

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Shiloh Winsor for the degree of Master of Arts in English  
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Masculinity, Access and the Hard-Boiled Detective.

Redacted for Privacy

Abstract approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Dashiell Hammett's fiction and detective pulps generally, offered the reader a chance to participate in vicarious power, by giving them a sense of the profession of detection, both in and out of the stories. It was the realism of the detective figure that allowed the audience to relate to him. What the detective offers the reader is an intensely powerful performance of masculinity that is at once ordinary in physicality and intelligence and extraordinary in the power it affords him. This power comes from his professional abilities, which allow him to transcend physical and class limitations. The detective story allows the reader to identify with the detective, and the detective pulps both in the stories and in their other sections offer the reader lessons in the profession of detection. Through this identification and education there is a kind of transference of the detective's power to the reader. The detective story offers the reader a chance to be powerful in a corrupt world, but since the detective is

never able to fully rid the world of corruption, the story also offers the reader an opportunity to escape the corrupt world by putting the story down (essentially locating the corruption of the world within the pulp itself). In this escape, the reader inevitably feels happiness and contentment because his real world (though not as exciting or powerful as the detective's) is safe.

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September 13, 2001

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Vicarious Power: Masculinity, Access  
and the Hard-Boiled Detective  
by  
Shiloh Winsor

A THESIS  
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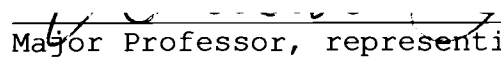
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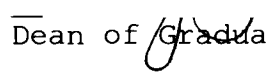
  
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To Hero: I love you. This thesis seems a shabby reason to have spent time away from you, and while I could continue to write many more words in praise of you, I will instead spend those precious minutes *with* you.

To Jillian: I can't believe how far we have come together. Without your faith in me and your sacrifices, I could never have finished this. Without you, I wouldn't have wanted to finish this. We have grown up together, and I would never have believed that I could love you more now than I did a decade ago--but I do.

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# **Vicarious Power: Masculinity, Access and the Hard-Boiled Detective**

## **Ch1--Introduction**

### ***Background***

In his contemporary history of the nineteen-twenties, Frederick Allen shows the way in which the twenties saw a revolution in manners and morals. He argues that this comes about partly because the increase in wealth allows people to feel as though they can use their disposable income outside of the house, making the home "a place of casual shelter where one stopped overnight on the way from the restaurant and the movie theater to the office"(98). This disassociation from an active home life brought urban citizens into closer contact with the rest of the city on the streets, where all social strata intermingled. Allen also shows the way in which "prohibition, the automobile, the confession and sex magazines, and the movies"(99), all uniquely American phenomena, changed morals and manners. These all made the bootlegger and the speakeasy possible, resulting in an increased awareness of crime (99). Crime became acceptable, to a certain extent, to the average citizen because it was the only conduit to liquor, and liquor was

a commodity that seemed normal because it had been acceptable for so long and it was also a way of connecting to the vital elements in the city. Associating with crime through drinking was not only easy, it allowed one to rebel against authority with relative ease and passivity. A side effect of prohibition, Allen argues, is that drinking as a means of rebellion becomes a unifying and inclusive project. Women shared in this typically masculine pastime. And, since liquor was only to be found in a limited number of venues, it tended to bring all classes together in the pursuit of alcohol: "Under the new regime not only the drinks were mixed, but the company as well" (Allen 100). This conflation of society into one lawless class occurs at the same moment that the country is becoming more prosperous. It is not wealth that "all" are sharing, but instead all share in a certain amount of criminality.

