimsey is a privileged and intelligent man. He could have any socially acceptable pastime that suits his fancy, and does have other habits like book collecting and music. However, he chooses to spend most of his time solving murders.¹ He still retains this feeling of responsibility he had during the war, so, when cases arise where he feels he could be of service, he steps in to help. In this way, he is able to bring justice to those who caused death in a way he was not able to while he was in service. Wimsey also saves lives by preventing those murderers from killing again. It is a way to come to terms with violence in a safe space (for him), because it has already occurred "off-stage" as is common during the British Golden Age. He rarely has

¹ Another one of these murders is also impacted by shell shock. In *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club*, Wimsey proves the innocence of George Fentiman, who suffers from trauma and medical complications from a gas attack, after Fentiman has a nervous breakdown and claims he killed his grandfather.

to face it himself, which helps to cause further trauma or more flashbacks to World War I. Wimsey gets the pleasure of “fixing” the violent acts that have happened and bringing society back to normal, without the dangers of encountering the violence itself. He also is able to put it in the context of the mystery novels that are so popular during this time, thus fictionalizing the sight of bodies and death around him so as not to feel the effects as harshly. The constant references to Sherlock Holmes and Watson and the wistfulness of the Victorian novel serve as a safety net for Wimsey, keeping him rooted in the desire for a good story. Sayers’s readers, also traumatized by World War I, probably looked to the Wimsey novels in a similar way – an escapist realm through which violent incidents can be understood and settled without any true trauma or danger in the way.

While Sir Julian Freke may have turned out to be an amoral villain, other real psychologists of the time period were also attempting to understand shell shock. Sigmund Freud published his essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in 1920, which partially focused on the “war neuroses” he saw in veterans from World War I. He stated that fright as a result of surprise was the main cause of the neurosis, and that an injury sustained at the time of the surprise generally prevented the neurosis. The case of Peter Wimsey includes both factors – he was shocked by the carnage around him, and he was not terribly injured. He was, however, buried alive, which induces fright. Freud goes on to say that veterans have flashbacks in their dreams because they do not realize all they have repressed while they are awake. Since Wimsey represses so much of his war experience, he relives in the present the horrors of his past, because they do not seem like a memory to him. This explains why his breakdown is in the present tense – he is watching it happen before his eyes rather than simply remembering how it happened.

The trauma is therefore just as fresh and scarring as it was on the day it occurred.

Wimsey's symptoms seem to be a fairly accurate portrayal of the shell shock that Freud observed in real veterans, and his scene with Bunter most likely looked familiar to many readers, making him more sympathetic and modern than a more stoic detective might have been.

* * *

As an American-born and British-raised detective fiction author, Raymond Chandler provides a transition between the British traditionalism of the Golden Age and the dark and deadly streets of the hard-boiled. His leading man, Philip Marlowe, reads like an old-world hero who has been forced into disillusionment. He has seen too much of Depression-era Los Angeles to believe in the eradication of violence through the capture of a single murderer, in the way that the English stories do. Between the ever-rising crime rates and his experience of trench warfare during the war, Chandler was surrounded by death, and so fell naturally into a graphic new form of detective fiction. In his second Marlowe novel, *Farewell, My Lovely*, Chandler writes of a cynical and somewhat disturbed detective on the trail of a gigantic felon named Moose Malloy.

It was not until 1933 that Chandler began writing detective stories, and not until 1938 that Philip Marlowe was created. Although Chandler had never been a private eye, everything besides occupation linked the author to his creation. Tom Hiney writes about the similarities between Chandler and Marlowe: "Both men were lonely drinkers working in Los Angeles. Both were good at jobs which they found distasteful and both, to the

same extent, were addicted to physical danger” (Hiney 64). This physical danger was a drastic change from the more traditional British detective stories. Unlike Miss Marple, who can solve crimes from the safety of her parlor, Marlowe is constantly experiencing violence firsthand. As he says to himself in *Farewell, My Lovely*, “You’ve been sapped down twice, had your throat choked and been beaten half silly on the jaw with a gun barrel. You’ve been shot full of hop and kept under it until you’re as crazy as two waltzing mice. And what does all that amount to? Routine” (Chandler 171). Not only does Marlowe put himself in dangerous situations often, he does not seem particularly fazed by them. He expects the violence rather than letting it shock him. In an age where crime rates were high, money was scarce, and people were desperate, this sense of normality surrounding violence was most likely common. Rugged and immortal, Marlowe keeps staggering toward a solution no matter how many times he is beaten down, a true hero of the Depression.

