

5-2024

Stretching the Hard-Boiled Detective: From Hammett and Chandler to Paretsky and Himes

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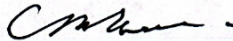
Stretching the Hard-Boiled Detective:
From Hammett and Chandler to Paretsky and Himes

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 in Virginia

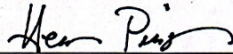
by

Chloe Louise Moore

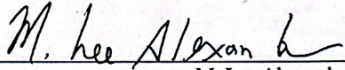
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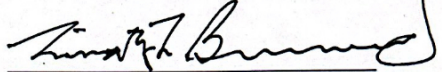
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May 6, 2024

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis will explore some transformations of the hard-boiled crime fiction genre by analyzing the works of Dashiell Hammett (1894-1961) and Raymond Chandler (1888-1959) and highlight how authors Sara Paretsky (1947-) and Chester Himes (1909-1984) change and manipulate the genre to suit their intentions and voices. Chandler and Hammett's novels will lay the foundation for understanding what makes a crime novel hard-boiled in the 1930s and 40s – what makes a private detective as hard-boiled and the genre qualifications that need to be met for this classification. I will specifically examine the construction of Hammett's serialized Continental Op (Operative) and his P.I., Sam Spade, and Chandler's iconic detective, Philip Marlowe. These private investigators characterize the hard-boiled detective in early renditions of the genre – white, male, outsider, lone wolf, rough, stoic, quasi-romantic, white knight saviors. With this foundation my thesis will explore how Paretsky and Himes adapted these qualities to suit a new demographic of detective: a white woman, and black men.

The detectives I will investigate are Sara Paretsky's V.I. Warshawski and Chester Himes' Coffin Ed and Grave Digger Jones. This analysis highlights what aspects of the genre remain from Hammett and Chandler's construction, and what needs to change to fit the new race/gender of the private eye. I will then explain how these changes, while not traditional to the genre, help ground these new variations in it rather than separate them from their predecessors, while simultaneously emphasizing the unique approaches to the genre. Beyond this thesis' focus on the private investigator, I will explore each version's approach to gender and race issues and explore the different motivations of each author and the social foundation of their work, including how these themes function in connection with the gender and race of the operative.

PART I: ESTABLISHING THE HARD-BOILED GENRE

Hard-boiled detective fiction emerged in the United States in the 1920s, a period characterized by dynamic social transformations and significant cultural clashes. For numerous Americans the 1920s was a decade of urban expansion, the emergence of consumerism culture, the proliferation of mass entertainment, and a period which symbolized a breakaway from the constraints of the Victorian era. F. Scott Fitzgerald notes that it was an era that was “reluctant to die outmoded in its bed,” and wished to see advancement and profound shifts in everything from sexual norms and gender expectations to hairstyles and fashion (Fitzgerald 414). For many others, however, the changes unfolding in the United States appeared unfavorable. Consequently, a veiled "cultural civil war" ensued, pitting a diverse society against itself in bitter disputes concerning issues like immigration, prohibition, women's roles, and racial tensions. Emerging and refining during a time of drastic social, cultural, and economic change in the United States, the hard-boiled crime novel became a backdrop onto which these authors could project their own perceptions of these changes.

The hard-boiled style was pioneered by Carroll John Daly in the mid-1920s, popularized by Dashiell Hammett over the course of the decade, and refined by authors like James M. Cain, Erle Stanley Gardner, and Raymond Chandler in the late 1930s and 1940s. In traditional detective stories, readers generally expect the detective who helps the rather limited police characters to possess the necessary skills and expertise to unravel the mystery presented. Whether it is their acute powers of observation, logical reasoning, forensic knowledge, or their esteemed reputation akin to characters such as Sherlock Holmes, there's a general sense of trust in their ability to piece together clues and solve the case at hand. Even when faced with unexpected twists or idiosyncrasies, the detective maintains control over the investigation with

his deductions and motives often hidden by the author until the very end. The goal, however, remains noble: to solve the crime through legitimate means, namely brainpower.

In contrast, hard-boiled detectives offer a less predictable approach. Often portrayed as emotionally flawed characters with their own interpretation of justice, they operate with a more visceral instinct, diverging from the composed demeanor of classic detectives. Despite attempting to maintain a detached stance, they frequently find themselves emotionally entangled in the cases they pursue, especially those involving women. This emotionality often leads to moments of violence fueled by their personal investment. In many respects, these hard-boiled detectives share character similarities with sympathetic villains, blurring the lines between protagonist and antagonist.

Black Mask Magazine

In 1920, as the “census revealed that, for the first time in U.S. history, more people lived in urban than in rural areas: 51.2% urban to 48.8% rural” (“Becoming Modern”) corporate America saw a growth in enterprise and possibilities for making money. As Sean McCann notes, all of this led to rising “tension[s] between bureaucratic organization and personal autonomy,” (McCann 44) meaning that there were increasing perceived social threats, from racial and gender conflicts to immigration, resulting in the Immigration Act of 1924 and the closure of Ellis Island. As a result of increased urbanization and Prohibition, crime also saw a rapid increase, leading to readers “eager for fiction that acknowledged the realities of the industrial metropolis” (42). The appetite for hard-boiled crime fiction was met through the newly popular pulp magazines. *Black Mask* (1920-1951) was a major pulp magazine that, according to Priscilla Watson, “offer[ed] readers a quick sampling of” stories by authors who could produce work “quickly and on

demand” (Watson 124). These types of pulp magazines were sold on newsstands rather than in bookstores, and “the authors who emerged in this market were professional ‘hacks,’ who did not conform to the romantic prototype of the lonely artist awaiting inspiration in a garret” (124). Instead, pulp magazines like *Black Mask* paid authors with some regular consistency to write a product for the consumer to consume.

Black Mask provided many crime fiction authors a way to exploit this new taste for noir. Carroll John Daly’s narratives developed the dime-novel detective who relied less on intelligence and more on brute force. His confrontational and forceful characters were increasingly popular with *Black Mask* readers, but unlike later champions of the American hard-boiled genre, Daly’s narratives were stale and rigid, relying too heavily on melodramatic characterizations. What makes Hammett and Chandler’s novels more literary is their attention to style. They, especially Chandler, found a comfortable middle ground between the fruity, gentlemen Golden Age detectives and violent, brash heroes who seemed too one-dimensional for full length features.

The Creation of the Hard-Boiled Detective

The hard-boiled genre was born out of two major popular culture shifts in America, a move away from the classic detective novel, and the revival of the American cowboy, “importing the conventions of frontier adventure to the territory of the industrial metropolis” (McCann 44). Golden Age crime fiction (1920s and 1930s) saw its popularity rise at the same time as the hard-boiled genre. Its most popular proponent was Agatha Christie, whose style was an obvious contrast to the emerging American noir tradition. Many of her stories are set in small villages with rich families shrouded in corruption and secrets that, when revealed, lead to the downfall of a system of lies and small-scale mystery. They featured characters such as Hercule Poirot, an

upper-middle class detective and the amateur village sleuth, Miss Marple. The major themes and tropes of this style became the staple of Golden Age mystery fiction – red herrings, a gathering of the suspects, locked doors, and detective showmanship.

The Golden Age gentlemen detectives, however, operated in a fictional past of order and genteel manners. The hard-boiled detective then represents a contrast with what Claire Gorrara calls the “intellectual puzzle and refined location of the English country-house mystery” (Gorrara 592) and the flawed but eccentric detective who relies on intelligence and flair to solve a crime. The attraction of a moral hero not only stemmed from a violent, corrupt society and rejection of the Holmes’ and Poirot’s of classic detective fiction, but also from a revival of the lone ranger style of heroes derived from the Westerns of the 1890s and 1900s. These tales saw the original lone heroes coming to town to mess up the bad guy and save the damsel in distress. What hard-boiled detectives achieved was the look and attitudes of the individualist loner, melded with the crime solving of the Golden Age figures to make a new, macho, white, superior hero to enter a realm of corruption, for a little money and sometimes in the hopes of making a small difference. These characteristics are also features in the rise of noir and gangster films in the 1920s-40s, like Fritz Lang’s proto-noir film, *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* (1922), and Billy Wilder’s *Double Indemnity* (1944 – screenplay co-written by Chandler). Beyond the adaptation of the cowboy and the gentleman detective, hard-boiled detectives bring new aspects of realism and violence to the genre, set in an urban and cultural metropolis dealing with the effects of “Prohibition, the Depression, the Wall Street crash, the rise of a gangster culture, racial tension and violence, rural poverty, and corruption at all levels of policing and government” (591).

Along with this new kind of detective came a further reimagining of the setting for the crime novel. Rather than a full rejection of the Golden Age villages that present a web of secrets

to expose, the hard-boiled detective melds the scenes of Westerns and Golden Age villages into an urban mess of corruption. The new genre then “imagined the city as a labyrinthine world of dark and mysterious powers, and, at the same time, an urban frontier,” where the law system is unable to uphold peace and justice (McCann, 43). Hard-boiled detective authors place their novels on a backdrop of major urban centers in the United States, such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York. These were chosen, not simply because of an increase in population in these areas, but to show the industrialization of American society and crime. The space then becomes an expanded version of the corrupt village.

This urbanization of crime fiction also came with a shift in villains. Rather than the enemy being outlaws or in-laws, these dangerous cities are tormented by small time crooks, crime lords, and corrupted officials. The corruption of the police force and government systems in these detective novels lays the foundation for the hard-boiled outsider to enter the stage and try to fight for justice in their place. It also sets up the confrontational relationships that hard-boiled P.I.s have with their respective law enforcement. While in the Golden Age the police usually tag along a few paces behind, the hostility of this new urban landscape helps further characterize the private investigator as a lone wolf moral warrior, placing him outside the corrupt society and governing bodies, working against both to attain justice for those who cannot fend for themselves.

With all of this, the newly formed hard-boiled detective, like their cowboy predecessors “struggle[s] between counterpoised (yet often mutually complicit) antagonists,” in a world of corruption and chaos (McCann 44-45), with nothing but a gun and a moral compass to defend himself. The traditional hard-boiled detective is thus a white male, loner/outsider, in a corrupted

environment that is out to get him, fighting the long fight for justice that still ends without major impact on the wider corrupt system.

DASHIELL HAMMETT

Dashiell Hammett is noted by Chester Himes as the pioneer of the hard-boiled subgenre. While Hammett's plots are often formulaic, Chandler himself proclaimed that Hammett "made the detective story fun to write, not an exhausting concatenation of insignificant clues" ("Simple Art" 13). Before his career as a writer, Hammett worked eight years as an operative for the Pinkerton National Detective Agency, with time off in between to serve in World War I. His experience as an operative allowed him to add some elements of realism to the narrative that were previously absent from other crime authors' works, however, his work was primarily fantasy. Rather than writing on a topic he only understood from other fictions, Hammett's first private investigator reflects himself, an operative working for a rival contractor of Pinkerton. Beyond providing him with inspiration for his own life stories, as LeRoy Panek points out, "his work as a Pinkerton validated his stories about detectives and legitimized them" (Panek 81). Hammett's command of the hard-boiled character doesn't end at the detective but translates into the world in which he exists. His writing is subtle and straightforward, emphasized by his ability to write quickly. The world he creates features recognizable aspects of contemporary reality. His characters are vivid and hold a strict sense of morality, taking, as James Naremore notes, a "deeply critical and skeptical attitude towards American society" (Naremore 67). An important feature that distinguished the early hard-boiled from other crime fiction subgenres is the adaption of Ernest Hemingway's direct and journalistic style. Rather than extended descriptions of place and people, Hammett stripped back the story to its bones and built on them in a more stylized

than complex narrative. Chandler notes that Hammett “was spare, frugal, hard-boiled, but he did over and over again what only the best writers can ever do at all [by writing] scenes that seemed never to have been written before” (“Simple Art” 13). From this new subgenre came Hammett’s detectives, *The Continental Op* and Sam Spade, and Raymond Chandler’s private investigator, Philip Marlowe, all of which embody the ideals of a strong, white, male, morally incorruptible detective. As the genre evolves, so do the transformations of the detectives, as evident in Sara Paretsky’s female detective, V.I. Warshawski, and Chester Himes’ black reconfiguration of the P.I. in *Coffin Ed* and *Grave Digger Jones*.

The Continental Op

Hammett’s *Continental Op* [hereafter referred to as CO] closely resembles Daly’s heroes in *Black Mask*: a detective who relies more on brute force than intelligence or puzzle solving – a huntsman in pursuit of truth and, later, justice. Based on Hammett’s own experiences as an operative, CO is not a completely lone ranger, but a company sleuth. While he appears in Hammett’s short stories from 1923 to 1930, his first appearance in a feature length novel was in Hammett’s *Red Harvest* (1929).

CO’s profession, however, is an innovative interpretation of the hard-boiled detective. Rather than being a private investigator, he’s an operative for the Continental Detective Agency – in the image of Hammett himself. Also, unlike the more gentlemanly Golden Age detectives, CO is a middle aged, slightly tubby, “truly ordinary-seeming person who turns out to conceal extraordinary cleverness beneath his commonplace exterior” (McCann 49). On top of everything else, this hard-boiled detective is nameless, adding to his outsider status and allowing him to adopt any persona necessary for the task at hand. For example, as he plans to hand out a card to

Bill Quint, he “ran through the collection of credentials [he] had picked up here and there by one means or another” (*Red Harvest* 7). This allows him not only to remain nameless but to become what John Whitley calls “a master shape-changer, a liar, a treacherous manipulator until his identification with the diseased society” (Whitley 445). This chameleon-like adaptive ability gives CO an advantage of secrecy that other private eyes don’t have, and knowing this, he uses it to his advantage to manipulate those around him into helping him, sometimes against their will or better judgement. The location itself adds to CO’s outsider status, as he is not operating on his home turf (unlike the later detectives discussed). Instead, CO is hired out into a hostile environment unwelcoming to an outside intruder, “a city where everyone says one thing with his mouth and another with his eye” (445). Placing him outside of his home base allows him to interact with people who have never seen his face before, adding an extra layer of anonymity – on top of his namelessness.

Treatment of Women

Another trait of CO is his seemingly asexual approach to women. While he can admire a girl with “wide chestnut eyes, light brown hair and a pale pretty face,” (*Red Harvest* 17) his view of women in general differs from that in the later hard-boiled genre. His ability to recognize attractiveness is also not limited to women. He characterizes the young Albury as “a nice-looking blond youngster,” (21) making his overall comments on people’s attractiveness less based in sexual attraction and more in simple observation. This almost romantic view of attractiveness is continued by Chandler, whose detective can appreciate a good-looking face no matter their gender. This minimal sexual attraction to the female body, however, changes in later hard-boiled fiction, intensifying with Spade and Marlowe, and countered by Warshawski. CO more

resembles Himes' characters' relationships with women, as his detectives see them more as hinderances and annoyances than an invitation to flirt.

The City

Another key aspect of hard-boiled fiction is the city. If the nickname of "Personville" being "Poisonville" doesn't point to the corruption rampant in and among the city and its citizens, CO's characterization of the place does. As soon as he arrives, he describes it as "an ugly notch between two ugly mountains that had been dirtied up by mining" (4). This image reflects the America in which CO operates, capturing the social anxiety surrounding increased crime amid the Great Depression – the fear that it would corrupt not only the people but the city itself.

The city's corruption, however, mostly revolves around the people with power. Poisonville is especially rampant with the villain types that become stereotypical to the genre. Elihu Willsson is the epitome of the corruptibility of power and money. Coined the "the czar of Poisonville," (13) Willsson's son is the person who hired CO in the first place and who has been murdered because of his father's wish to rid the city of those who have more power than him. In keeping with the stereotypes, Elihu is an ugly, harsh voiced, incapacitated know-it-all, prone to violent outbursts, whose corruption has led him to overstep his opponents. These include Max Thaler, the local gang leader; Noonan, the corrupted chief of police; Pete, the bootlegger; Lew Yard, another important gangster; and Reno Starkey, the professional thief. These are the corrupted individuals fighting for power and money in an already corrupt city. They also represent those who are willing to go to extraordinary lengths to achieve their selfish goals. But, of course, CO is the outsider with just enough power to turn them against each other through manipulative tactics and even blackmail. But it is also the time that CO spends in their presence

that leads, as John Cawelti explains, to a “moral dilemma created by his immersion in violence, thus freeing him from the devastating awareness of personal guilt” (Cawelti 172). Once his initial case is solved, he turns the city into his personal justice project: “Now I’m going to have my fun. I’ve got ten thousand dollars of your money to play with. I’m going to use it opening Poisonville up from Adam’s apple to ankles” (*Red Harvest* 64). In this instance, CO’s personal vendetta for revenge against the thugs and brutes of Poisonville serves as a reminder of the hard-boiled detective’s flawed humanity, a simple man doing his job and entangling himself in a mountain of corruption.