The period between the wars has been popularly characterized as a boom time and the gay 20's, but even a rudimentary glance at the level of discontent that surfaces throughout the modernist fiction of an author

like Hemingway,<sup>1</sup> makes clear that the optimism of the 20's was not shared by all. Some modern critics still buy into a popularized image of the 20's as the time of boom, while only seeing the period following the depression as unhappy for most. In his history of American manhood, Michael Kimmell notes:

The optimism ushered in by the Roaring Twenties was ushered out by the Great Depression and widespread unemployment of the 1930's. Never before had American men experienced such a massive and system-wide shock to their ability to prove manhood by providing for their families. (Kimmell 192)

While the depression certainly intensified these feelings of inadequacy, the roots of inadequacy would seem to go beyond simply the ability to provide for one's family. American men have been told not just that they will be successful if they can provide for their families, but that they have the ability through work to do more than that. They have been taught that they can be rich, and, if the popularity of entertainments promoting wealth are any indication, that is what they desperately desire.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The connection between Hemmingway's sparse style and Hammett's sparse hard-boiled style has been made by Nolan (3).

<sup>2</sup> This is a tricky point, because it does seem that entertainment promotes wealth as an ideal, yet, as I go on to argue throughout, entertainments can also allow access to wealth in order to allow the viewer to feel as if he no longer needs that wealth. Or, in the case specifically of pulp detective fiction, the viewer no

The fantasy nature of widely accessible entertainments (movies, pulps, general magazines), it would seem, led Americans to desire access to the wealth they see at every turn--wealth which before this time was less visible and seemingly less attainable. For example, before prohibition, the idea of a criminal like Al Capone becoming a member of high society might have seemed close to impossible. This is not to say that those with wealth have never acquired or maintained their wealth through less than legal means, but before this time illegality was not so out in the open or so easily seen.

If it was within entertainments that all men during the nineteen-twenties could glimpse the workings of wealth, then the question becomes, what did those entertainments say about wealth and how did they allow the viewer vicarious access?

I define vicarious access here as the ability to transcend one's supposed class through fiction. For example, traditional relations of power would presuppose that one would be inevitably locked into a social class, and to rise beyond that class would be difficult to

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longer wants wealth because he sees that wealth is always associated with all of the most horrible aspects of human society: greed, corruption, murder, etc.

impossible. The American myth of the self-made man tries to offer a vision of a factory worker who can become a factory owner; however, while this may have occurred from time to time, it is analogous to buying a lottery ticket and thinking that this action will result in the mega-jackpot: both feel like fictions--out of reach probabilities. Access, in a fictional world, then, is the ability for the viewer to view a world outside of his own class, and to feel vicariously as though he could be powerful in that world. Further, if the reader is to place himself in that fictional world, it (and the character the reader associates with) must seem realistic, or the enterprise will simply feel like a myth again.

In discussions of the popular literature of the nineteen-twenties, a distinction is usually made between the widely read respectable magazines, the "slicks" (magazines like *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Scribner's*, and others), and the low-brow story magazines, the pulps (magazines like *Doc Savage*, *The Spider*, *Dime Detective*, *Black Mask*, and many others). This distinction, and the names given to each, comes from the type of paper they were printed upon, but they also imply (or in the case of the pulps, impugn) the audience for each.

The slicks were printed on glossy high-quality paper, which meant that their distribution and printing costs had to be heavily subsidized by advertisers who crammed their pages with ads meant to entice the disposable income of the general reader. The pulp, on the other, hand was printed on low-quality paper which "was much cheaper than [slick] or coated paper, and its use made it possible for publishers so inclined to reach a mass reading market at low prices without any substantial financial aid from advertisers" (Blackbeard 218). This may mean that the content of the pulps was more likely to be a result of bottom-up reader desires--the choice of content created by the reader. The slicks, which were controlled by advertising interests, would tend to choose content from the top-down for the reader--essentially creating reader choice. Based on the lower circulation of the pulps, Bill Blackbeard argues that the pulp was appealing to an elite audience of educated and/or inexhaustible readers, while the slicks appealed to the masses who wanted magazines that would look pretty:

The widespread belief that pulp paper magazines printed popular fiction for vast masses of readers, while the slick paper magazines published quality material for more tasteful elite readers, is simply wrong. The reverse, in fact, was true. While such magazines as the *Saturday Evening Post* . . . sold in the many

millions of issues . . . the pulps in general retailed . . . in the low tens of thousands at best . . . These people, many of them well educated, often academics, often writers themselves, often simply the brightest kids in a given school, numbered at best only a few hundred thousand out of a populace of a hundred million or more. (220)

This description of the pulp as a refuge for a sophisticated reader seems to be product of a late twentieth century reading of the pulps which (after careful examination) have been found to contain some celebrated work; however, the pulps were largely filled with work that was no better than the paper it was printed on.<sup>3</sup> The only thing that can probably be safely said about the pulps is that with their more specialized subject matter, they appealed to readers with a fetishistic desire for a particular genre (while he may not have been the collector Blackbeard envisions).