Chandler’s target audience was not only used to the sheer number of crimes committed, but also the level of gore present. The murders Marlowe encounters are extremely graphic compared to their British counterparts. In one instance,

He lay smeared on the ground, on his back, at the base of a bush, in that bag-of-clothes position that always means the same thing. His face was a face I had never seen before. His hair was dark with blood, the beautiful blond ledges were tangled with blood and some thick grayish ooze, like primeval slime.... I held the light on his face. He had been beaten to a pulp. One of his hands was flung out in a frozen gesture, the fingers curled. His overcoat was half twisted under him, as

though he had rolled as he fell. His legs were crossed. There was a trickle as black as dirty oil at the corner of his mouth. (Chandler 71)

The level of detail in which the body is described shows the strong sense of realism which makes the hard-boiled distinctive. Chandler had seen people die before, and his writing makes his wartime past apparent. Unlike the Golden Age stories, where the body is used as a means for the mystery rather than a shock factor, hard-boiled novels dramatize the extreme violence as more than just a plot point. From the placement of each limb to the truly horrifying choice of adjectives, Chandler is not squeamish about forcing his readers to picture the body exactly as he envisions it. However, this was most likely a typical occurrence for them. Californians had read about true crime in similar, and sometimes more graphic, detail. Hiney writes, “Californian newspapers reveled in the explicit. Photographs of mutilated homicide victims were as commonplace as pictures of the detectives leading celebrated cases.... At one point, Chandler began to wonder whether even hard boiled-murder stories were not going to seem ‘a bit on the insignificant side’ for the Angelino reader, considering the publicity given to real-life urban homicide” (Hiney 87). Even though Chandler’s murder victims are depicted in brutal visual detail, it is nothing his audience has not seen before. The Los Angeles society as a whole had become somewhat desensitized to violence in a way that the British audience does not seem to have been. Rather than dancing around the subject of death, discussing the footprints on the windowsill rather than the blood seeping into the carpet, Chandler’s detectives refuse to dust for fingerprints and ignore the realism. In fact, the methods of detection are entirely different. Motive and connections between people are the most important clues, not alibis or a strand of hair found on the victim’s

coat. When Marlowe examines the scene of the crime, it is to react to the visual representation of death as a whole. He sees the blood and brain matter, no matter how nauseating.

One of Chandler's first attempts at prose was a short piece entitled "Trench Raid," which he wrote while in hospital in 1918. The story is in third person, giving a brief glimpse into the life of an unnamed soldier in the trenches. Unlike his former attempts at poetry in his younger years, the language reads very similarly to his later detective works. It is difficult to separate the faceless narrator from Chandler himself and his own personal experiences – perhaps, like in detective fiction, writing in third person helped to distance him from the trauma he faced. In the opening of "Trench Raid," he says, "He groveled against the wall of the trench, nauseated by the din. He seemed to be alone in a universe of incredibly brutal noise" (*The Raymond Chandler Papers* 12). This brutal noise entraps the soldier from the beginning, setting the scene distinctly in war. Noise is a sense that is hard to ignore, so the inescapable feeling of the bombardment is made clear to the reader. Also, we see Chandler's soldier attempt the Hammett style of detachment in the face of danger, remaining as calm as possible:

He began to concentrate on the shells. If you heard them they never hit you.