Use of Violence

Violence plays a crucial role in hard-boiled detective fiction. In Poisonville especially, “violence and internecine warfare is the norm to which society naturally gravitates” (Zumoff 130), evident from the graphic turf wars and gunfights:

A sheet of flame was followed by a deafening noise. Hunks of things pelted us while we tried to keep from being knocked over by the concussion. Then there was no door to keep anybody out of the building. A man ran forward, swung his arm, let a pipeful of hell go through the doorway. [...] O’Marra put one foot high in the air, clawed at his throat, and fell solidly backward. Another of our party went down under the slugs. (*Red Harvest* 196)

The violence in *Red Harvest* is, Sara Paretsky notes, “so pervasive [that] it infects even the detective” (*Writing* 93). The violence not only corrupts the city and its inhabitants, but has such a corrupting effect on CO that, in the end, he sees the need for his colleagues to take over to stop him from losing his morality and dignity as a professional detective. Regardless of all the gunfire raining in every direction, CO leaves the battlefield physically unscathed. The bloodshed throughout the novel is intense to say the least, but adds to the purpose of the narrative, to express the extent of Poisonville’s corruption and corruptive powers. While CO goes unharmed

from all gunfights – minus a few sluggings on the back of the head – his mental wellness deteriorates from his exposure to such brutal violence.

Morality

While hard-boiled private investigators often fear that their private morality is compromised, CO experiences a significant degree of corruption regarding his own mind and morals, mostly through his exposure to the corruptive powers of Poisonville. He understands that as a professional operative, “when you’re out on a job, you’ve got to do it the best way you can” (*Red Harvest* 117), but he also intends to maintain a moral superiority over those who are corrupted by greed and violence. Yet, he starts to find himself in compromising positions. He admits that he “blackmailed [Willsson] into” hiring him to take on a new case of ridding the city of Willsson’s opponents so he could dismantle the whole corrupt administrative system (151). He also admits that “it’s easier to have [the corrupt ones] killed off, easier and surer, and now that [he’s feeling more sound in killing people], more satisfying” (157). This is a violent shift from the saintly Golden Age detectives who preceded the hard-boiled into an imitation of the rogue cowboy. It even starts to scare him that “[he] can look at any sort of a murder without seeing anything in it but my bread and butter” (157). Not only does CO start liking the thrill that accompanies killing the villains that plague the city, he starts to feel as though he’s no better than the people he’s desperate to destroy. While it is a genre norm for the hard-boiled detective to face unruly violence, that violence translating itself into CO’s own character is an innovation of Hammett’s that adds significant depth to the character and his narrative.

Sam Spade

Hammett’s novelized private investigator Sam Spade from *The Maltese Falcon* (1930)

became the base model for the hard-boiled detective; a Pinkerton fantasy, white, semi-handsome man whom ladies love and men envy, with an uncompromising sense of morality. The novel tells the story of a group of criminals each in pursuit of a jewel-encrusted statue of a falcon, the namesake of the novel. The crime and corrupt people who plague the narrative of *The Maltese Falcon* are tamer than those in the Continental Operative stories, with the body count only amassing to three. Casper Gutman, Elmer, Joel Cairo, and Brigid O'Shaughnessy make up this misfit group of thieves all after a single item, "bound together in a web of mutual lies and emotional entanglements," resembling the flawed family unit in need of exploring by an outsider (McCann 51).

Characterization

Like CO, Spade's physical appearance is not like the knightly figure in Chandler's version of the hard-boiled novel. Nevertheless, Paretsky notes that Spade is "a more attractive hero" than CO, both physically and morally (*Writing* 94). He has a "v" motif embedded into his face – the jutting chin and his thick brows – with a "hooked nose and [...] pale brown hair," growing downward, an overall "pleasantly" looking man – but far from Marlowe-handsome (*Maltese Falcon* 1). This once again grounds the character in a stripped back perception of the hard-boiled detective, just an average looking man whose detection skills and private practice set him apart from the corrupt and untrustworthy police force. He works out of a shabby, small office that he shares with a "partner" and has just enough space to make room for a secretary, a commodity that Marlowe, Warshawski, Coffin Ed, and Grave Digger don't have access to. What drives Spade more than anything else is his moral compass. He truly believes in society's need for justice, urging the police to properly investigate the murder of Miles Archer rather than lazily

pinning it on Spade out of convenience. When confronted with the moral dilemma of choosing between potential love and putting away a murderer, the latter is the obvious choice for him.

Female Stereotypes

Golden Age detectives rarely allow women to complicate their puzzle solving. In the hard-boiled genre, however, women play a vital role, often adding a threat of corruption through their sexuality. Spade interacts with three types of women in *The Maltese Falcon*. The first is the innocent angel type: Effie Perine, Spade's secretary and confidante. While there may be some attraction in this relationship, it would only ever be an admiration of her cuteness. Her "playful [eyes] in a shiny boyish face" code her as someone Spade views more like a niece than a potential lover (1). Effie and Spade's relationship is solidified as familial over sexual in his treatment of her. He often "put a hand on her head and smoothed her hair," calling her "angel" (22) and comforting her, especially after disagreements. Effie represents the uncorruptible innocents of society, trapped in a changing world where morals are being compromised for capitalistic success – money. Her ability to remain grounded in her morals, evident in her defense of Brigid as a fellow woman, is what strengthens her relationship with Spade. Both characters are set in their ways and determined about their opinions. While this causes tension when she knows that Spade's judgement is correct, it hurts her to see Spade choose his morality and freedom over his humanity: "I know you're right [...] but don't touch me now" (212). This opinion alone grounds her in her innocence-coded character; she's so innocent that she cannot see the extent of corruption in Brigid and prefers to view the world through her own lens rather than Spade's moral one.

The next type is the overbearing wife-type, Iva Archer. Even though she is not Spade's wife, he is left to deal with the consequences of their affair, one Spade regrets throughout the

novel. Spade views her as a woman whose “facial prettiness was perhaps five years past its best moment,” (22) and whose voice and demeanor no longer attract him. Of course, he is not so insensitive as to reject her in a moment of grief, but his little motions – “when they kissed he made a little movement as if to release her” – suggest he wants to separate from his obligations to her (23). Especially now that her husband is dead, Iva believes it to be an opportunity for them to finally be together, while Spade views any sort of long term, committed sexual relationship as an impending trap. His treatment of her, however, is an important moment that characterizes Spade himself. The only way he appears to be able to relate to women is on a sexual level. Simultaneously, Effie emphasizes that Spade is unable to form a genuine and romantic connection with a woman. While Spade thinks Iva would be silly to think that they would marry, Effie notes that “[Iva] doesn’t think it’s silly. Why would she – the way you’ve played around with her” (25). While the women believe him to be genuinely attached to them, Spade simply views women as things of pleasure and fun. While one might think that his relationship with Effie would complicate this notion, his characterization of her as “boyish” suggests that he views her as non-womanly and so as an unsexual being. This notion is intensified in the third type of woman Spade interacts with.

The final and most important type is the femme fatale, represented by Brigid O’Shaughnessy. She exemplifies the power women have when they put their sexuality and attractiveness to use. Not only is she able to seduce the men she means to manipulate but she is also able to fool both Archer and Spade until the very end. The femme fatale was a newly popular concept when Hammett was exploring its possibility. Chester Himes himself noted in an interview that “it was the first story in which a woman got sent to prison” (Jenkins 99). She has a “willingness to commodify and use all of her assets [...] as a currency for exchange” (Hamilton

8), and so Brigid represents the dangers that come with a sexually free woman. She is able to seduce Miles Archer in a single encounter to the point of him risking his life to “protect her” (*Maltese Falcon* 7), when in reality she plans to kill him to frame a major opponent.

Relationships

A concept Spade engages with more than CO is the potential for the hard-boiled detective to have long lasting friendships. While we know that Effie is Spade’s secretary and a person in whom he has a well-developed rapport and much confidence, it is not common to see a hard-boiled detective reliant or in need of help from others. Their relationship closely resembles that of Perry Mason, Erle Stanley Gardner’s fictionalized and hard-boiled defense attorney, and Della Street, his secretary. Although their relationship does develop into something romantic, Della and Perry maintain a professionalism and friendliness that connects them to Effie and Spade. Effie becomes a character who will always be there for the detective. When he needs someone to protect Brigid, he immediately confides in Effie and relies on her assistance in the matter, the same role Della fulfills for Mason.

While Spade has sex with Brigid, the intimacy of the scene is something that would be unthinkable for a knight-like Marlowe figure to succumb to:

She put her hands up to Spade’s cheeks, put her open mouth hard against his mouth, her body flat against his body. Spade’s arms went around her, holding her to him, muscles bulging his blue sleeves, a hand cradling her head, its fingers half lost among red hair, a hand moving groping fingers over her slim back. (86)

This is a more sexual intimacy than any reader of Chandler witnesses in his novels. Hammett’s Spade is also more susceptible to the seductress’ power than Marlowe would be in his novels. But while his falling for Brigid is morally compromising as he debates letting her get away with murder, Spade recovers himself in the final moments of the novel.

Morality

Spade's moral compass is best examined in the final scene of the novel. Spade, realizing that Brigid killed Miles Archer, now faces a choice between a woman whom he might have loved and his need for justice. Of course, in true hard-boiled fashion, morality wins when Spade declares to Brigid that:

When a man's partner is killed he's supposed to do something about it. It doesn't make any difference what you thought of him. He was your partner [and because we're a detective business] when one of your organization gets killed it's bad business to let the killer get away with it. (209)

He also states that it is his nature as a detective to put away the bad guy, letting her run free would be like "asking a dog to catch a rabbit and let it go" (209). Essentially, for the hard-boiled detective morals are their very nature and to go against them would be to go against everything they stand for. Hammett also emphasizes the importance of capitalism in his society, with Spade noting that this is a business after all.

Law Enforcement

Even though the police in a hard-boiled novel are often corrupt and incompetent, they play a vital role in regard to the P.I. William Mooney notes that "the private detective shares with police detectives a realm of experience, knowledge, and skills of the trade" (Mooney 65), but they are ultimately divided when it comes to their interpretations of justice and ways in which they uphold their respective definitions. While it is customary for hard-boiled detective fiction to feature a corrupt policing system, there is usually "one good cop" that the private investigator can rely on to want justice just as much as him, but who has to be careful of his divided loyalties. In *The Maltese Falcon* this is District Attorney Bryan. He refuses to have confidence or belief "in those theories the police seem to have formed" against Spade in the murder of Archer

(*Maltese Falcon* 141). Bryan represents what is left of an uncorrupted law enforcement that strives for justice rather than an easy solve or a false accusation. Nevertheless, in the hard-boiled detective novel, these “good cops” are few, making way for the private detective to serve true, but sometimes compromised, justice.

Both of Hammett’s operatives are coded in a genre that identifies them as a more gritty and tough representation of the hero that corrupt cities need to help them in the fight for justice. These men are middle-aged, slightly overweight, and grounded in a morality that wavers a lot. Raymond Chandler, however, while acknowledging that Hammett made pioneer innovations to the detective genre notes: “all this (and Hammett too) is for me not quite enough” (“Simple Art” 14). Chandler’s version of the hard-boiled detective takes the sexual desires, violence, and moral codes from Hammett’s fantasy-centric rendition and transplants them into more realistic worlds. In this he creates an even more savior-like hero determined, with very little hope, to fight for justice in an overly corrupted society.

RAYMOND CHANDLER

Like Hammett, Raymond Chandler served in the army during World War I. Nevertheless, the rest of their lives and careers vary greatly from this point on. After high school in England and travelling around Europe, Chandler “decided to pursue a career writing essays and poems for London journals” (Moss 23). After moving to the United States and working a stint with the Dabney Oil Syndicate, he returned to a writing career through publications in *Black Mask* (1920-1951) and *Dime Detective* (1931-1953). He and his short stories soon became champions of the hard-boiled genre. When he came to write his first hard-boiled detective novel, “he did what

multitudes of writers had done before him: He reused some of his earlier material” (Durham and Moss 64).

Philip Marlowe

Chandler’s essay, “The Simple Art of Murder” (1950), notes Gardner and Hammett as his models for expanding upon the hard-boiled detective narrative. He champions Hammett as having “[given] murder back to the kind of people that commit it for reasons, not just to provide a corpse” (“Simple Art” 13). He took the foundations laid out by Hammett and created a more romanticized detective, invested in the goodness of others and on a path to correct injustices. His style takes the conventions of hard-boiled realism and the cynical view of the rampant corruption as caused by rich, power-hungry gangsters and politicians, but adds a conflicting “romantic idealism,” reinventing the mercenary-type hard-boiled operative into a “courtly knight of medieval romance” (McCann 53). Chandler doubts “that Hammett had any deliberate artistic aims whatever; he was trying to make a living by writing something he had firsthand information about,” and was championed primarily for his Hemingway-influenced style of writing that was new for the detective genre (“Simple Art” 13). His readers “thought they were getting a good meaty melodrama written in the kind of lingo they imagine they spoke themselves” (13), mixing fantasy and realism to create a story the public would enjoy and want to read more of. The most important change Chandler argues that Hammett brought to detective fiction was that he took away the overwhelming, convoluted puzzles, making the genre fun. (15) He also claims that without Hammett we would never have read works such as Percival Wilde’s *Inquest* (1938) or Kenneth Fearing’s *The Dagger of the Mind* (1947). Nevertheless, Chandler thought the perfecting of the hard-boiled detective only half-way completed. What was missing was the

sense of realism that would allow for an ordinary man to command the narrative. With this in mind, he set out to create a hard-boiled P.I. who was of our world, a common and simultaneously unusual man:

He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world. [...] if he is a man of honor in one thing, he is that in all things. (15)

From this mission was born Philip Marlowe, although Chandler's earlier short stories call him variously John Dalmas, Carmady, and Mallory. Marlowe is a "neat, clean, shaven and sober" detective: "I was everything the well-dressed private investigator ought to be" (*Big Sleep* 1), Marlowe says of himself a little cynically. A model citizen with the morals of a gallant knight with close to superhuman awareness and detection skills, often claiming that "something told [him] to wait," (16) an instinct which keeps him out of the perils of death more often than it feasibly should.

Female Stereotypes

Beyond Marlowe's skills as a detective, his reactions to women differ slightly from Spade. In creating Marlowe, Chandler writes: "I think he might seduce a duchess and I am quite sure he would not spoil a virgin" ("Simple Art" 15). Because of the duality, there are two different types of women Marlowe interacts with, unlike the three kinds Sam Spade interacts with. The first type is the femme fatale. The best examples of femme fatales are Carmen Sternwood and Vivian Regan in *The Big Sleep* (1939); Mildred (i.e., Muriel) in *The Lady in the Lake* (1943); Orfamay Quest, Mavis Weld, and Dolores Gonzales in *The Little Sister* (1949); and Eileen Wade in *The Long Goodbye* (1953). Carmen and Vivian are both overtly sexualized and attracted to Marlowe. Carmen kills Vivian's husband and Vivian has gangster Eddie Mars cover it up. Mildred, or Muriel, kills another woman so that she can escape her marriage and move on

to her next sexual partner, showing how her sex drive drives her emotions and willingness to murder and deceive. Dolores, Mavis, and Orfamay all turn out to be criminals of one sort or another. However, it is Dolores who is primarily characterized by Marlowe as a woman who is master of “that smile that no one ever has to teach them” (*Little Sister* 40). More than once she attempts to seduce him, often “reeking with sex” (248), or flirting with him outright: “The next thing I knew I had her in my lap and she was trying to bite a piece off my tongue” (72). Eileen first portrays herself to Marlowe as a damsel in distress needing protection from a crazy husband (whom she later kills). While Marlowe doesn’t ever truly buy her story, he is somewhat blinded by her attractiveness. Marlowe as a narrator characterizes a femme fatale by the “faint, half-deprecatory, half-seductive smiles women are so good at” (*Long Goodbye* 301). They are always willing to use sex or their sexuality to get out of a sticky situation, reminiscent of Hammett’s Brigid.