One particularly popular genre in pulp magazines was the detective pulp. The American detective has his roots in the western, with the story arc of order turned to chaos returning to order, but the detective was, from the beginning, a realistic figure who walked urban streets that seemed familiar to the reader. It is clear that this

realism is what tended to speak to pulp readers. A letter to the editor from *Detective Story Magazine* (April 4, 1925) reads, "May I offer my most sincere congratulations. The stories in *Detective Story Magazine* are wonderful--realistic" (139). It is this realism (as argued by Cawelti and others) that sets the American detective story apart from the English detective school.

In creating the American detective story as a realistic enterprise, no author is pointed to more often than Dashiell Hammett. Hammett became known for his hard-boiled detective stories in the magazine *Black Mask*, which is regarded as the birthplace of the hard-boiled style. Hammett was born Samuel Dashiell Hammett, and the most important piece of information about his history for a description of his texts is that he was employed for several years by the Pinkerton detective agency. It was during this period that Hammett gained the skills with which he would later imbue his characters.

Though "Hammett's prose fiction career was of brief duration, extending from 1922 into early 1934" (Nolan 4), he is known for having attempted to make the detective

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<sup>3</sup> I realize that I, too, am falling here into the trap of judging the work in pulps, but I do not think it is too much to argue that the pulps were not consistently read for their high literary value.

story a story driven by characters with realistic motives.

Raymond Chandler, in *The Simple Art of Murder* claims that

Hammett took murder out of the Venetian vase and dropped it into the alley; it doesn't have to stay there forever, but it was a good idea to begin by getting it as far as possible from Emily Post's idea of how a well-bred debutante gnaws a chicken wing. He wrote at first (and almost to the end) for people with a sharp aggressive attitude to life. They were not afraid of the seamy side of things; they lived there. Violence did not dismay them; it was right down their street.

Hammett gave murder back to the kind of people that commit it for reasons, not just to provide a corpse; and with the means at hand, not with hand-wrought dueling pistols, curare, and tropical fish. He put these people down on paper as they are, and he made them talk and think in the language they customarily used for these purposes. He had style, but his audience didn't know it, because it was in a language not supposed to be capable of such refinements. (*Later Novels & Other Writings* 988-9)

This claim for Hammett's realism has been challenged by Cawelti, who believes "Hammett's power as a writer does not lie in his greater fidelity to realistic details . . . but in his capacity to embody a powerful vision of life in the hard-boiled detective formula" (Cawelti 163). It may certainly be true that hard-boiled detective stories in general are not entirely realistic, but, as the reader's letter from *Detective Story Magazine* shows, the reader clearly saw them as somehow tapping into something realistic.

The forum for this new realism was generally the pulps that handled detective fiction, but more specifically it was the pulp *Black Mask*, which fostered the hard-boiled detective genre:

Within a few years the magazine [Black Mask], especially under the editorship of Joseph T. Shaw, had attracted a number of writers who refined and fashioned violence into a style for the 1920's and 1930's. ("Detectives and Mystery Novels" 108)

It was in *Black Mask* that Earle Stanley Gardner, Carroll John Daly, Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and many others became known. And it is *Black Mask* that is credited with creating (or at least fostering and popularizing) the hard-boiled style and the hard-boiled detective character. It is in *Black Mask* that Hammett introduced the Continental Op, a fat, middle-aged, unnamed operative working for the Continental Detective Agency (an analogue for Hammett's own Pinkerton agency).