With meticulous care he set himself to picking out the ones that would come close enough to be reckoned on as a possible introduction to immortality. To these he listened with a sort of cold exhausted passion until a flattening of the screech told him they had gone over to the support lines. Time to move on. Mustn't stay too long in one place. (*The Raymond Chandler Papers* 13)

By focusing on the possible harbinger of death, he is able to move forward in his journey. Assuming Chandler was describing himself and the days he spent in the trenches, this means he has looked death in the face and forced himself to carry on his duties afterward, like many soldiers. Even though it is difficult, it must happen out of necessity, because if a soldier remains in one place in the trenches, he might die. This mentality carries forward into the life of Phillip Marlowe. When Marlowe is beaten or sees someone he talked to get killed, he cannot stand there frozen by fear or disbelief. He must act in order to solve the mystery. Poirot or Wimsey, although occasionally pressed for time by police or impending police processes, are rarely forced to physically act in the way that Marlowe is time after time. Marlowe moves to survive, like those men in the trenches, dodging bullets and punches and racing forward toward eventual answers.

One must wonder why, if Chandler was traumatized by his experiences in World War I, he would choose to preoccupy himself with the ghastly scenes of murder he creates in his fiction. Freud says in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" that where the conscious mind can be at ease with the past, the unconscious mind can still have a fixation on an incident of the trauma. There is no mention of Marlowe ever fighting in World War I, but since he displays so many similarities to Chandler, he also displays some symptoms of trauma. Hiney writes,

Chandler could not help but absorb the details he had witnessed in wartime France; from the way a man's eyes look just after death to the viscosity of blood that seeps from a fatal head wound. These observations he would use in his later fiction. It would seem that he had also decided that the way to deal with such sights, apart from dulling their memory with drink, was to keep himself as distant

from the events as possible. In 'Trench Raid' are the first signs of the detachment with which increasingly he chose, in both life and fiction, to deal with unsavory realities. (Hiney 45)

By making Marlowe emotionally distant from the violent crimes he was solving, Chandler mirrored the way he struggled to distance himself from his experience with war. If Marlowe, who had a similar temperament to himself, did not have breakdowns upon seeing gore, Chandler could handle his memories from the trenches as well. He must have internalized some visions from France if he was able to describe the sight of a gunshot wound so clearly, but he seemed more intent on escapism than facing his trauma. Writing the experience out in fiction may have helped in the detachment process, if he was fictionalizing his own memories of encountering death. Both Marlowe and Chandler seem to deal with death by avoiding sobriety and making violence into a business. If the gore is just part of the job, they can become desensitized rather than traumatized and get the job done.

Even though Marlowe consciously remains stoic in the face of all that blood, deep in the back of his mind he does show signs of being disturbed by it. We are able to gain access to these emotions when his conscious mind is not in control. Marlowe has quite a few scenes where he is in a dreamlike state, whether it is due to alcohol, drugs, or having a concussion like the one Chandler experienced in the war. There is an extended scene in particular when Marlowe is waking up after being knocked out.

'Then one of them got into the car,' the voice said, 'and waited for you to come back. The others hid again. They must have figured he would be afraid to come alone. Or something in his voice made them suspicious, when they talked to him

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

'Yeah, that was about how it was,' the voice said. It was my voice. I was talking to myself, coming out of it. I was trying to figure the thing out subconsciously.

'Shut up, you dimwit,' I said, and stopped talking to myself. (Chandler 63)

He hears a voice and cannot understand that it is himself talking. His unconscious mind is working out an act of violence over and over without the conscious mind accepting it.

This is only a section of the conversation between his subconscious and conscious selves.

It goes on for another two pages, where eventually he starts arguing with himself, even

egging himself on to the point of a possible physical fight: "Maybe you want to make something of it. Okey, shut up and let me think. What with?" (Chandler 65) It takes

Marlowe quite a while to mentally move past what he has experienced in order to think

about what to do next. "Trying to figure the thing out subconsciously" is exactly what

Freud was describing in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." He breaks down the violence,

from possible causes to a minute-by-minute synopsis, and he keeps revisiting it until the

consciousness takes over once again.