The other type of woman, who appears less often than femme fatales in Chandler’s novels, is the innocent angel, figures who resemble Effie in *The Maltese Falcon*. The best example would be Merle in *The High Window*. Rather than seeing her as a sexual being, Marlowe develops an almost parental love for her, just as Warshawski does with her younger clients and people like her old neighbor. Merle is so innocent that she believes she killed her boss’ husband, Horace Bright, years ago, when it was her boss, Mrs. Murdock, who was the true killer. His relationship with Merle in this book further expresses Marlowe’s shift from the Hammettian hard-boiled detective into a more romantic, knightly hero, ready to save the damsel in distress from danger, even if the danger is her own wandering and innocent mind. Another example of the innocent woman caught up in an entanglement of crime is the wife of racketeer Eddie Mars, Mona, from *The Big Sleep*. Throughout the story she hides, pretending to have left

her husband for Rusty Regan so that the police don't suspect that Rusty is dead. She even convinces herself that "Eddie didn't do anything to him," claiming that he was "not that sort of man" (*Big Sleep* 210). Even when describing her, Marlowe limits himself to her height and hands, not focusing on the usual, sexualized legs. He in turn becomes sympathetic to Mona's ignorance and sees that all she wishes is for her husband to be innocent, which of course he is not.

However, that is not to say that Marlowe doesn't constantly objectify women in his internal monologue, no matter if they are angels or femme fatales: "I stood there and admired the long line of her thigh," (101) he says of Agnes Lozelle, a woman who uses her sex appeal to manipulate men. He is still a man who can appreciate a beautiful woman and who still has sex with women involved in the case, when he deems it safe. Nevertheless, maintaining the hard-boiled loner trope, his partners are infrequent and rarely repeated.

The City

Chandler's narratives often spill over into Bay City – a fictional Santa Monica – although Marlowe is based in a Los Angeles rampant with urban crime. The smaller Bay City, with a different police jurisdiction, is characterized more by a corrupt administration. The novels focus on smaller, rich neighborhoods corrupted by an outsider and in need of an outsider's assistance to fix the problem. Chandler praises Hammett as the author who took "murder out of the Venetian vase and dropped it in the alley," ("Simple Art" 14) and Chandler retains the theme of the outsider P.I. in a foreign, urban place, removing many of Marlowe's clientele to "neighborhoods [that] have bad habits" (*Big Sleep* 34). He sees Bay City as a completely corrupt area, "a cheap and nasty little town," that needs cleaning up (*Little Sister* 146). He is more sentimental about Los Angeles. He hates the changes to the more human scale city he first knew. Nevertheless, he

insists that “the big sordid dirty crowded city” (*Long Goodbye* 249). will always be his preference over the small-town life he could have had if he weren’t a P.I. and stayed in his hometown, Santa Rosa.

Private vs. Professional life

Chandler differentiates Marlowe’s private and professional life through the actions that take place in his home versus in his office. Hammett never provides information about CO’s personal life, and with Spade the only personal detail is his affair with Iva Archer. Himes gives few domestic details of Grave Digger and Coffin Ed’s lives, focusing almost entirely on their police work, while Warshawski completely blends her professional and private spheres. Marlowe’s office is basic and bare: the tattered waiting room, furniture that is old and in need of washing, bare décor, and an unwelcoming atmosphere – “the usual chair, the usual blotter” (*Big Sleep* 60). There is nothing personal in his office, mostly because there is almost nothing personal about Marlowe in the early novels. While the space is small, it works; it is “not beautiful, not gay, but better than a tent on the beach” (*High Window* 15). Similarly his apartment is a small and insignificant one bed, one bath, a place meant simply for sleeping and eating, and later he rents a house on Yucca Avenue that “belonged to a woman who had gone to Idaho to live with her widowed daughter for a while” (*Long Goodbye* 6).

Chandler admits that he does “not care much about [the detective’s] private life” (“Simple Art” 15). While there’s very little detail about Marlowe’s private life as compared to Paretsky’s V.I. Warshawski, he sometimes narrates his loneliness in his professional life: “I’m just one man” (*High Window* 7). Detecting is the main purpose of Marlowe’s life, leaving him in a line of work that requires isolation. The cost of the profession is being unable to form real

human attachments or have any hobbies. His main pastime is his interest in replaying famous chess games by himself:

I opened a little paper-bound book of tournament games published in Leipzig, picked out a dashing-looming Queen's Gambit, moved the white pawn to Queen four, and the bell rang at the door. (63)

These games also act as the one connection between Marlowe's job and his private life:

I went over to a floor lamp and pulled the switch, went back to put off the ceiling light, and went across the room again to the chessboard on a card table under the lamp. There was a problem laid out on the board, a six-mover. I couldn't solve it, like a lot of my problems. I reached down and moved a knight, then pulled my hat and coat off and threw them somewhere. (*Big Sleep* 168)

The knight resembles himself as a detective, the noble investigator putting himself in harm's way for justice.

Attachment to Cases

As his loneliness increases with age, he settles down with Linda Loring in *Playback* (1958). Coinciding with his increased loneliness is his increasing attachment to cases. Chandler's earlier novels show Marlowe's need to detach himself from the case entirely once the mystery is solved. Marlowe does, however, become fully invested in each case during the detection process. Like CO, his motivation to destroy corruption is so strong that he dedicates all his time to the case and the people involved. Like Spade, he occasionally becomes sexually involved with someone attached to the case. The end of Chandler's novels usually sees Marlowe confronted with a femme fatale whose corruption has led to many unnecessary deaths. Often, however, Marlowe decides to let her deal with the consequences herself instead of involving the police. At the end of *The Big Sleep*, once Marlowe discovers that Carmen killed Rusty Regan and had Vivian and Eddie Mars cover it up, he tells Vivian to leave town with her sister. When Vivian asks, "What about you?", he responds:

‘Nothing about me. I’m leaving. I’ll give you three days. If you’re gone by then – okay. If you’re not, out it comes. And don’t think I don’t mean that.’ (250)

This is often the resolution because Marlowe sees the inadequacy of the police force in making a difference anyway. It is because of the police that Dolores dies in *The Little Sister*, with Marlowe stating that “they came fast – but not fast enough” (*Little Sister* 250), Marlowe feeling just as responsible for her death as the police should.

As previously stated, with age Marlowe feels more emotionally attached to cases. For example, he takes on the case in *The Long Goodbye* because a now long-term friend is involved. In the beginning of the novel, Marlowe and Lennox develop an unhard-boiled friendship. A significant change in Marlowe’s sentimental nature is when he believes Lennox to be dead and he “poured two cups [of coffee] and added some bourbon to his and set it down on the side of the table where he had sat the morning I took him to the plane,” even lighting him a cigarette in honor of his memory (*Long Goodbye* 85). While Marlowe himself doesn’t see the action as sentimental, there is a change in his character as he feels the loss of a friend. This touching scene is characteristic of what E. M. Beekman calls Chandler’s “pathos that never gibbers into sentimentality,” yet adds to the humanistic side of Marlowe (Beekman 167).

Law Enforcement & The “One Good Cop”

Marlowe lost his job with the D.A. for constant insubordination (*Big Sleep* 9), and so like Spade, Marlowe has some respect for what is legal. For example, he will usually call the police when he finds a body, because it is the law. Nevertheless, he does so simply out of legal obligation, and so he takes his time with the crime scene before calling, moving carefully and not leaving his own fingerprints that could destroy any evidence. But it is also sometimes the case that he interferes with the scene to help him make sense of the details.

Marlowe's strong sense of morality, as Robert Merrill argues, "motivates his uncooperative stance toward the police" (Merrill 12). Working as a P.I., Marlowe understands the difference between law and justice and shows respect for police officers who care for the latter. For example, in *The High Window* Marlowe and officer Breeze have a mutual understanding that Marlowe might not want to tell the police everything he knows about the case before he's solved it. Officer Breeze understands that they're dealing with a murder, saying to Marlowe "you found the body. You had talked to the guy," and so it would be best for the police to consult Marlowe rather than attack and force information out of him (*High Window* 67). He even endures jailtime and a police interrogation in *The Long Goodbye* to keep his client's identity and information secret. While Breeze seems like he's on the same justice-focused path as Marlowe, he's doesn't quite fit the type of the genre's "one good cop." That role is reserved for Bernie Ohls. In both *The Big Sleep* and *The Long Goodbye*, Ohls is the one police officer Marlowe can have useful conversations with in which they treat each other as equals. While there is not much evidence of a friendship, in *The Long Goodbye*, "Ohls wants Menendez for a cop shooting more than he resents Marlowe," allowing, as Kristen Garrison points out, for the moment of teamwork to take place (Garrison 118). Law enforcement is rarely present in Hammett's work, except for Spade's declaration that he plans on turning Brigid in to the police, primarily to give way for the P.I. to take charge of a case without interruption. Nevertheless, this trope of the "one good cop" in Chandler also appears in Paretsky and Himes' versions of the hard-boiled detective.

The police in Chandler's novels are not just corrupt because of the people in the system. The main limitations that the police force must deal with go beyond the corrupted people who hold power among them, stemming also from the gangsters and politically powerful corrupt who have more control over the city than they do. The police question their own authority because

“with the syndicate we have in this country,” (*Big Sleep* 67) their jobs are made too difficult. Especially with gangsters like Eddie Mars running gambling joints and corrupting officers to work for him, the few “good cops” have a difficult task and Marlowe admits: “I didn’t envy the police their job when it was handed to them” (45). In Marlowe’s world, crime solving and justice are an almost impossible task for the police, and most laws are ineffectual. They’re “like a doctor that gives you an aspirin for a brain tumor” (*Long Goodbye* 352).

Morality

A major staple for Marlowe’s morality is his integrity, most evident in his unyielding honor for his clients’ privacy. He consistently refuses to tell the police something that might reveal who his client is, and he is willing to go to extreme lengths to solve a case and keep his clients’ identities and mysteries a secret. When refusing to give up his client’s information to Officer Ohls, he is shocked at Marlowe’s integrity: ““You’re willing to get yourself in Dutch with half the law enforcement of this country?”” to which Marlowe responds: ““What the hell am I to do? I’m on a case”” (*Big Sleep* 123). Marlowe also admires people with similar morals to himself. Marlowe, Garrison argues, “shows us his morality, his honesty, his integrity, not only through the words, thoughts, and actions of the hero, but through the words and responses of the other characters” (Garrison 118). Along with Lennox and General Sternwood, one of the few people to earn Marlowe’s respect is Harry Jones in *The Big Sleep*, for his unwillingness to give up information that would get a less than honorable woman in trouble, even though Jones is unaware of the woman’s poor character. Marlowe especially admires him for risking his life to maintain his code of honor, something he himself would also be willing to do, which mainly stems from Chandler’s belief that a hard-boiled P.I. should exhibit chivalry and a strong moral code. Chandler himself outlines what makes a hard-boiled detective:

He is a relatively poor man, or he would not be a detective at all. He is a common man or he could not go among common people. He has a sense of character, or he would not know his job. He will take no man's money dishonestly and no man's insolence without a due and dispassionate revenge. He is a lonely man and his pride is that you will treat him as a proud man or be very sorry you ever saw him. ("Simple Art" 15)

FINAL NOTES ON HAMMETT AND CHANDLER

Hammett and Chandler, pioneers of hard-boiled detective fiction, diverge in their narrative approaches. While characters like Sam Spade and the Continental Operative embody hardened, morally ambiguous figures, Philip Marlowe is a more principled yet solitary and knightly detective. One common theme, however, is the temptation faced by Marlowe and Spade, showcasing their moral integrity despite external pressures. Corrupt police forces serve as persistent obstacles, highlighting the lone investigator's pursuit of justice amidst systemic corruption, while the motif of the "one good cop" offers a glimmer of hope in a bleak world, suggesting that not all are tainted by corruption.

Outsider status is a central theme, with Marlowe and CO often thrust into unfamiliar, corrupt environments, deepening their involvement in cases as they are tasked with becoming experts on the people involved and discovering those peoples' darkest secrets. Their outsider status provides both protection and challenges, shaping their interactions and investigations. Despite navigating treacherous landscapes, their instincts guide them through corrupt cityscapes they seek to cleanse, yet the city remains unchanged, serving as both their battleground and home. While Hammett and Chandler established the groundwork and formula for the hard-boiled detective, they still differ importantly from each other. Chandler's work is grounded in realism while Hammett opts for a more fantasy-driven approach to Pinkerton-esque detectives in the *Maltese Falcon*. Chandler also writes a more lyrical style compared to the very matter-of-fact

descriptive style of Hammett. Where Hammett focuses his narrative on the mystery at hand, Chandler offers commentary on Bay City and Los Angeles, providing more context for the corruption and Marlowe's interaction with it, physically and morally.

PART II: TRANSFORMING THE HARD-BOILED GENRE

Despite the formulaic requirements of the genre, Sara Paretsky and Chester Himes adapt it for their own quite different detectives, a white woman and two black police men respectively. They all maintain the outsider nature of the characters working in predominantly white, male professions. Nevertheless, the authors reimagine the narrative context, the violence, the portrayals of women, and the relationships with law enforcement to create transformations of the hard-boiled detective that push the limitations of the genre. Both Paretsky and Himes give an even stronger moral purpose to their detectives, as they take on a patriarchal Chicago and a racist Harlem respectively.

SARA PARETSKY

Both Hammett and Chandler are major sources for the contemporary transformations of the hard-boiled detective novel, with authors like Sue Grafton and Sara Paretsky pioneering the genre's feminization. Grafton's hard-boiled detective Kinsey Millhone is an ex-cop, a rebellious loner who closely resembles Spade and Marlowe. Paretsky's approach to the genre, however, started out more particularly as an imitation of Marlowe but she, as Felicia Gresette puts it, "didn't want Philip Marlowe in drag." Paretsky herself notes: "What I really wanted was a woman who was like me and my friends" (Paretsky and Gresette 41), slowly removing herself from a female imitation of a male hard-boiled detective. The result is V.I. Warshawski, who is

sexually active, takes a realistic amount of time to heal, deals with white collar crime, and creates a pseudo-community to support her.

In the Summer of 1966, when she was nineteen years old, Paretsky spent three months working with the Civil Rights Movement in Chicago, and she writes that “much of what shaped VI’s history came out of that summer” (*Writing* 36). During this time, she witnessed first-hand the inequality experienced by African Americans and low-income citizens, making her particularly sensitive to the number of people who deal with voicelessness and inequality in the United States. Paretsky herself understands voicelessness, growing up in a restrictive and male-dominated family and experiencing the economic limitations of being a woman, constantly being told by her parents that her destiny was to become a secretary and a mother. Voicelessness having “dominate[d] [Paretsky’s] emotional life” (38) for so long finds a parallel in V.I. Warshawski’s own activism in Paretsky’s novels.

During her work with the Civil Rights Movement, Paretsky discovered a passion for activism. Her belief was: “if I and my peers put enough energy and good will into the struggle, we could transform America” (36). Paretsky instills this same hopeful mindset into Warshawski and pushes her struggle for change with every case she takes on, shifting the hard-boiled detective into a determined activist and representative for those who find themselves limited by the corrupted systems she encounters. Nevertheless, given the realistic social setting that the hard-boiled genre commands, Warshawski’s mission is often hindered and belittled by those, mostly men, with power, only allowing her to make minute, and often ineffectual changes, even though she on some level solves her mysteries. Her “failures” are depicted in the final moments of a Paretsky novel, when Warshawski realizes that the wrong doers with real power will never be treated equally by the law. For example, in *Dead Land* (2020), when Nobel Prize-winning

economist Larry Nieland has been caught up in an illegal cover-up job, officer Pizzello breaks the news to Warshawski that her detection work will not pay off as much as she'd hoped:

The state's attorney says that there's no way to prove Nieland knew Quintana was going to shoot Ryerson. There might be an accessory or obstruction of justice charge, but probably not. He's famous, the university is about the biggest employer on the South Side, he brings in cash-paying foreign students. And so on. (*Dead Land* 619-20)

In this moment, Warshawski realizes that “there's one law for the rich and another for the rest of us” (*Overboard* 380), a statement that perfectly captures the majority of Paretsky's pragmatic yet realistic resolutions. Nevertheless, Warshawski doesn't let this stop her from continuing her fight for change: “sometimes the best you can do is to save one person, but it's not a waste or a loss to save one person” (380).