Another interesting instance where we see this ulterior relationship with violence

is when Marlowe finds himself drugged in a private hospital. He thinks the room is full

of smoke because his vision is so blurry: "I yelled: 'Fire!' That made me laugh. I didn't

know what was funny about it but I began to laugh. It was the laugh of a nut" (Chandler

166). Once again we see the same detachment that was demonstrated when he woke up

from his concussion. He continues laughing as he beats up the man that came to give him

more drugs, eventually knocking that man out. Now, in his half-conscious state where

the id and the ego are both in play, he recreates the violence he experienced by inflicting

it on another person. The drugs keep him from feeling like it is actually happening, so he is able to laugh about it. It still takes Marlowe a long time for his normal, reserved self to regain control, as seen in a brief description of his evening. Chandler writes, “I undressed and went to bed. I had nightmares and woke out of them sweating. But in the morning I was a well man again” (Chandler 190). We get a brief glimpse into the struggles Marlowe is having with the brutal criminal underworld in which he makes his livelihood. It is not that the murder and pain does not affect him, like with Sam Spade – Marlowe is disturbed, but he refuses to appear so if he can help it. We are only privy to these inner repressed emotions when he cannot control himself.

There is one instance where Marlowe shows signs of weakness without his consciousness impaired. In this scene, he is waiting for a gambling boat to go hunt for a man named Brunette, who might lead him to Moose Malloy. There is a lot of fog, an almost Victorian sign of unreality, and he falls into a reverie:

It got darker. I thought; and thought in my mind moved with a kind of sluggish stealthiness, as if it was being watched by bitter and sadistic eyes. I thought of dead eyes looking at a moonless sky, with black blood at the corners of the mouths beneath them. I thought of nasty old women beaten to death against the posts of their dirty beds. I thought of a man with bright blond hair who was afraid and didn't quite know what he was afraid of, who was sensitive enough to know that something was wrong, and too vain or too dull to guess what it was that was wrong. (Chandler 238)

Even though he rarely admits it, he is haunted by the deaths that he's seen. He is more vulnerable and sensitive to those things than his contemporary hard-boiled detectives.

When his mind is allowed to wander, it wanders to those victims of violence. Marlowe is responsible for them now – their murders and memories are in his hands. As with Lord Peter Wimsey, one must question why he is willing to have strangers' deaths weigh on him as a career choice. There are plenty of jobs in Los Angeles – why be a detective? Unlike Wimsey, Marlowe needs the money, but he is driven by a similar sense of moral obligation. He is determined to find answers to the senseless violence on the Los Angeles streets, both for public and personal understanding of the crime.

The concept of the grotesque is another aspect generally attributed to the war novel that is found in Chandler's detective fiction. For example, as James Dawes explains in *The Language of War*, "The fog...is a quintessential grotesque motif, signifying 'the disintegration of order in a spatially unified social group.' Fog, itself situated somewhere between material and immaterial, commemorates the dissolution of the categories of perception and the disabling of the individual's capacity to discriminate: it wreathes war representation from *The Red Badge of Courage* to...*Apocalypse Now*" (Dawes 134). There is often fog on the battlefield in a literal sense, because of the poison gas used in trench warfare, but it also makes sense in a metaphorical way. Fog blurs the lines between life and death, moral decisions and chance, and the conscious and unconscious mind. When fog appears, Marlowe's memories of violence and trauma reemerge, and he has a harder time suppressing them.

Later, a young man appears who offers to take him to the gambling boat, and things get even more personal. The setting, with "just enough fog to make everything seem unreal" (Chandler 255), helps in loosening Marlowe's tongue and allowing him to confide in the young man in a way he hasn't done in the novel thus far. "I'm afraid of

death and despair,' I said. 'Of dark water and drowned men's faces and skulls with empty eyesockets. I'm afraid of dying, of being nothing, of not finding a man named Brunette'" (Chandler 251). He admits the nightmarish thoughts he's had about this case, and the pressure he feels he is under to complete his mission. He suffers from the idea that his work affects the ghosts of men and women found dead. There is no back-story or explanation that Marlowe fought in the war, so perhaps this sense of inevitable and terrifying responsibility stems from Chandler himself. Chandler was not put in the same situation as Lord Peter Wimsey, commanding many men to die, but he had seen men die in a similar way.

In terms of the title of this particular novel, Chandler seemed to have distinct views of love's place in the hard-boiled detective novel. Even though Chandler's more famous novel, *The Big Sleep*, offers some romantic and sexual intrigue, Marlowe always remains determinedly unattached. His moral fortitude always overcomes his personal desires, showing a contrast between him and characters like Sam Spade. Chandler is quoted as saying, "The love story and the detective story cannot exist, not only in the same book – one might also say the same culture. Modern outspokenness has utterly destroyed the romantic dream on which love feeds.... There is nothing left to write about but death, and the detective story is a tragedy with a happy ending" (Hiney 76). This is another drastically different view than his British contemporaries. Lord Peter Wimsey falls in love with Harriet Vane in the novel *Strong Poison*, and Hercule Poirot almost always ends up matchmaking a happy couple. Even Chandler himself wrote love poems to his wife, but he saw no place for it in a detective novel. He displays this view clearly in *Farewell, My Lovely*. It is revealed at the end of the book that Moose Malloy has

finally found his girlfriend, but she has married another man and kills Moose on the spot. She then commits suicide after she is caught. There is the happy ending Chandler describes – two murderers who are punished, rather than a marriage. The immediate threat of continued violence by these murderers is stopped, which is the most optimistic outlook Chandler can manage. The days of pet names and happily-ever-after stories are over in the post-war era, and all that remains to give us any sort of happiness is the idea of justice served.

Chandler sets himself apart from Golden Age fiction in terms of his priorities, as well. He is aware of the similar murder-driven writing, but he is determined to focus more on character development than the typical English stories provide. In a letter to his publisher, Alfred Knopf, after his initial success with his first novel, *The Big Sleep*, he explained this rationale:

I do not want to write depraved books. I was aware that this yarn had some fairly unpleasant citizens in it, but my fiction was learned in a rough school, and I probably didn't notice them much. I was more intrigued by a situation where the mystery is solved by the exposition and understanding of a single character, always well in evidence, rather than by the slow and sometimes long-winded concatenation of circumstances. (*The Raymond Chandler Papers* 15).

Chandler does not want the moral corruption of his characters to become sensationalist, or the single selling point of his books. Ultimately, he is trying to tell a believable, realistic detective story, one that could plausibly take place in Los Angeles, where policemen were crooked and murders received front-page photos from the press. If the morality is questionable in his books, it is questionable in his city. Since English mystery

novels largely stemmed from sensationalist Victorian literature, he is breaking away from this traditional viewpoint and reemphasizing that realism is more important.

His distaste for the genre, even though he clearly is passionate about his own novels, seeps into many, if not most, of his letters during the first few years of his writing. For example, his statement from “The Simple Art of Murder” that bad novels never get published but bad mystery novels always do is brought up in a letter to the wife of his publisher, Blanche Knopf, in 1940. This took place during the writing of his second novel, soon to be renamed *Farewell, My Lovely*: “I finally did get a very rough draft done but was not at all pleased with it and had to put it aside for a while, in the hope of later discovering whether it was just plain lousy or whether it was a distorted point of view that made me think so. However, I am a bit cheered up about it (in absentia) as my researches have convinced me that just plain lousy is the normal temperature of the detective story” (*The Raymond Chandler Papers* 24). If he thinks so poorly of the genre, the question of why he insists on making a living from it comes up frequently. He believes that Dashiell Hammett began to improve the mystery novel, and that he, Chandler, could continue building on that foundation in order to make the style more believable, and therefore more substantial as actual literature. Chandler, both in his fiction and his letters, refers to Hemingway quite a lot. Hemingway seems to be his primary example of realistic and respectable post-World War I literature. He complains in another one of his letters that Hemingway is not included in enough libraries, and is not attaining the notoriety it deserves, when “bunk” like Agatha Christie’s *And Then There Were None* was widely successful without being truthful to the same degree. After reading Agatha Christie, he sadly and resignedly comes to the conclusion,