For Sara Paretsky, “the private eye is America's unique contribution to the crime novel. It comes out of our fascination with the loner heroes of the old West” and “glorifies the individual often at the expense of society” (*Writing* xvi). However, the portrayal of women by Hammett and Chandler left her “uncomfortable with the way women's sexuality dictated their ability to act, or to have good moral judgement” (*Indemnity Only* viii). Paretsky's main challenge, as highlighted by Kenneth Paradis, “was to negotiate the change from a male to a female protagonist,” without creating a parody of Spade or Marlowe (Paradis 86). With this in mind, Catherine Nickerson notes that one way to meet this challenge for women detective writers is to use their voices to make women feel seen and heard (Nickerson n.p.). Paretsky's own opinion adds that it is the job of women writers “to broaden the range of their voices, to represent their age of women,” and to capture “women's social position, their suffering – and their triumphs” (*Women* xi). The theme of women supporting women is very prevalent in Paretsky's writing. She recalls that growing up she had become accustomed to thinking of herself, and all women, as secondary to men. Where

her parents borrowed money to send her brothers to prestigious schools, she was told “that if [she] wanted a college education, it would be at [her] own expense” (*Writing* 11). Without the support of her family, Paretsky relied heavily on the influence of the second wave of feminism and female friends like Isabel Thompson to push her into a career of writing (23). This too translates into the characterization of Warshawski.

Because she was upset by how women are treated as vixens in Chandler’s work or how “virginal women in noir fiction are virtuous, [and] by definition,” too innocent to care for themselves, (*Indemnity Only* viii) she created a new hard-boiled woman: V.I. Warshawski. With the characteristics of a hard-boiled detective – an independent outsider with a strong moral compass, and ready to take on dangerous tasks – she is set up to express the struggles, pains, and victories of being a woman in a male dominated field. Paretsky’s earlier novels, such as *Indemnity Only* (1982), *Bitter Medicine* (1987), and *Blood Shot* (1988), often border on a parody of Philip Marlowe, especially considering how often people involved in her cases also find her attractive and as enticing as the women of Chandler’s novels consider Marlowe. Nevertheless, by *Dead Land* (2020) and *Overboard* (2022) she is moving Warshawski away from the masculine constraints of the hard-boiled detective, invoking, as Helle Porsdam notes, “many of the concerns of contemporary feminism,” and altering the more “aggressive, gun-slinging attitudes of her male predecessors” (Porsdam 132).

V.I. Warshawski: A Female Hard-Boiled Detective

Adjusting the hard-boiled genre to suit a female body in place of the lone wolf male detective proved a daunting task. In fact, Kenneth Paradis notes how it “disrupts the genre's association of masculinity with that special kind of self-capable of the effective investigation and

execution of justice” (Paradis 86). To avoid creating a gender parody Paretsky takes the hard-boiled genre and reimagines its functions and formation. Beyond adjusting the framework of the detective to suit a woman, Paretsky redefines the female characters within hard-boiled fiction, creating “a woman who would turn tables on the dominant views of women in fiction and society” (*Writing* 60). In reading Chandler, Paretsky was introduced to “the staple of noir fiction, the sexually – very – active woman who is the cause of all that goes wrong in the world around her” (54). Rather than conforming to the hard-boiled genre’s established view of women as binary (angel or vixen), and rather than ignoring her character’s private life and struggles, she created a space in which personal and professional issues could co-exist, and a character who experienced the realistic limitations of her gender.

The City

A classic hard-boiled novel is always set in a rough, urban city full of unfeeling, powerful people, run and policed by a corrupt system. Paretsky transports the hard-boiled detective from the West Coast to the rough and tough gritty city of Chicago, focusing heavily on the South Side. Although Warshawski grew up there, she no longer lives there, making her an outsider when she returns to solve crimes. In the hard-boiled tradition, Warshawski maps her city, focusing on the small details such as where she parks her car and which bus station is the best for losing a tail. On an outing with her dogs, she notes the world around her in an informative rather than a literary manner:

The park nearest the synagogue was filled with toddlers. I drove to the lakefront, where a gigantic cemetery, bigger than the city parks, separates Chicago from Evanston. Its eastern boundary is Sheridan Road. Lake Michigan lies just beyond. I parked at the western entrance. (*Overboard* 8)

The urban landscape in which her detective operates is intricate and accurate. This mapping goes beyond the physical aspects of Chicago, turning into a sort of socioeconomic

mapping of the city: “New high-rises, with matching rents, were going up close to the lake, but housing around the hospital was a mix of gentrifying bungalows and run-down two-flats” (*Overboard* 36). These details help Warshawski visualize exactly where she operates, and how to react to her situation based on the socioeconomic location. The South Side is specifically important to Warshawski as it is not only where she grew up but where she has her “most harrowing adventures” (*Writing* 42). The low income and interracial density of the South Side makes it the prime location to be taken advantage of by powerful people. This is especially important in *Dead Land*, illustrating how little autonomy the South Side people have over their own land. This disadvantage then sets up a prime opportunity for moral and social activism on Warshawski’s part, as there is almost always someone who needs help or a crime that needs investigating. Although hard-boiled detectives constantly complain about the urbanization of their beloved city, they will always prefer it to the suburbs or countryside, where all is quiet, and nothing happens. For them, the urban mess of the city presents opportunities that keep them in business.

Marginalization

The hard-boiled detective is always an outsider. But unlike Marlowe, who, as Paradis points out, “operates as a largely ahistorical moral function in his narrative, Warshawski understands herself as a product of a particular personal history marked by a self-consciousness of ethnic, gender, and class marginalization” (Paradis 91). As previously mentioned, Warshawski is already a marginalized character since she’s a woman in a patriarchal field of work. She is additionally marginalized by the law enforcement’s negative view of detectives as snoopers and unwanted “spies” ruining their cases. The hard-boiled detective thrives on being the outsider, entering spaces that are unfamiliar to provide a unique perspective that helps solve the crime.

While all the hard-boiled detectives operate in their own respective cities, they enter unique and unknown systemic spaces, from insurance companies to wealthy families in need of outside assistance. This outsider status often helps them solve their cases without much interruption, except from the police and the bad guys. But when this “outsiderness” turns into systemic marginalization it can turn a simple task into an impossible one. This is a struggle Warshawski deals with that is unique to her as a woman. Unlike Marlowe and Spade, Warshawski often must fight back against her gendered marginalization. She is much more aware of her ‘outsider’ label than her male predecessors and in response builds her own pseudo-community and frequently bites “back another snarky retort” (*Overboard* 5), to counteract her systemic marginalization, a problem and solutions introduced because of her gender.

Pay & Employment

Paretsky also maintains the hard-boiled traditions surrounding money and pay. Warshawski often takes on cases for very little or no money. Most of the time this is because she has become emotionally attached to the case in some way. In *Bitter Medicine* it is because Consuelo, the victim, is one of her friends. In *Indemnity Only* she sympathizes with young Jill and her need to know who killed her father. In *Dead Land* her goddaughter Bernie convinces her she is the only one who can save Lydia Zamir – an unpaid job. In *Overboard*, Warshawski once again takes on a case no one asked her to. The only thing she requires is a receipt, as a validation of her “hiring”. She tells them: “not to worry. If you want to hire me, give me a dollar and I’ll give you a receipt, and that will mean you’ve hired me” (*Indemnity Only* 144). However, Warshawski, Marlowe, and Spade all work primarily to earn a living. None of them come from or own much money. They must work for it.

Office & Resources

Since Warshawski is mainly dealing with white collar crime, her office is a front of professionalism meant to impress clients and keep them. While somewhat bare, her space is neat and tidy, far better than the beaten-up car Himes' Grave Digger and Coffin Ed use as their "office." Warshawski's professionalism exceeds even that of Marlowe and Spade's official space, with a cabinet for files and a safe for important documents (2). What's also unique to Warshawski is a police-style desk and walls that are decorated for appearances. Her office is much more inviting than Marlowe's bare one, because as a female detective she has an additional need to create an inviting environment to reassure clients. Her desk is also meant for appearances, to ensure her clientele of her professionalism, a mechanism she has to implement to counteract anyone's doubt about her abilities. This of course is not a priority concern for Spade or Marlowe. They receive most of their business through recommendations or the phone book, people sent to them to solve a case when the police should not be involved, or people simply invite themselves in. Where the men rely more on character statements, references, and listings to attract a clientele, Warshawski needs the additional support of a professional appearance.

This doubt in Warshawski's abilities most often stems from sexism, with male clientele thinking the job too daunting for a "girl." For example, in the first Warshawski novel, *Indemnity Only*, Andrew McGraw seeks out Warshawski as a detective thinking he is hiring her father. He goes on to say to her that "this really isn't a job for a girl to take on alone" (*Indemnity Only* 6), setting a theme of the series that her gender will be a constant deterrent for some clients and a frequent obstacle in Warshawski's professional life. Referring to her as a "girl" is not only patronizing her gender but also a dig at her age, and an assumption of her inexperience, countered when Warshawski narrates that she "was with the Public Defender ten years ago," as

of the timeline in *Indemnity Only*. Not only does she have years of legal experience and training, but she is a seasoned professional and bar certified lawyer. She also grew up with a police officer for a father who taught her how to be tough and defend herself well. Characters like Spade, Marlowe, Coffin Ed, and Grave Digger don't feel the need to defend themselves from doubt – on the rare occasion that it happens. Although, as Paradis notes, Warshawski “recognizes the professional benefits of the ‘tough guy’” persona that male hard-boiled detectives embody, she “marks her distance from it” (Paradis 94). Her professionalism is what helps her earn respect.

Morality

Warshawski's sense of social justice is a key factor that differentiates her from Spade and Marlowe. While the men have strong moral compasses, Warshawski's takes on the extra task of being an activist and supporter of social movements in almost every novel. For example, when the abortion clinic in *Bitter Medicine* is attacked by a mob of mostly young men, Warshawski doesn't hesitate to fight back against the verbally and physically aggressive protestors and try to protect Lotty's institution. While her affinity for Lotty surely drives her willingness to step up against the mob, it is important to remember that she is dealing with contemporary politics and gender issues, something Marlowe, Spade, and CO do not engage with in their novels. We don't know whether Marlowe or Spade would support Roosevelt or Truman, but we can guess who would get Warshawski's contemporary vote.

Facing Corruption

Cynthia Hamilton highlights that “where Hammett explores social corruption, Paretsky focusses on the misuse of power” (Hamilton 714), often aiming her attacks more directly. Paretsky still emphasizes corruption but mixes it with Warshawski's specialty of white-collar crime to expose the brokenness of multiple systems of power – money, medicine, politics,

foreign affairs, and insurance. In this respect, Paretsky closely follows Chandler's themes of powerful people corrupting the system at its core. For example, in *Bitter Medicine*, Warshawski discovers how people with money have turned medical care from a human right into a business focused on making money. Consuelo becomes a victim to this bureaucratic medical system when she is left to die in the hallway after it is discovered that her insurance is invalid. She is also treated poorly as she dies because of her broken English and low income. Warshawski claims that in America, "poverty [has] become a crime almost as bad as child-molesting" (*Bitter Medicine* 23), since the election of President Reagan.

In *Bitter Medicine*, the medical system has become corrupt by those in power dictating who can and who cannot be treated based on income, creating economic limitations that hospital doctors are obligated to adhere to. Lotty especially faces bureaucratic blockades that prevent her from providing people with the care they need. She understands that "the bureaucracy in a place like this just about kills you" (212), and often remarks how difficult it is to advocate for patients in a field where they should be a priority. This again is a driving force behind Warshawski's action-taking moral compass. Warshawski and Lotty are often witness to "the normal hospital routine, which depersonalizes patients at its expense" (*Blood Shot* 190).

The medical field is just one example of a system corrupted by power, here prioritizing monetary gain over patient care. In *Dead Land*, Warshawski witnesses the realities of homelessness and disregard for people who suffer with mental illness in her interactions with Ms. Zamir, a singer who becomes depressed and homeless after witnessing a mass shooting. Her experience exposes a system that has no sympathy for survivors. Rather than providing her with emotional and psychological support, Zamir was allowed to become "a target of the hate fringe that finds exposés of gun violence a visceral threat" (*Dead Land* 127). Social injustices are

characteristic of Paretsky's transformation of the genre, creating a feminized hard-boiled detective "whose actions and beliefs," as Kinsman notes, "will not change the world, but who continues to try to make a difference" (Kinsman 159).

Criminals & Resolutions

Chandler's mysteries feature deeply explored criminals for their heroes to "battle," the femme fatales' complex characterization taking up a lot of the novel, even though the perspective is limited to first person narration. Nevertheless, this doesn't limit the detective's characterization because it stems from Marlowe's superhuman instincts and ability to read people's character and motivation. Chester Himes follows Hammett in a third person approach that allows insight into the minds of numerous characters, especially the criminals. Paretsky's novels, however, are from Warshawski's first person perspective, and unlike Chandler, this limits the view to her and her opinions as she lacks Marlowe's instincts and judgement of character. This leads to somewhat stereotypical villains. Paretsky even admits that "it's a weakness in my books that I don't explore the characters of the wicked very well" (*Writing* 39). Criminals in her work are evil because they work for a corrupt corporation or are simply devoted to their own professional advancement and care little, if at all, for the "greater good." This limits Paretsky's complexity in description of crimes as well as the criminals in question. We usually don't witness the initial crime and because of the first-person narrative, we rarely hear of the motivations behind the crime until the end of the mystery. The narrative, therefore, can become formulaic. Paretsky's villains are political or business powers who cannot be brought down by a P.I. or law enforcement, a trope contrary to Chandler's intricate and conniving femme fatales and Himes' drugged-up killers and gangsters who are much more unpredictable.

A similar limitation to Paretsky's hard-boiled transformation are her endings; they are performance-like, with all the "bad guys" conveniently arriving where Warshawski is for her to round up. Not only that but they are forced to listen to Warshawski's moral declaration of their wrongdoings in somewhat unlikely exposition. This is more reminiscent of the Golden Age of crime fiction than of the hard-boiled genre. Warshawski in these final scenes better resembles Hercule Poirot in Agatha Christie's "dramatically revealing the killer" endings. After a very convoluted and detailed mystery, the final moments of Paretsky's novels don't reflect the complexity of the mystery. Instead, they are cut short and end in suicide or very little justice served. Her endings are far more convenient than one might expect from a writer whose work is grounded in realistic and politically current issues.

Unique to Paretsky is her desire for her character to remain contemporary. Unlike Marlowe and Spade, and even Himes' detectives, who are consistently set in the 1920s through the 1960s, each of Warshawski's successive adventures are set in the present day. For example, *Dead Land* and *Overboard* are set during the COVID-19 pandemic and *Pay Dirt* opens with the murder of a trans-femme student, being published in 2024 and set around the same year. To ensure that the novels are time-relevant, Paretsky often makes contemporary cultural references, like mentioning TikTok or commenting on how the pandemic has changed her entire business practice (*Overboard* 8). In *Overboard* Warshawski comments on how "covid and the destructive political situation [are currently] wearing down everyone" in America (26).