“it finally and for all time settled a question in my mind that had at least some lingering doubt attached to it. Whether it is possible to write a strictly honest mystery of the classic type. It isn’t. To get the complication you fake the clues, the timing, the play of coincidence, assume certainties where only 50 per cent chances exist at most. To get the surprise murderer you fake character, which hits me hardest of all, because I have a sense of character. If people want to play this game, it’s all right by me. But for Christ’s sake let’s not talk about honest mysteries. They don’t exist” (*The Raymond Chandler Papers* 28).

Even though this letter was sent in June of 1940, and “The Simple Art of Murder” was not published until 1950, Chandler’s experience reading Agatha Christie provides the grounds for the contrast he is so determined to set for himself. Even though he admits Hemingway is repetitive, with Marlowe calling him “a guy that keeps saying the same thing over and over until you begin to believe it must be good” (Chandler 164), he seeks to emulate that style more so than the almost Victorian traditions of Sayers and Christie. Chandler attempts to bridge the gap between the Lost Generation authors, who sought to express their displacement and disillusionment in the modern era, with the mystery writers that ultimately are his foundation, however much he would like to deny it. As much as he criticizes the Golden Age authors, he is writing for a similar audience, and building on a genre they have brought into blossom.

Even though these authors were popular and successful during the same time period, there is a distinctive order in which they entered the detective fiction world. Agatha Christie published *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* in 1920, Dorothy L. Sayers published *Whose Body?* in 1923, Dashiell Hammett also published his first mystery story

(“Arson Plus”) in 1923 in *The Black Mask* magazine, and Raymond Chandler published his first *Black Mask* story (“Blackmailers Don’t Shoot”) in 1933. The same order shows a hierarchy of comfort levels in discussing World War I trauma. In the 20-year period after the Great War, detective fiction saw an arc in its descriptions and reactions to violence. Agatha Christie, writing so soon after the war when suppression was still encouraged among shell shock victims, offers a way to come to terms with violence without having to see it or have emotional ties to it. Dorothy L. Sayers, who did not serve during the war but was close to people who did, then brings in the emotional connection to violence while still retaining the sense of removal from the actual act. Dashiell Hammett, who transported returning veterans as an ambulance driver, never saw the trenches but saw its consequences, so it is natural that he would incorporate graphic descriptions into his detective fiction without any emotional relationship to them. Finally, Raymond Chandler saw the war and had lasting psychological effects from it, so his novels involve both extreme scenes of violence and of emotional trauma.

Despite their many differences, Chandler and Sayers were not in total opposition to one another as is generally accepted by detective fiction critics. The Golden Age and the hardboiled novels had contrasting writing styles and focuses, but the core of the genre was the same: both used mystery writing to process World War I violence. The different chronological stages of understanding that followed the war explain the differences in style. Ten years passed between Sayers publishing *Whose Body* and Chandler publishing his first short story, and even longer until *Farewell, My Lovely*. Since nearly 36% of British troops were casualties, whereas it was only 7% of the United States troops, Britain’s social recovery from the war also took longer than it did in America. Perhaps

Dorothy L. Sayers was able to be more direct about Peter Wimsey's diagnosis than Chandler could be because the war itself had such an obviously large impact on British society. In England, the violence could be ignored by those who did not serve in the war, but the after-effects of trauma could not. In America, the trauma was ignored, and the violence was not.

Bibliography

Anderson, Patrick. *The Triumph of the Thriller: How Cops, Crooks, and Cannibals*

Captured Popular Fiction. New York: Random House, 2007. Print.

Booth, Allyson. *Postcards from the trenches: negotiating the space between modernism*

and the First World War. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Chandler, Raymond. *Farewell, My Lovely*. New York, NY: Vintage, 1992. Print.

Chandler, Raymond and Howard Haycraft. "The Simple Art of Murder' by Raymond

Chandler." *The Art of the Mystery Story; a Collection of Critical Essays, Edited, and with a Commentary*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946. Print.

Chandler, Raymond, Tom Hiney, and Frank MacShane. *The Raymond Chandler Papers:*

Selected Letters and Non-fiction, 1909-1959. New York: Atlantic Monthly, 2000. Print.

Christie, Agatha. *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*. Toronto: Bantam, 1983. Print.

Dawes, James. *The Language of War: Literature and Culture in the U.S. from the Civil*

War through World War II. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002. Print.

- Eaton, William W. *The Sociology of Mental Disorders*. New York: Praeger, 1980. Print.
- Fussell, Paul. *The Great War and Modern Memory*. London: Oxford UP, 1977. Print.
- Freud, Sigmund, James Strachey, Anna Freud, Alix Strachey, and Alan Tyson. "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. London: Hogarth, 1957. Web.
- Graves, Robert, and Alan Hodge. *The Long Week-end: A Social History of Great Britain, 1918-1939*. New York: Norton, 1963. Print.
- Hiney, Tom. *Raymond Chandler: A Biography*. New York: Atlantic Monthly, 1997. Print.
- Johnson, Diane. *The Life of Dashiell Hammett*. London: Picador, 1985. Print.
- Mandel, Ernest. *Delightful Murder: A Social History of the Crime Story*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1986. Print.
- McGregor, Robert Kuhn, and Ethan Lewis. *Conundrums for the Long Week-end: England, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Lord Peter Wimsey*. Kent, OH: Kent State UP, 2000. Print.
- Nolan, William F. *The Black Mask Boys: Masters in the Hard-boiled School of Detective Fiction*. New York: Mysterious, 1987. Print.
- Quinn, Patrick J., and Steven Trout. "'Thoughts That You've Gagged All Day': Siegfried Sassoon, W.H.R. Rivers and '[The] Repression of War Experience'" *The Literature of the Great War Reconsidered: Beyond Modern Memory*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001. Print.
- Rivers, W. H. R. "The Repression of War Experience." *Instinct and the Unconscious; a Contribution to a Biological Theory of the Psycho-neuroses*. Cambridge:

- Cambridge University Press, 1922. Print.
- Sayers, Dorothy L., and Barbara Reynolds. *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers, 1899-1936*. New York: St. Martin's, 1996. Print.
- Sayers, Dorothy L., and Barbara Reynolds. *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers: A Noble Daring*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998. Print.
- Sayers, Dorothy L., and Barbara Reynolds. *The Letters of Dorothy L. Sayers, In the Midst of Life*. Cambridge: Dorothy L. Sayers Society, 2000. Print.
- Sayers, Dorothy L. *Three Complete Lord Peter Wimsey Novels*. New York: Wings, 1992. Print.
- Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. New York: Oxford UP, 1985. Print.
- "The Last Tommy Gallery" *BBC History*. BBC, 1998. Web. 10 Oct. 2013.
- Tischler, Nancy Marie Patterson. *Dorothy L. Sayers, a Pilgrim Soul*. Atlanta: John Knox, 1980. Print.
- "Tribute to WWI 'Cowards'" *BBC News*. BBC, 21 June 2001. Web. 10 Oct. 2013.
- Williams, Leut. Col. Frankwood E., MC, and Col. Thomas W. Salmon, MC. "The Medical Department of the United States Army in the World War, Volume X: Neuropsychiatry." *Office of Medical History*. U.S. Army Medical Department, 26 May 2009. Web. 4 Nov. 2013.
<<http://history.amedd.army.mil/booksdocs/wwi/Neuropsychiatry/default.htm>>.
- Wynne, Catherine. "Sherlock Holmes and the Problems of War: Traumatic Detections." *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 53.1 (2010): 29-53. Print.
- "WWI Casualty and Death Tables." PBS. Web. 3 Oct. 2013.

http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/resources/casdeath_pop.html.