Violence

When Warshawski finds herself in a violent situation, she always "respond[s] with a Sam Spade toughness" (*Bitter Medicine* 95). She "will go into the ring against anyone, as long as they are at least five times" her size, never knowing when to "walk away from a Goliath" (*Writing*

xiii). For Warshawski, this comes from her not being an exception to violence because of her gender. Just like Spade and Marlowe, she is brutalized, knocked unconscious, threatened with knives, and shot at. In *Indemnity Only*, when she is jumped by a gangster who wants her to drop the case, she is treated like any other detective would be: “he let go, but clobbered [her] on the right side of [her] head” (*Indemnity Only* 67). What separates Warshawski from Spade and Marlowe is that her healing time differs from their superhuman bounce-backs. After being tortured, punched, slapped, and attacked by men much larger and stronger than herself, she is bruised for weeks and often in need of medical attention, usually provided by Lotty. The threat of violence is not limited to the physical, but as Hamilton notes, “suggests the violation of her self-image as a physically attractive woman” (Hamilton 708), with Earl in *Indemnity Only* threatening to disfigure her.

Warshawski also transforms the hard-boiled tradition in her response to violence. She rarely carries her Smith & Wesson on her person, and when in a confrontational situation, she would rather talk herself down than act on her agitation or anger, keeping a strict “violence only begets violence” mentality (*Overboard* 260). This is not to say that she will not fight back when provoked physically, breaking many ribs and jaws in self-defense. This self-restraint is unique to Warshawski. Other – male – detectives don’t usually worry about the consequences of hitting back. But also, more often than not, the provocation the men experience is violence related. Warshawski stays silent when dealing with snide comments from men. For example, when being treated by a male physician in *Bitter Medicine* he says to Warshawski: “You boyfriend may see a faint line when he kisses you, but if he’s that close he probably won’t be looking” (*Bitter Medicine* 85). Even though she wants to call out the “sexist asshole,” she takes a second to recollect and remind herself that there’s “no point in biting the hand that sews you” (85). These

kinds of sexist remarks are not something that male detectives have to take, and if they did, they would not allow them to go without a slap or retort.

Healing Timeline

The level of violence Warshawski endures is similar to that which Spade, Marlowe, Grave Digger and Coffin Ed experience. Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, she requires a more realistic healing time as her bruises turn from purple to green as they heal, and she takes her pills to work through the pain. Marlowe often recovers from a slugging within minutes, stirring from unconsciousness and sprinting after the criminal. Of course, he slows down with age, but we never see him very physically affected after a fight. The opposite is true for Warshawski. When she gets into a fight, she takes more punches than Spade or Marlowe would, and leaves with physical marks that take a long time to heal. After being jumped by an old client in *Indemnity Only*, she sees herself in the mirror and remarks that she “was going to look like absolute hell tomorrow” (*Indemnity Only* 71). Never do the male hard-boiled detectives care about their appearance, as it is often left unaltered after an altercation. The exception to this is Coffin Ed, who is permanently disfigured by an acid attack.

Due to Warshawski’s profession, she often must work through the agony, getting supplements from Lotty to help her hide her pain. Even after suffering a beating from a corrupt police officer, Coney, she doesn’t have time to heal properly before continuing her investigation, commenting: “I had to act even though I was still sore and swollen from my time with Coney” (*Overboard* 365). Warshawski’s body is altered by the brutalization that it endures. We would never find Marlowe in this state:

I’d carefully avoided the mirror when I’d washed up in the little bathroom [...] a dark line ran from about an inch below my left eye to my jawline. Transparent plastic clips pulled it together. In itself it didn’t appear particularly terrible. It was

the radiating swelling in purple and yellows and my bloodshot eye that made me look like a wife-abuse casualty. (*Bitter Medicine* 88)

Her pain separates Warshawski from the earlier hard-boiled genre in which the hero is meant to represent an unbreakable, unstoppable, gallant, superhuman figure capable of enduring brutality.

Forming a Community

Specifically in contrast to Marlowe, Warshawski often has a difficult time separating her professional life from her personal. While Warshawski still operates independently, relying heavily on herself to get through the rough situations she constantly finds herself in, she is grounded in a community that is inaccessible to the likes of Marlowe and Spade. The male hard-boiled detectives show very little ability to trust or come to like other people. Beyond the few men they develop respect for, Marlowe and Spade are individualists, determined to remain lone wolves and solve crimes with their superhuman abilities. Warshawski doesn't have superhuman instinct, nor is she a purely individualistic character. Due to her limitations, especially people doubting her abilities because of her gender, she forms a community to support and protect her in times of need, a community that grows throughout the series. For example, after many short love affairs, Warshawski falls in love with archeologist Peter Sansen, the only boyfriend who understands her passion for her job. In comparison to Hammett, Chandler, and Himes, Paretsky's treatment of, as Porsdam notes, the "issues relating to friendship, care, and family come to occupy center stage, to the point where they threaten to become more interesting than the stories of detection themselves" (Porsdam 143).

Warshawski surrounds herself with women just as devoted to their moral code and as headstrong as herself. Lotty is the best and foremost example. A best friend, mother figure and main supporter of Warshawski, Lotty represents the framework of Warshawski's makeshift community that she has built for herself. Like Warshawski, Lotty is opinionated and dedicated to

helping those the system has rejected, specifically in the field of medicine, as “she’s been one of the physicians who performed abortions in connection with an underground referral service” (*Indemnity Only* 94) before it became legal practice. Lotty represents the one person in Warshawski’s life who will never doubt her, having always “respected [Warshawski’s] decisions” (95). Unlike Warshawski’s former husband and the many boyfriends she’s had, who are often controlling and want her to back down from a fight, she relies on Lotty to be the one who would be there to stitch her back up and not ask (too many) questions. Lotty’s job in medicine also gives Warshawski access to an abundance of drugs, seen when Lotty gives her “a shot of phenylbutazone. That’s what they give racehorses to keep them from aching when they run” (96).

Beyond being a personal doctor and motherly support system for Warshawski, Lotty is the one person who can truly ground her with common sense and helpful advice. Warshawski is best known among her friends for her stubbornness. Lotty notes that her friend “seem[s] to be in love with danger and death [and always makes] life very hard for those who love [her]” (*Blood Shot* 190). Lotty is also the one friend who understands the pains of trying to make a difference in the world, as she is in a similar position as a progressive abortion clinic owner. Warshawski can always rely on Lotty when she feels like the world is against her, and Lotty is always ready to help her realize the limitations of her abilities:

You can’t heal the world, Liebchen. I know you know that. You can only work with one person at a time, in a very small way. And over the individuals you help you have much effect. It’s only the megalomaniacs, the Hitlers and their ilk, who think they have the answer for everyone’s life. You are in the world of the sane, Victoria, the world of the limited. (243)

Warshawski’s gender and emotionality allows this type of bond to be formed and kept, a relationship inaccessible to cold, hard, male detectives. Neither Spade nor Marlowe are subject to

the complications a “family” introduce for a detective, although Grave Digger and Coffin Ed, like Warshawski but less frequently, see their private lives occasionally entangled in the dangers of their job.

Unique to Warshawski is her neighbor, a ‘helpful old codger’ and stand-in father figure who Warshawski can always rely on. In the early pages of *Bitter Medicine* Paretsky introduces “old Mr. Contreras from the first floor” (*Bitter Medicine* 64). At first, Warshawski finds him a nuisance, poking his nose in her business and becoming a liability for her to protect. Not to mention his annoying disposition to refer to her as “cookie” and “doll.” But beyond the condescending nicknames, Warshawski slowly learns to appreciate Mr. Contreras’ concern for her, moving “protectively to [her] side,” when people try to intimidate her (90) and sometimes taking a beating himself to save her from another. Ironically, the characteristics of Mr. Contreras that annoy Warshawski the most are the characteristics they have in common. As Lotty points out, “the two of you are well matched – stubborn, pigheaded, with only one allowable way to do things – your own” (*Blood Shot* 178). Mr. Contreras becomes a pseudo-dad figure for Warshawski, protecting her, staying up late waiting for her to come home, and taking care of her dogs when she needs to leave them behind (among all the detectives I discuss, she is the only one to have pets). While Warshawski fulfills the hard-boiled loner characteristic by being an orphan, Mr. Contreras helps shift her away being a simple re-genderization of Marlowe. While, as Porsdam writes, “the (male) story of detection is still important,” Warshawski becomes increasingly preoccupied with her “effort to reconcile the contradictory needs of independence and interdependence” (Porsdam 148).

Murray Ryerson is another part of Warshawski’s makeshift community. Reporter at the *Herald-Star* newspaper, he is Warshawski’s longtime friend, sometime rival, and updated period

motif of the genre. In male dominated hard-boiled detective novels, reporters serve as an annoyance detectives must deal with or avoid but occasionally also use. Murray and Warshawski's relationship is then contrary to the hard-boiled tradition that reporters are usually the enemy of a detective. He does, however, continue the hard-boiled tradition of being the reporter who is used by the police or P.I. to publicize or keep the case out of the papers. While Ryerson might not always be a helpful friend, he offers a unique perspective on her cases and has access to unique sources because of his gender and profession. As Warshawski comments in *Dead Land*, "the patrol officers, especially the men, were the kind of source Murray knew how to work" (*Dead Land* 262). Warshawski often complains that Ryerson wants more from her than she can give, asking her to trade insider information about her cases for his assistance, but at the same time she notices how much he helps her. As a private investigator, she is often left to her own devices, but Warshawski admits that "Murray was a kind of teammate" (*Overboard* 138) that she could bounce ideas off of, creating between them a mutual trust and quasi-colleague relationship. His job as a journalist also adds to his helpfulness as he often gives Warshawski information he has paid someone for. In *Overboard* he provides her with insight into the current affairs of the construction industry, a "perennial Mob front," (139) in Chicago. Without Murray, she sometimes struggles to come up with leads to pursue. Of course, their relationship is mutual, as he promises to dedicate his Pulitzer to Warshawski, "O High Empress among all the detectives in the six counties" (139). Murray is also an example of updating the genre in the later books, as he leaves the newspaper to make more money on television, doing "Chicago fluff on Global's cable station" (*Dead Land* 32).

A Glimpse into her Private life

Something that is integral to having a community to rely on is making time for them. Paretsky's novels are not just about Warshawski as a detective, but also Warshawski as a friend, a neighbor, and a member of her own community. The scenes between her and Mr. Contreras having dinner together, or her taking a bath to relax from a hard day take up almost as many pages as the actual detective action. We see something similar with Marlowe, using his free time to replay famous chess matches and taking time out of his day to go to the bar, but nothing to this extent. Spade and CO have very minimal "free time," if any at all, and the time that Coffin Ed and Grave Digger have is spent investigating off the clock. But the importance of taking time for herself is another way that Warshawski, as a woman in this profession, moves away from the traditional hard-boiled male detective. Her downtime is a necessity that allows her to continue in this intense line of work. She says of Mr. Contreras in *Dead Land*:

Conversations with my neighbor are never short, but they can also be healing. Even though I had a list of people I needed to see, the hour spent together in the garden helped me feel more like myself and less like a tsunami of hazardous waste. (543)

Paretsky gives her female detective what Johanna Smith calls "the kind of emotional baggage – conflicted friendships, troubling memories of dead parents – unknown to the hard-boiled masculine, sturdy individualist PI" (Smith 80). A prime example of this "baggage" is when Warshawski places herself in a pseudo-mother role for youth in need. Sometimes she mentions that she wishes she had children, thinking that one "beautiful summer day it might be nice to be having a picnic with my children instead of hiding a fugitive from the police and the mob" (*Indemnity Only* 242). Wanting children and a family is not something Marlowe and Spade think about. In fact, they're mostly against settling down, except for the tired Marlowe in his last novels when he finally starts to consider it a possibility.

Sex & Dating

Unlike Marlowe and Spade, who see sex as a distraction or a weapon implemented by femme fatales against the seeker of truth, Warshawski has a very free relationship with sex. Before her more long-term relationships, she feels free to have casual sex with men, inviting them over simply to sleep with them, not looking for anything serious. Sex for Warshawski is fun, not something that could corrupt or limit her. Having sex with someone involved in the investigation is again not something she worries about, allowing herself to explore potential sexual prospects. In *Bitter Medicine* Warshawski says that “for the next hour or so [Burgoyne] demonstrated the value of a good knowledge of anatomy can have in the right hands” (*Bitter Medicine* 122). Just as when Spade finds out that Brigid is the killer and turns her over to the police in *The Maltese Falcon*, Warshawski doesn’t feel an obligation to save Dr. Burgoyne when she discovers his part in the crime that killed her friend. Nevertheless, Spade’s sexual intimacy with Brigid didn’t hinder his investigation, unlike Warshawski who was distracted by her attraction to Burgoyne who used it to hide his involvement in the case. She prioritized seeing him over dedicating her time to Consuelo’s case, whereas Spade never puts Brigid first. Nevertheless, in the end both Spade and Warshawski choose their own morality and justice over their lover.

Although there is more casual sex in Paretsky’s novels than in other hard-boiled detectives’ stories, it doesn’t dominate Warshawski’s life. Instead, it becomes another way to spend her free-time and a human comfort that Warshawski has access to, unlike Marlowe and Spade – they don’t see it as a comfort but mostly as a distraction. Her long-term relationship with Peter is a very far stray from the classic hard-boiled detectives who feel like they cannot maintain a long-term relationship because of their profession. Unlike the male hard-boiled

detectives, Warshawski is more emotional, which allows her to form these deep bonds with people, who can still enjoy a casual relationship. Coffin Ed and Grave Digger are the exception, as their job on the police force allows them the time to have families. However, the film, *V.I. Warshawski* (1991) starring Kathleen Turner takes Warshawski's sexual independence to an extreme, even making Murray a still interested ex-boyfriend and making Turner as much a fashion model as she is a detective.

The "One Good Cop"

Like Marlowe's Bernie Ohls and Himes' Lieutenant Anderson, Warshawski has her own version of the "one good cop" who tries to rise above the compromised police department to solve the case. The police officer Warshawski has a relationship with is homicide lieutenant Bobby Mallory, her father's old partner and a member of her makeshift family, especially since she "usually ha[s] Thanksgiving dinner with [him and] his warmly maternal wife" (*Indemnity Only* 32). As Porsdam points out, Mallory is often annoyed "by [Warshawski's] somewhat infantile need to show how good she is" (Porsdam 141). As he provides her the same advice a father would give, he can be simultaneously just as condescending and unhelpful as the rest of the police force.

Introduced in the later Warshawski novels is Officer Pizzello, another example of the "one good cop." She a fellow woman who wants justice for those afflicted by the cases she is assigned. But like most officers, her mission is circumscribed by the patriarchal and bureaucratic system in which she operates. Warshawski notices that she "went through the same turmoil at the PD, giving in to pressure to accept plea deals when [she] thought the client was innocent" (*Overboard* 297). From not being able to secure warrants, to having hundreds of unsolved cases, being a cop makes her desire for justice daunting and sometimes impossible. But because of their

mutual understanding of failures of the system, Pizzello and Warshawski develop a mutual respect for one another. When she doesn't find Warshawski's intrusions completely disruptive, Pizzello relies on Warshawski to discover information that she herself cannot obtain without permission or, sometimes, legally. In a fashion very reminiscent of Marlowe and Ohls, and Lieutenant Anderson and the Harlem Detectives, Pizzello and Warshawski consider each other equals and often find themselves relying on one another in difficult situations.

The Rest of the Chicago P.D.

Beyond Pizzello and Mallory, Warshawski's relationship with the Chicago police force is close to the antagonistic relationships Spade and Marlowe have with police officers. In a self-reflective moment, Warshawski notes that "in a hard-boiled novel, the private investigator is almost always at odds with the actual police" (*Dead Land* 637). For one thing, most officers are annoyed with the constant intrusion of a private investigator on their cases. This sometimes even applies to Pizzello:

You are the most arrogant PI I've ever met. You and you alone can solve a homicide with no DNA, no fingerprints, no security camera intel? Don't call me again unless you have real information, not a wish list. Besides, we don't work homicides out of the Twentieth. As you'd know if you knew anything about policing in Chicago. (*Overboard* 133)

Nevertheless, Pizzello recognizes that Warshawski is one of few people truly working to serve justice.

In true hard-boiled fashion, Paretsky depicts the corruption within law enforcement, from corrupt and incompetent officers to higher-ups limiting the abilities of officers to do their jobs. Firstly, the incompetency of many officers on the force not only shows the limitations of the system but restricts Warshawski in her own detection. In *Overboard*, after Warshawski calls the police, the first officer on the scene is more interested in charging her with trespassing than

finding and saving the young girl trapped down by the rocks. This incompetence, however, is systemic; they are majorly overworked and underfunded. In *Indemnity Only*, an officer says that John Thayer's case is not a priority as they have "73 unsolved homicides right now" (*Indemnity Only* 121). The police don't have the funds or manpower to handle the cases that Chicago provides them with, especially when those with power higher up limit their ability to do their job. Pizzello often complains that she cannot do anything to help Warshawski on a case because the chief "won't let [her] ask a judge for a warrant" (*Dead Land* 526).

In a hard-boiled novel, it is not only the priorities of the police and the system that are corrupt, but sometimes the officers themselves. Ironically, as Beverly Six argues, "the corruption of the State, i.e. law enforcement officials," is also "not illegal" (Six 156), for rather than becoming involved in corrupt gang or mob activity, corrupt officers simply push the limits of what is legal. The best example is Coney in *Overboard*, a violent, sexist, corrupt, power-hungry officer hellbent on taking Warshawski down. Not only does he threaten to taze Warshawski's dogs and brutalize Mr. Contreras, but he also often acts on his violence, slapping Warshawski hard enough to make her fall, and shouting profanities at her in front of other people (*Overboard* 66-69). Coney is the prime example of what power can do to a person in the novels. Because he's a police officer he believes he has superiority over those he interrogates and has a right to use brute force to get what he wants, a habit police detectives Grave Digger and Coffin Ed also indulge in, but with much less selfish aims. This sense of power not only comes from his job but also from the fact that he has never experienced any consequences from his higher ups, due to their own corrupt ideas of power and patriarchy.

Evolution

While Paretsky's earlier work is modelled more on the rough and tough likes of Philip Marlowe, CO, and Sam Spade, she later steps back from this outright imitation of the hard-boiled detective and transports Warshawski and her version of the genre into the modern day.

Warshawski deals with corruption as a female P.I. would, feels sympathy for young girls in need of help, struggles with her confidence and self-image, takes a realistic amount of time to recover from injury, and is able to form deeply bonded, mostly female, relationships with those around her without being completely distracted from her work. She successfully operates in a male-centric job and in hard-boiled style, and unlike Himes' detectives, she survives.

CHESTER HIMES

While Hammett and Chandler are the pioneers of the hard-boiled detective, the genre, as Sean McCann points out, is one "whose rules are instantly recognizable and endlessly available for variation," allowing authors such as Paretsky and Himes to adapt it as a "means [of pursuing] quite varied ambitions," from their predecessors (McCann 42). Evidently, Hammett, Chandler, Paretsky, and Himes use the hard-boiled genre, despite its formulaic qualities, for its malleability. Hammett strips back the flowery language of mystery to create semi-realistic worlds and Chandler introduces a romantic idealism suggesting his iconic white knight savior detective. Paretsky introduces political and social commentary that manipulates the formula and characterization of the hard-boiled detective to reverse its gender tropes while still staying within the genre.

What can then be interpreted as the white feminized interpretation of the hard-boiled detective by Paretsky occurs in a similar yet alternate way in the detective stories of Chester

Himes. The authors are similar in the sense that they approach the hard-boiled genre initially as a means for addressing social concerns which, throughout their series, develop into a reworking of the genre's characteristics to highlight particular social and cultural issues in the world of their novels. They differ in the issues they address, with Paretsky's feminist and Himes' racial concerns, and with the intensity in which they address certain social injustices.

Before the Harlem Detectives

Before he turned to the detective genre, Chester Himes was an established writer whose novels and stories protested the treatment of blacks in America, but his audience remained small. Coming from a middle-class black family, in 1928 he enrolled at Ohio State University but was expelled for his involvement in a bar brawl and poor grades. Getting in with criminal company, he subsequently served seven and a half years of a twenty-year sentence in prison for an armed robbery, an experience that profoundly shaped his writing, with his earliest works inspired by life in prison, and generally focusing on the plight of black America. In 1931, from prison, Himes began writing short stories and articles for black publications like *Abbott's Monthly*, *Atlanta Daily World*, *Bronzeman*, and *The Pittsburg Courier*, but subsequently in the mainstream *Esquire*, which helped him gain "the notice of the larger literary world" (Silet xxiv). His *Esquire* story, "To What Red Hell" (1934), published under his prison number, "59623," was a partly fictionalized account of the Ohio State Penitentiary fire that killed 322 inmates.

After his release in 1937 he wrote a novel, *Cast the First Stone*, that would not be published until 1952, which is a searing exploration of faith, power, and corruption in a community struggling against the forces of racism. Reverend Shadrach's world is turned upside down when he becomes embroiled in a series of scandals and controversies, including an illicit

affair with a wealthy socialite and accusations of embezzlement. As his reputation and credibility are called into question, Shadrach must confront his own moral failings and the hypocrisy of those around him.

Himes' first published novel, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945), drew from his own experiences with racism while working in shipyards in Los Angeles. In the book Bob Jones becomes increasingly resentful, grappling with his feelings of rage and powerlessness in the face of the systemic oppression he endures at work. He finds himself divided between either expressing his anger and risking trouble, or passively enduring racism, hoping for white acceptance. Bob's vulnerability when facing false assault claims from a white woman underscores this racism. After being severely beaten up by his white male co-workers, he is forced to enlist in the army as a condition of having the rape charges dismissed. The novel confronts the realities of racism and Bob's quest for equality and fair treatment. Himes' early subsequent novels – *Lonely Crusade* (1947), *The Third Generation* (1954), and *The Primitive* (1956) – continued to focus on racial conflicts, black people's struggles with autonomy and power, and often, tragedy.

His move to Paris in the early 1950s proved pivotal for his literary career. At the time, Paris was the place where several black expatriates like political cartoonist Oliver Harrington and writers like Richard Wright and William Gardner Smith found an audience for their protest literature. Through Langston Hughes, Himes had met Wright and Ralph Ellison in New York. While Ellison stayed in the United States, Himes and Wright were among those who, escaping the racism in the United States found respect among French intellectuals in Paris. Many of Himes' contemporaries also read his novels, with James Baldwin being a scathing critic, noting Himes' work as "the worst writing on this side of the Atlantic" (Field n.p.), while Simone de

Beauvoir praised his work as “carnival mirrors deforming all things in the direction of truth” (Eburne 820).

While Himes’ stories and novels garnered him some recognition, they did not provide him a steady income, struggling as he was against censorship and publishers failing to enthusiastically market his books. This lack of commercial success mainly stemmed from his refusal to write “racial uplift” narratives intended to motivate educated black people to be responsible in the lifting of their race. As Raymond Nelson points out, Himes “had long been regarded as one of the angriest black writers of the ‘school’ of Richard Wright” (Nelson 53).

Barely able to sustain himself from his writing in the early 1950s, he was at one point reduced to working as a janitor in an Automat Cafeteria on a trip to New York to visit a failing publisher of one of his books. After returning to Paris, his friend Marcel Duhamel suggested that Himes “return to the crime story he had been asked to produce for the [Gallimard’s La] Série Noire list back in 1954” (Jackson 372), Duhamel’s own publishing imprint. Himes somewhat half-heartedly took up the project, hoping that this more popular genre would provide him with some financial stability. He later confessed that while he started, and continued, writing detective fiction for income, “it [also] became a pleasurable experience just to create a story out of my own experience” with racism and the law (*Conversations* 86). He argued that the hard-boiled genre was a natively American genre:

there is no reason why the black American, who is also an American, like all other Americans, and brought up in this sphere of violence which is the main sphere of American detective stories, there is no reason why he [the black American] shouldn’t write them. It’s just plain and simple violence in narrative form. (Himes and Nelson 55)

While biographer James Sallis recognizes Himes as a major contributor to the detective genre, Himes felt that he hadn’t “created anything whatsoever; I just made the faces black, that’s all”

(56). But he underestimates his particular transformation of the genre. Most of his detective novels maintain the same formulaic plot structure as his model – Hammett, whom he named “the only mystery writer who mattered [in his] time,” (*Conversations* 84) and *The Maltese Falcon*. Yet, Himes utilizes the genre to dramatize the racial tensions and injustices of his novel’s settings, the Harlem of the 1950s and early 1960s, and to make clear, through his narratives, his continuing anger at racial injustices.

Himes almost certainly would have also known the work of Rudolph Fisher, writer of *The Conjure-Man Dies* (1932), widely recognized as the first black detective novel. Set in Harlem, Dr. John Archer investigates the mysterious death of N’Gana Frimbo, a well-known conjure-man, a witch doctor who believes they can heal through magic. As Archer delves into the case, he uncovers a web of secrets, deceit, and ancient rituals, challenging his perceptions of justice and truth in a racially divided Harlem. But unlike the later Himes novels, Archer uses the medical knowledge of his day to help solve the case. Coffin Ed and Grave Digger Jones rarely rely on forensics, as theirs are street stories.

Coffin Ed and Grave Digger Jones: Black Hard-Boiled Detectives

Coffin Ed and Grave Digger Jones are Himes’ transformation of the hard-boiled detective. Coffin Ed, known for his tough demeanor, often resorting to violence to enforce justice, is a no-nonsense cop with a short fuse and a deep sense of loyalty to his community. Grave Digger, on the other hand, is the more level-headed of the pair, often serving as the voice of reason. He's pragmatic and resourceful, relying on his street smarts and intuition to crack cases. They maintain the hard-boiled genre in their own unique way, a loner-duo, who Nelson notes are “themselves [marginalized by] an oppressive environment,” characterized as “cynical

men seeking a basis for logical action in a brutally irrational world” (Nelson 55). As the hard-boiled genre requires, they value, as Jay R. Berry Jr. points out:

Honesty, loyalty [...] a dedication to one’s profession of helping to form a better community, and, if necessary, a willingness to take the law into one’s own hands to ensure that justice prevails. (Berry Jr. 120)

Of the two, Coffin Ed is a “trigger-happy detective” which is “as dangerous as a blind man with a rattlesnake” (*Big Gold* 46). They are the most violent and angry of the hard-boiled detectives, very different to Warshawski’s passive, no-gun approach to detection. Marlowe and Spade also rarely carry a gun, with CO only doing so because it is required of him by his boss. Corruption is just as rampant in Himes’ narratives as it is in Hammett, Chandler, and Paretsky and they encounter varying levels of corrupt political and governing bodies, law enforcement, and criminals. In Himes’ novels, corruption is even amplified by the detectives’ roles as police detectives, as they experience firsthand, as Sallis notes, how “the forces of law and order only serve to amplify the disorder and chaos” in Harlem (Sallis 129).

Genre Issues

Raymond Nelson argues that of the nine novels in Himes’ Harlem Detectives series, those written between 1958 and 1961 are in the classic detective genre. These include *The Real Cool Killers* (1959), *The Crazy Kill* (1959), *The Big Gold Dream* (1960), and *All Shot Up* (1960). For Nelson, “each poses a problem, or series of problems, usually expressed in hideous physical violence, which extends to corruption into personal and communal life, and threatens the always precarious balance by which individuals survive in Harlem,” (Nelson 56) and the discovery in the end is made by the main characters. He argues that the first novel, *A Rage in Harlem* (1957) is not purely a detective novel because Grave Digger and Coffin Ed are not yet the focus of the narrative. Rather the reader is introduced to Jackson, the hearse driver caught up with a group of

criminals with the third person narrator following his point of view for most of the novel. Nelson also doesn't consider *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1965), *The Heat's On* (1966), and *Blind Man with a Pistol* (1969) as purely detective novels either, because they focus more attention on racial tensions than mystery. He notes that especially in *Cotton Comes to Harlem*, "Himes' attempts to weld together two unlike materials are sometimes hilariously successful, but the seams show, and, finally, the fusion does not hold" (62). (Nelson's article appears before *Plan B* [1993] – published posthumously as the last in the series, which focuses the majority of its attention on the beginnings of a large-scale race war with the only mystery being the origin of the guns being distributed.)

While I agree with Nelson's exclusion of *Blind Man with a Pistol*, as Coffin Ed and Grave Digger only appear at the beginning and end of the novel, having very little to do with the main narrative events, Himes' use of the hard-boiled fiction genre can be categorized differently. Every novel, except *Blind Man with a Pistol* and *Plan B*, loosely follows the plot of Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*. Each of the seven detective novels from 1957 to 1966 include an item being hunted by a criminal which by the end turns out to be a falsified one, with the real item being hidden somewhere else all along. For example, in *The Big Gold Dream* the money being looked for by several criminals is in the hands of Sweet Prophet the entire time. Similarly, in *Cotton Comes to Harlem* the detectives discover that there are two separate bales of cotton, and the one with the money was taken by a homeless man early on. Again, in *The Heat's On*, the drugs every criminal in the novel is hunting are hidden inside the skin of some dead eels, and when Pinky is asked what he did with them he says he "threw 'em in the 'cinerator [because they] were full of paper and trash" (*Heat's On* 173). This formula continues throughout almost all of Himes'

detective novels, alongside the racial themes that permeate the narratives. The first seven books are arguably more integrated into the detective plots than Nelson argues.

The later novel in the series, *Blind Man with a Pistol*, however, takes an ambitious approach to the detective form by completely diverging from it at the end. The ending sees the blind man raging around with a pistol in fear, not knowing that everyone around him is scared of him and his gun. The plot centered on Coffin Ed and Grave Digger disappears, overshadowed by the actions of the blind man. Nelson notes that here “the *failure* of the genre is the message” (Nelson 62). The same is true for *Plan B*, which explodes the hard-boiled genre and prioritizes historical racial tensions and a raging race war over the crime only initially investigated by the Harlem detectives before they are both sidelined.

An Emphasis on Race

As Nelson points out, “what was new about the Harlem Domestic series was its variety of character-types, its grotesque comedy of violence, and its sparse, descriptive style” (53). Himes’ earlier writing was focused on a naturalistic and deterministic view of society, with themes of racism, racial conflict, and America’s racial history, which translates into his crime novels. While Hammett and Chandler expose how a corrupt world affects the powerlessness of the everyday man, and its effects on the protagonist, they do not directly focus on that corruption. Paretsky does focus on specific forms of gendered inequality and political corruption, but all three authors rarely discuss race or feature important black characters. Robert Skinner notes that “Hammett usually depicted them as pawns of criminals” (*Two Guns* 24), and often characterizes minorities through stereotyping. For example, in *The Maltese Falcon* Cairo is a darker skinned, effeminate man, introduced by Effie as “this guy is queer” (*Maltese Falcon* 40), and he is easily manipulated and just as easily killed off. Chandler shows a more nuanced understanding for

black mannerisms and speech “but they were never more than minor characters off whom Marlowe could play” (*Two Guns* 24). An exception might be made for Moose Malloy in *Farewell, My Lovely*, as this character allows Chandler to explore black life and black people’s relationships with law and justice. In one scene Marlowe sarcastically says to Lieutenant Nulty, “all he did was kill a Negro...I guess that’s a misdemeanor” (*Farewell* 118), a comment on the racist prejudices of the Los Angeles police. Additionally, Skinner argues that Himes “does a credible job of showing the undisguised racism that was so much a part” of his novels (“Black Man” 193). Until *Blind Man with a Pistol* and *Plan B*, his handling of the mystery plot is carefully balanced with his wider focus on racial injustice.

Point of View

The biggest stylistic change that differentiates Himes from Chandler and Paretsky, and formally aligns him closer with Hammett, is his third person perspective narrative. Rather than the monologue that follows the detectives as they ponder the mystery, Himes’ narrator explores the motivations of criminals, the feelings of victims, the fears of witnesses, the general Harlem malaise, and the rage of our lead detectives within the narrative. Hammett, however, employs a narrator whose voice and views closely align with that of Spade. Although Cynthia Hamilton points out that in *A Rage in Harlem*, “Himes uses a narrator whose awareness of the vicious dynamics of Harlem contrasts sharply with Jackson’s naivety” (Hamilton 17), she limits her analysis to Himes’ first Harlem detective novel, in which Coffin Ed and Grave Digger are not yet central characters. Throughout the rest of the series the narrator’s voice becomes aligned more to that of the leading detectives, just like Hammett’s narrative style.

What makes Himes stand out amongst Hammett, Chandler, and Paretsky is that readers always get to witness the crime. This allows Himes to provide much more of the cultural context

that surrounds the crime. Himes also creates a variety of “bad guys” of differing shades and degrees of villainy. For example, *All Shot Up* sees everything from a petty tire thief and con artist Mister Baron, who turns out to be a woman, all the way to professional killers like the white man and two black men who kill George Drake and blind Big Six. In *A Rage in Harlem*, readers also see the sides of Jackson that would not be visible were the perspective limited to the detectives. In the third person, the “tears [well] up in Jackson’s eyes,” out of fear, exposing that he is not the typical ‘tough guy’ criminal, but a bystander caught up in a racket bigger than he could have ever bargained for (*Rage* 8).

Violence

Himes also doesn’t limit himself to the realism of Paretsky’s hard-boiled narratives, nor the romantically idealistic ones of Chandler. Instead, like Hammett, he adopts a style that allows a sort of comedic absurdity to permeate his narrative without distracting from the barbarity. Similarly, CO approaches the outrageous amounts of violence in *Red Harvest* with a nonchalant, almost suave, attitude that invites a comedic reading. This allows Himes to create, as A. Robert Lee argues, “witty, complicated, often anarchically grotesque and funny tale[s] of detection bulging with mayhem, predatory hustle, and murder” (Lee 76). For example, the bar fight in the opening of *The Real Cool Killers*:

The severed arm in its coat sleeve, still clutching the knife, sailed through the air, sprinkling the nearby spectators with drops of blood, landed on the linoleum tile floor, and skidded beneath the table of a booth. (*Real Cool* 8)

Another example is in *All Shot Up*. While being chased by Grave Digger and Coffin Ed, a motorcyclist twists and turns around corners “like a Hollywood Indian on a pinto pony” (*All Shot* 89), but eventually meets his demise in a highly absurd scene:

The three thin sheets of stainless steel, six feet in width, with red flags flying from both corners, formed a blade less than a quarter of an inch thick. This blade caught the rider above his woolen-lined jacket, on the exposed part of his neck, which was stretched and taut from his physical exertion, as the motorcycle went underneath. He was hitting more than fifty-five miles an hour, and the blade severed his head from his body as though he had been guillotined. (93)

While the situations in Himes' novels are sometimes comedically absurdist, they illustrate the extremes of the racism in the society in which they happen. This reaches a pinnacle in Himes' final Harlem Detective novel, *Plan B*, which veers from a detective narrative into one that focuses on a violent race war. A scene in which a black man has used an automatic rifle to shoot at white people in Harlem, sees him eventually surrounded by police. Nevertheless, he doesn't let his rage subside. When the police bring in an army tank to take him down, he yells:

'I'll fight you with anything you wanna fight with; I ain't scared of you white motherfuckers.' No sooner had the words left his lips (almost as though the cannoneers had waited politely for him to finish), than he was struck in the chest by a 105 mm shell, and his body exploded. (*Plan B* 66)

Violence is also used by Coffin Ed and Grave Digger to assert themselves as figures of power and respect. Their signature move of shooting at the ceiling, preceded by their booming catchphrase: "Straighten up [...] Count off," (*Rage* 51) invokes fear in their audience and gives the detectives command of the space. At the sounds of this echoing and ominous order "the morbid and the innocent moved in closer [while] suspicious characters began to blow" (*Real Cool* 15). Because of their marginalized position as black detectives, being excluded by their white colleagues as equally as black Harlem disowns them, there are only a certain number of ways they can command respect in Harlem, and violence is the most effective. This resembles Warshawski's struggle to command respect as a woman in a more masculine profession. While Spade and Marlowe are respected by some, they are often underestimated and command respect through their skills more than through brute force. Toughness, however, is a genre-necessary

characteristic for hard-boiled detectives, especially as outsiders. Even Lieutenant Anderson understands the reason for his detectives' violence, telling his superior in defense of his detectives' violence that, "you've got to be tough to be a colored cop in Harlem. Unfortunately, colored people don't respect colored cops unless they're tough" (41). Through their experience of being threatened, beaten, and brutalized by the criminals of Harlem, they've learned that the truth is simply that "colored folks didn't respect colored cops. But they respected big shiny pistols and sudden death" (*Rage* 49).

Knights vs. Cowboys

In Chandler's novels, Marlowe often resembles a white knight savior figure who enters the play to resolve the mystery and leave everything behind once the job is complete. His cut-throat, and mostly ethical, morals draw him as a figure to be admired, fall in love with, and save the day in some capacity. This image of a gallant, romantic outsider invented by Chandler became the norm for many hard-boiled detective novels, a detective with a "willingness to get pushed around in order to protect a client" (*Big Sleep* 123), and a sharpened second sense for crime. However, this image, with Himes, needed modifying when the racial demographic of the detective changed. The violence his duo face in the streets of Harlem requires not the keen eye of a Marlowe or the hunches of a Warshawski. Instead, Grave Digger and Coffin Ed, as "men of ruthless action [supplant] the passivity of earlier protagonists" (Sallis 137), using the brute force of their two, "special made, long-barreled, nickel-plated .38-calibre revolver[s], that had shot [their] way to fame in Harlem" (*Heat's On* 103), gave themselves a reputation as the "damned Wild West gunmen" of Harlem (*Crazy Kill* 28).

This transition from white knight, returning to a gun-slinging cowboy aesthetic is complicated by the fact that Himes' detectives don't operate in the private sphere, unlike Spade,

Marlowe, and Warshawski. They belong to the police force. While the P.I.s discussed earlier are respected for their expertise, nuanced approaches, sometimes even recommended by elite members of society, and almost always answer to themselves, life looks a little different for Coffin Ed and Grave Digger.

Moving from the P.I. to Police Officer

Himes doesn't write his detectives into the private sector, but rather places them in the established and culturally limiting system of justice – a majority white police force operating in a majority black precinct of Harlem. Himes notes that they are still meant to “represent the kind of detectives that should exist, living in a community, knowing the people, enforcing law,” (Fabre and Skinner 85) even though they don't live in Harlem – they live in nearby Queens. By placing them in an official sector of law and justice protection surrounded by people like the white Lieutenant Anderson, who knows little of Harlem and the people within, Grave Digger and Coffin Ed must act as a pair who are fighting for, yet are simultaneously marginalized, by both sides. This contributes to the limitations Coffin Ed and Grave Digger face as they push the limits implemented by the rules and regulations of the system. Coffin Ed and Grave Digger sometimes find themselves often “just pissed-off with all the red tape” (*Blind Man* 58) that stops them from doing their jobs “effectively” – mostly suggesting that they cannot go around beating suspects and witnesses up for answers – which is not a limitation that P.I.s face. Rather, Spade, Marlowe, and Warshawski often find themselves getting away with a lot and while they run the risk of losing their license when they take such liberties, this never happens. Ironically, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger get away with their brutality in cases where the people they're beating on are black. Black on black brutality being acceptable to the police further exposes the racist prejudices of the system. When Coffin Ed and Grave Digger beat up a white person they are

immediately suspended from the case, as in *The Heat's On*, and it's only when a white person is killed in Harlem that the commissioner and D.A. involve themselves personally in a Harlem murder.

Despite their success in solving cases, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger's methods keep them at the lowest rank of detective, as even "after twelve years as first-grade precinct detectives they hadn't been promoted" (97). They are often threatened with suspension when they disagree with the racist actions of white supervisors. But what secures the detectives as contemporaries of other P.I.s is that their integrity is not threatened or diminished by racist comments or suspensions. Nelson notes that "they struggle courageously to uncover truth; trapped in a hopelessly venal institution, they remain incorruptibly honest" (Nelson 56). Lastly, at the end of every shift they have to make their way "back to the precinct station and [make] out their report[s]" (*Crazy Kill* 131).

Being on the police force, however, does come with some advantages. For one, while they sometimes continue to work outside of paid hours, they are not required to: by the time it is 9am, they have the luxury of "[calling] it a day," and going home to their wives (*Big Gold* 70). In some of the novels they do simply clock out and leave matters to the day shift. Most of their advantages, however, are tech related. For example, it would be difficult for a P.I. like Marlowe to get his hands on "a US army tracer bullet," (*Heat's On* 104) or speed down the busy streets of the city "with the siren open, scattering cars like ninepins" (*Big Gold* 13). (Nevertheless, no other P.I. has and uses the advantage of Google like Warshawski.) Additionally, they are guaranteed pay, even if not promoted, unlike Marlowe and Spade who must take on cases to receive any income. In this regard, the Harlem detectives have the advantage of financial security but they, as

in the hard-boiled tradition, are still working class and detect because it provides them with an income.

Skinner, however, sees Coffin Ed and Grave Digger as having another source of income.

A passage in *A Rage in Harlem* begins, “Grave Digger and Coffin Ed weren’t crooked detectives,” but continues:

They took their tribute, like all real cops, from the established underworld catering to the essential needs of the people – game-keepers, madams, streetwalkers, number writers, number bankers. But they were rough on purse snatchers, muggers, burglars, con men, and all strangers working any racket. (*Rage* 49)

Skinner’s reading of this passage is that “the detectives take bribes and protection money from gangsters and pimps,” while thinking “nothing of terrorizing small-time criminals [who] perhaps coincidentally [...] are also the only ones who are unlikely to be able to pay them off” (*Two Guns* 26). With this in mind, I would think that their “tribute” is knowledge and stool pigeons, not money. Skinner’s claim also ignores two important characteristics of the detectives: First, every bribe offered to either Coffin Ed or Grave Digger is met with a rejection and possibly a slugging. Second, his reading brushes over the important statements by the narrator, that the people the detectives don’t bother are those who cater to the “essential needs of the people,” meaning that the crimes that serve the greater good and are not threatening the lives of others are not their top priority. The detectives are more inclined to act for justice than law, and so if the madams and streetwalkers work in favor of peoples’ livelihoods or the detectives’ own business of justice, then why would they arrest them when the real problem are those so-called “small-time criminals.” In Himes’ Harlem there are not a lot of employment opportunities – and the sex industry is an important and rarely troublesome sector.

The Makeshift Office

Unlike Warshawski, Marlowe, or Spade, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger being somewhat lowly members of the police detective force have no personalized office space. What they have instead is Coffin Ed's "small battered black sedan" (*Big Gold* 47). But what it lacks in curb appeal is made up for in use: "the little car might have looked like a bow-legged turtle, but it ran like an antelope" (*All Shot* 20). While this doesn't allow them to have a personalized space or a safe to store important documents in, it does allow them to make after criminals immediately, very rarely being too far away to not catch up to the chase. It is also the place where they "interview" their stool pigeons, as they can easily pick them up while on patrol without bringing them to the station. The car also provides them a more private location to talk to suspects in before they bring them to the precinct's interview room where they must follow official protocols.

Private Life

Chandler notes that when it comes to a hard-boiled detective, "I do not care much about his private life" ("Simple Art" 15). Warshawski is a major exception to this common feature of the genre, as her domestic, social, and romantic life is an important part of the mystery narrative. Coffin Ed and Grave Digger are on the overnight shift, but some details of their lives outside of working hours appear in a few of the novels. For example, in *The Real Cool Killers* Coffin Ed's daughter Eve, known by her criminal friends as "Sugartits," has caught herself up in a gang of drug users and pushers wanting to make a name for themselves. Coffin Ed clearly has a difficult relationship with his daughter to the point where "it's getting so I hardly know her" (*Real Cool* 44). In other instances, the detectives' wives have "probably begun to worry" when they come home late from work (*Big Gold* 70). In *The Heat's On*, we momentarily glimpse Coffin Ed's

home when returns home from the hospital and puts “the Silex coffee maker on the gas stove, with enough coffee in it to make mud” (*Heat’s On* 103). Scenes like this, however, are rare.

Marginalization

Although Coffin Ed and Grave Digger operate within the police force this does not affiliate them with the morals, actions, or even rules of their mostly white colleagues. In fact, this emphasizes the marginalization and outsider-ness they feel in their pursuit of justice since many of their actions are frowned upon or contested by the colleagues. Thus, they are first marginalized by their white colleagues for being black, and secondly marginalized by the black community of Harlem for being cops.

As noted, the marginalization the detectives experience at work is, for the most part, racially charged. This resembles Warshawski’s added struggle of sexist clients and criminals as she operates in a predominantly male field and in patriarchal white collar crime. A key type of racism that Coffin Ed and Grave Digger must deal with within the force is the casual remarks that white officers make, either about them or the people of Harlem, comments that white officers brush off as “just a way of speaking,” (*All Shot* 41) perpetuating the poor relationship Harlem has with law enforcement. Coffin Ed is especially picked on by his white colleagues for the events that open *The Real Cool Killers*, when he shoots an “Arab” gang member for throwing perfume in his face, an instinctive response caused by the trauma from the previous book, when Ed was the victim of an acid attack. Rather than finding support at the precinct, “some of the white cops distorted [the story just] to needle [him]” (*Heat’s On* 14). The place where they should find support and fraternity is just another place where they are met with racism and marginalization. Another example of their separation from their white colleagues is evident when, while many white police officers get away with killing black people, when Coffin Ed and

Grave Digger kill a white drug dealer, the D.A. notes that he is “going to have these detectives indicted [as] there has been too much police brutality in Harlem” (*Heat’s On* 56), as it is easier to blame the increased brutality on them than on the white officers.

The people of Harlem are aware of the prejudice most white police have against them, thus the secret “code of Harlem for one brother to help another lie to white cops” (*Rage* 82). The community forms a united front based on the racial divide caused and perpetuated by white police and their violence on the black body. Nevertheless, this resistance and negative relationship with the black community is not limited to just white police. The people of Harlem feel betrayed, accusing the system of “using [their] brothers against [them],” when the duo are just doing their job (*Cotton Comes* 5). In some instances, black people turn to Coffin Ed and Grave Digger for support against white cops, but again, it is their job to observe the law and so they are required to respond with: “don’t look at me, . . . , I’m the law too” (*Blind Man* 59). They are not allowed the same black-black relationship as non-cops in Harlem and refuse to stand up for criminals solely based on race. They are marginalized by black people in Harlem because “colored folks didn’t respect colored cops,” (*Rage* 3) and so they no longer see Coffin Ed and Grave Digger as black men, simply treating them as they would white officers. When they try to make witnesses cooperate, they try to relate to them racially. When asking a room of black witnesses, Coffin Ed tries to convince them to talk, saying, ““don’t try to give me that silent treatment,’ he warned. ‘We’re all colored folks together’” (*All Shot* 25). Nevertheless, the only response they receive is a giggle and silence. It is not until they shoot at the ceiling that someone responds to them. Thus, in their position Coffin Ed and Grave Digger are marginalized double fold.

Morality

The morality of the hard-boiled detective is key to the genre, as being strict in their values ensures the pursuit of justice, even if it is private justice. As police officers, Grave Digger and Coffin Ed's morals don't always align with those of the law. Instead, as Nelson notes, figures like slave rebel Nat Turner, and Stackalee, a bandit of Black folklore, are the "cultural antecedents [that] ultimately give [the detectives] the moral authority they exercise" (Nelson 57). In essence, the "bad n----s" who are associated with courage and purpose in black culture are the models on which Himes invented Coffin Ed and Grave Digger. While their actions are sometimes unethical, their perceptions of justice are consistent. Unlike Spade, Marlowe, or Warshawski, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger don't have the advantage of what Scott Bunyan calls an "extra-legal space which affords [private investigators] the authority to impose [their] own kind of morality," and yet the duo continuously operate on their own understanding of justice (Bunyan 339). They don't discriminate on who they beat on based on gender; they see no difference between beating a woman senseless in *Cotton Comes to Harlem* and pummeling a black man to his wit's end in *Blind Man with a Pistol*. The difference between the violence they enact and how white cops treat the black community is that, for Himes, the duo's morals lie on the side of justice. While Skinner argues that "perhaps unwittingly, Himes was mimicking the traditional hard-boiled ethic which places justice over law," (*Two Guns* 26) clearly this was a conscious decision by Himes. His understanding of Hammett's approach to the justice/law dichotomy in *The Maltese Falcon* is expressed by Grave Digger and Coffin Ed's personalized division of law and justice versus Spade's inability to differentiate them. Spade believes in justice enacted through law. Chandler adjusts Hammett's view in his hard-boiled narratives to show that there is a difference between serving justice and abiding by the law. Himes, as a black

activist, an ex-prisoner, and an expatriate writing protest novels had a nuanced and individual understanding of justice completely separate from the law. In *The Heat's On*, Grave Digger and Coffin Ed find themselves caught between their own interpretations of justice and their colleagues' view on law. The assistant D.A., a white man, is annoyed that Coffin Ed and Grave Digger killed a white drug peddler as he's only committed the "minor crime" of selling heroin, and he sees the need to remind the Harlem detectives that they "are primarily a peace officer" (*Heat's On* 55). To this however, Grave Digger is enraged and, reminds the D.A. that:

All the crimes committed by addicts – robberies, murders, rapes...All the fucked-up lives...All the nice kids sent down the drain on a habit...Twenty-one days on heroin and you're hooked for life...Jesus Christ mister, that one lousy drug has murdered more people than Hitler. And you call it *minor*! (55)

Coffin Ed and Grave Digger, instead, choose which crimes they deem important enough to pursue. While they despise the white man that sells drugs to young people in *The Heat's On*, they tell the mammie in *The Crazy Kill*: "We're just letting you run because you keep our stool pigeons supplied," (*Crazy Kill* 82) a somewhat corrupt but personalized understanding of justice.

The City

The hard-boiled detective always has a particular locale. In this case, Harlem is the backdrop for Himes' detectives. The New York neighborhood bound by the Hudson River, the Harlem River, 155th Street, Fifth Avenue, and Central Park North, was an epicenter for rich white families of importance until the 1900s before it slowly became a ghetto "constructed and delimited by white economic and political power" (Bunyan 351), and in the 1920s the center of the Harlem Renaissance, the decade before Himes started writing. Himes focuses less on the physical mapping of Harlem and more on its cultural and economic mapping. In *The Real Cool Killers*, a now dilapidated building is a reminder of the past, when "Harlem was a fashionable

white neighborhood, and the Negro slums were centered around San Juan Hill on West 42nd Street” (*Real Cool* 154). This image alone, of the once fashionable house now occupied by poor, black families, shows the change Harlem experienced in the early years of the twentieth century.

In *Blind Man with a Pistol*, the focus shifts from the past to the present, highlighting the conditions in which the poor of Harlem now try to survive. On a routine police cruise, two white officers find themselves in front of a rotting, sinking, stinking building which “for five years past [...] had been condemned as unsafe for human habitation” (*Blind Man* 7). Yet upon entering, they discover a makeshift harem of black nuns, their husband, and a multitude of naked, malnourished children living in these conditions. This same novel again illustrates more poor living conditions, housing tenements with “urine stinking-hallway[s],” and the “hot dirty slim streets” Harlemites call *The Valley* (73). While a white cop sees these conditions and wonders “how people can live in such filth,” (8) the narrator reminds us that even though “no one knew what [the dilapidated building] looked like inside, no one cared” (7). Marlowe’s Los Angeles and Warshawski’s Chicago are also characterized by dilapidated, crumbling buildings used by criminals for drug pushing, but their narratives put such conditions in the background to focus on political and social corruption. Himes, however, foregrounds the connection between living conditions and the crimes committed in Harlem. Grave Digger and Coffin Ed understand the need to fight for “justice for the Harlem residents, whom the law ignores, in a space that is” overrun with “criminals and privileged outsiders” that choose to victimize the people of Harlem (Bunyan 351).

The “One Good Cop”

The “one good cop” trope as noted earlier is a standard of the hard-boiled genre, but for Himes it takes on a new twist. Since Coffin Ed and Grave Digger are the morally grey yet most

morally sound police officers in the novels, the “good cop” role becomes more pointed. The “good cop” connection here is Lieutenant Anderson, the good *white* cop colleague and boss to whom Coffin Ed and Grave Digger can sometimes turn for support. Like Warshawski’s father’s former police partner, Bobby Mallory, or Bernie Ohls in the Marlowe tales, Anderson represents a moral police officer who aligns with the values and aims of the detectives. Time and again, Anderson stands up for Coffin Ed and Grave Digger, supporting their insubordination and often shutting down racist remarks made by colleagues. After being on the night shift with them for over a year “he had come to know his two ace colored detectives well, and he depended on them” (*Big Gold* 62). He even supports their own personal interpretation of law enforcement and justice. He stands up for them when white colleague detective Haggerty equates them to “tow hog farmers lost in the city” (*All Shot* 22). Unlike Anderson’s own boss, Captain Brice, Anderson allows the detectives leeway in their pursuits, as long as the mess left behind is not too hard to clean up. Anderson provides Coffin Ed and Grave Digger a “community” to turn to outside of just themselves. He understands them, unlike any of their other colleagues. However, there are limits to Anderson’s protection, and they sometimes find themselves suspended for their actions. For example, after they kill the white drug dealer in *The Heat’s On*, the commissioner, Captain Brice’s superior, orders that they are “suspended from the force until further notice [and for them to] turn in their shields and strike their names from the roll” (*Heat’s On* 56).

Female Stereotypes

Sex is not as central to Himes’ detective mysteries until *Plan B*, differentiating him from Hammett and Chandler and aligning his novels more with Paretsky’s where sex is part of the character. Nevertheless, he maintains the hard-boiled rules of gender by categorizing the “types” of women who operate in Harlem: the youthful, sexual object and the protective, fat, mammie. *A*

Rage in Harlem has multiple examples of the different types of women that the Harlem Detectives encounter: Billie, the manly, unsexual woman; Imabelle, the femme fatale; and Carol and Jeanie, the prostitutes. Billie is “a brown-skinned woman in her middle forties, with a compact husky body [...] a man’s haircut, and a smooth, thick silky moustache” (*Rage* 142). Billie aligns with the mammie figure, providing Grave Digger and Coffin Ed with stool pigeons and informants. Imabelle, who resembles Brigit O’Shaughnessy in her use of sex to dominate men, is the epitome of a femme fatale. She uses her sexuality to seduce Jackson into submission, using her smell of “hot-bodied woman, and dime-store perfume” (96). Lastly, the prostitute stereotype is unique to Himes, with characters like Jeanie and Carol parading around with their “over full, ripened breasts and tight-fitting slacks,” and characterized by their “heart-shaped face[s], long black lashes concealing dark brown eyes, and [mouths] too small for the thickness of the lips” (145). The most sexualized characters in Himes’ detective novels, absent in Marlowe and Warshawski’s stories, are “sissies”, black gay men dressed as women who often take advantage of older white men in Harlem, “their motions were wanton, indecent, suggestive of an orgy taking place in their minds” (*Blind Man* 15). Hammett is the exception, as Cairo is described as an overly effeminate gay man.

Physical and Mental Trauma

Like most hard-boiled detectives, Coffin Ed and Grave Digger have their fair share of being slugged, shot at, and brutalized in their line of work. Although their responses to blows to the head resemble the superhuman recoveries of Spade and Marlowe, when the injury is more severe, so is their reaction. Himes provides his characters with a more realistic recovery time, similar to that of Warshawski. In the first novel in the series, Coffin Ed experiences a trauma that scars him physically and mentally for the rest of the series. In a violent gun fight in the dark

between the detectives and criminals, Hank grabs a jar of “acid [that] had been used to demonstrate the purity of the gold ore,” and throws it “into Coffin Ed’s eyes” (*Rage* 69); “quick scalding rage turned his acid-burnt face into a hideous mask and his scarred lips drew back from his clenched teeth” (*Real Cool* 19). This “mask” is one Coffin Ed wears throughout the series, with twitching face muscles as a result of the attack. This is a major shift away from the traditional hard-boiled model of the untouchable hero.

Exploding the Genre

Plan B, the final novel of the series, marks Himes’ radical departure from the hard-boiled genre, intensifying his focus on the rage and violence of racial tensions in Harlem and killing off his Harlem detectives. In this novel, the violence, sex, and racism are amplified to the extreme. The novel further develops the absurdist black comedy that increases with every novel in the series. In *Plan B* this violence reaches a brutal peak. For example, a crowd of white and black people, and some complacent police officers, witness a racist, neo-Nazi biker and his gang lynch an innocent black man and simply leave the scene without any repercussions or punishment as neither the black or white members of the audience physically intervene, and the police are blocked by the crowds and arrive too late:

When he grunted the motor, it took off with a shower of grass and gravel, pulling the hanging rope at burning velocity, and jerked the body of the black man into the air so rapidly it was still in the sitting position as it shot upward [...] The neck broke with a loud, eerie cracking, like a tree exploding from frost. Probably it was intensified by the sound of the skull bursting. (*Plan B* 122)

Racism fuels much of the violence in Himes’ novels. In *Plan B*, however, it receives an historical context by examining the origins of Chitterlings, Inc., starting out as an unsuccessful slave plantation before the Civil War, how the land came to be owned by a black man, and the personal history of Tomsson Black, a black man who learned to influence white politicians. Throughout

the historical sections of the narrative, readers discover that Black has come to own Chitterlings, Inc. and is using it to distribute unmarked guns to the black community of Harlem. His own experiences with racism when he was accused of raping a white woman when she was the one to suggest sex fuels his rage and desire to incite a race war, seeing violence as the only solution to oppression.

Coffin Ed and Grave Digger are early removed from the contemporary action, with the latter getting suspended by Captain Brice for killing an unthreatening man with a gun and Coffin Ed wanting to back up his partner:

‘Ain’t involved? I’m here, ain’t I? I’m your partner, ain’t I? We’re a team, ain’t we? I’d killed him too, man. I’d have just done it different is all. [...] I’ll be deaf, dumb, and blind. But it ain’t going to be easy.’ (20)

Later, Coffin Ed listens to his white superiors argue over the brutality of the black man shooting up 125th Street. When asked for his opinion he responds that they should probably “quit thinking about him as a n----- and start thinking about him as sick,” a statement that is met with “he’s going to be sicker than that shortly [...] He’s going to be dead” from Captain Brice that leaves Coffin Ed concluding, “‘I’m no good here,’” and climbing out of the car and returns to the station (60).

The narrative of the rest of the book until the last chapter explores Tomsson Black and the racial history behind Chitterlings, Inc. intertwined with the mystery surrounding a rising race war in Harlem started by the appearance of guns.

Racism doesn’t always necessarily pertain to or involve the police. In *Plan B*, the narrator describes the repercussions of a mass murder committed by a black man in which he shoots at mostly white people. As a response, the unbridled violence of the police ends up killing many innocent black civilians. Instead of the news reports focusing on the rage and violence of the

attacker or the brutal response of Captain Brice and the police, the white community enjoys a sort of superficial mourning. The “white people were so predisposed to the emotion of guilt, that they were blind to the murderous assault of the homicidal black,” as if it would label them as racist to acknowledge Captain Brice and his actions as violent – a notion which is racist in itself (104). This racism persists even when the tone shifts. A week later the white community start to ask themselves “why should they feel so bad about a few blacks [59] being killed by the police when all of their lives were in danger,” and that “they were fed up with these blacks and their impossible demands,” (112) the demands of which are equality and peace.

The most brutal “battle” in *Plan B* begins with a demonstration of strength and power by law enforcement. Ironically, this attempt to reduce the “animosity between the races [had] no black policemen [...] parading for the simple reason that none of them had been asked to parade, and none of them had requested the right” (172). In a nearby Catholic cathedral, a black man, hidden behind a wall with one of the mystery guns, is poised ready to massacre the parade:

The first burst, passing from left to right, made a row of entries in the faces of the five officers in the lead. The first officers were of the same height, and holes appeared in their upper cheekbones, just beneath the eyes and in the bridges of their noses. Snot mixed with blood exploded from their nostrils and their caps flew off behind, suddenly filled with fragments of their skulls and past gray brain matter, slightly interlaced with capillaries, like globs of putty, finely-sculpted with red ink. (176)

The internal monologue of the shooter throughout the scene emphasizes his despair and fury as he approaches the massacre with the thought that “the God of this cathedral was white and would have no tolerance for him [and] there was no black God nearby, if in fact there was one anywhere in the U.S.” (174).

The rest of *Plan B* illustrates the violent consequences of the historically-based racial divide and the repercussions of the racialized hate in America through the violent assaults by black

people on the white community and the lynching of innocent black men in response. The narrator takes on Himes' voice and opinions of racial violence, and the novel often makes little effort to dramatize the commentary or blend it in to the narrative. The narrative almost becomes a series of essays on violent racial confrontation as the inevitable outcome of the racial divide.

Plan B finally explodes the detective genre. This last novel echoes many themes in Himes' earlier protest novels which explore racism, intra-racial color distinctions among African Americans, discriminatory employment, and socioeconomic disparities. In *Plan B* the hard-boiled genre cannot contain Himes' anger, making Hammett, Chandler, and Paretsky appear conventional in comparison.

CONCLUSION

Spade's only novel-length appearance is in Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*, but he continues, like the Continental Operative, to appear in short stories. Marlowe in the final novel by Chandler, *Playback*, starts to think about settling down with Linda Loring, pondering a life after his career as a private investigator. Paretsky's Warshawski continues to exist today with *Pay Dirt* being published this year, although in *Overboard* she starts to slow down. Yet Himes kills off his detectives.

Coffin Ed and Grave Digger return to the narrative near the end of the novel when Captain Brice tells them to deliberately get themselves suspended for an undercover mission to infiltrate the black power group possibly responsible for the thousands of guns circulating around Harlem. When they suggest that they beat up a random black man on the street, Brice's response is racially violent: "you know we wouldn't fire you for that – not really" (192). Subsequently, most of Harlem believes that they are fired because they "had kissed the white man's ass, and

now that they were considered no longer useful [...] had been thrown out in the street” (193-4). When they meet and confront Black after discovering that the mystery guns are being distributed by Chitterlings, Inc., Coffin Ed is disgusted with Black’s contempt for justice and order. Grave Digger, however, approves, seeing Black as a way out of racial oppression, insisting “I’d rather be dead than a subhuman in this world” (202). When Coffin Ed announces his intent to kill Black in hopes of ending his violent scheme, Grave Digger turns and “shot Coffin Ed through the head” (202). Black then “drew a small automatic from a side table drawer and shot Grave Digger in the back of the head” (202), remarking that because Grave Digger killed his partner he could not be trusted. For Hammett, Chandler, and Paretsky, the overarching social concern that permeates the mysteries do not overwhelm the crime fiction narrative. Himes’ balance between detective fiction and protest narrative, however, falls apart in this last novel, as the protest becomes his overarching concern.

As my four examples show, the hard-boiled genre is malleable and can be used to expose numerous social, gendered, and racial injustices, despite its restrictive narrative formula and specialized character requirements. Hammett and Chandler being the pioneers have the advantage of molding the genre. Paretsky primarily addressing the treatment of women shifted the detective’s “loner” disposition in the gender change, maintaining the main constructs of the genre. Himes, however, using the genre to address his themes of imbedded racial injustice, oppression, and violence, reaches what for him are the limits of the genre. The problem that *Plan B* lays out is much more than a mystery, and its solution is way beyond what any hard-boiled detective, black or white, male or female, can solve.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my parents, whose love, support, and encouragement have been the foundation of my academic journey. Their belief in me has been a source of strength and inspiration. I am profoundly grateful to my dissertation advisor, Professor MacGowan, for his invaluable guidance, expertise, and mentorship throughout this research process. His insightful feedback and encouragement have been instrumental in shaping this thesis. I would not have been able to do this without him.

I am also grateful for my boyfriend, Paul, and my best friends, Claire and Natalie, for their patience, understanding, and constant support through this process. Thank you for always being there for me and allowing me to talk through every step of my research and writing with all of you. To my wonderful friends who sat with me in the library, offering words of encouragement as I navigated through the challenges of writing my thesis, I am deeply thankful. Your presence and support have made this journey more enjoyable and meaningful.

I truly would not be where I am today without the support of all these amazing people.