Hammett wrote thirty-six Op stories for *Black Mask*, eight of which were subsequently revised into the novels *Red Harvest* and *The Dain Curse*. In addition, Hammett's *Maltese Falcon* and *The Glass Key* originally appeared serialized in *Black Mask*.

As a style, the hard-boiled school has continually been described as a masculine enterprise. *Black Mask* did much to foster this:

*Black Mask* was a male stronghold. E.R. Hagemann's *A Comprehensive Index to Black Mask, 1920-1952* shows it had no women series characters in its thirty-one-year history. And this despite having a woman editor in its later years (Fanny Elsworth from 1936 to '40) and occasional women writers (such as Katherine Brocklebank and Agatha Christie). (Drew xiii)

The women who do appear in hard-boiled stories are either extensions of the weak damsel from the Western, or more often, the femme fatale who appropriates both masculine violence and female sexuality in a performance that attempts to destroy the men who surround her and which ultimately excludes her from participation in society.

Hammett's fiction, and detective pulps generally, offered the reader a chance to participate in vicarious power, by giving them a sense of the profession of detection, both in and out of the stories. It was the realism of the detective figure that allowed the audience to relate to him. What the detective offers the reader is an intensely powerful performance of masculinity that is at once ordinary in physicality and intelligence and extraordinary in the power it affords him. This power comes from his professional abilities, which allow him to

transcend physical and class limitations. The detective story allows the reader to identify with the detective, and the detective pulps, both in the stories and in their other sections, offer the reader lessons in the profession of detection. Through this identification and education there is a kind of transference of the detective's power to the reader. The detective story offers the reader a chance to be powerful in a corrupt world, but since the detective is never able to fully rid the world of corruption, the story also offers the reader an opportunity to escape the corrupt world by putting the story down (essentially locating the corruption of the world within the pulp itself). In this escape, the reader inevitably feels happiness and contentment because his real world (though not as exciting or powerful as the detective's) is safe.

### ***Methodology***

In putting together this argument I will make several assumptions. The largest and most problematic assumption is that I can describe the way in which the detective novel and short story might have spoken to their contemporary audience. I doubt a reader at the time could fully describe his or her reaction to the texts or the

reasons for buying and reading them. Whenever possible, I have included information to support my claims about readers by giving a historical analysis of the way a reader might respond. The assumed readers are male, despite evidence that shows that many women read and enjoyed these stories (the letters to the editor from *Detective Story Weekly* are frequently from female readers<sup>4</sup>). I make the assumption of a male reader based upon evidence that shows that the magazines themselves believed the audience was male. For example, at the bottom of many advertisements from *Dime Detective Magazine* is a line that reads, "Please mention Man Story Magazine (Popular Publication Group) when responding to this advertisement." This shows that the advertisers would buy ads in these publications hoping to, and believing they would, reach a male audience.

This brings me to the second major assumption: that my claims have enough textual foundation to speak for the genre as a whole. This project would have more authority and the claims would be better supported if I had been able to gain access to more original materials. Given

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<sup>4</sup> I am a bit suspicious of these letters to the editor, and do not include them often in this analysis because they are almost all of a congratulatory nature, and may have been merely editorial fabrications.

greater scope and time, I would have liked to have explored the entirety of the *Black Mask* periodical, which has continually been cited as the most read and most influential of all American detective pulps. Access to the original publications would have allowed me to look outside of the texts themselves in order to found or challenge my conclusions within the sidelines as well (illustrations, letters to the editor, editorial notes, and advertisements might all have been of interest).

For this study, I had access to a large number of reprinted stories from *Black Mask*, including most of the stories published by Dashiell Hammett (whose work will be the main point of interest). These stories have many broad recurring concerns, and it is within these concerns that I hope to place my focus. As the claims here rely mainly upon a single author to make an argument about an entire genre, I will attempt to show that individual moments in particular texts are representative of recurring ideas. I make heaviest use of Dashiell Hammett and place his work as prototype, in particular his novel *Red Harvest*. This is done for two reasons. The first, obviously, is expedience. Hammett's work is more readily available than almost any other author in this genre from this period. The second reason for a focus on Hammett is

because his contemporaries and later writers point to him as the creator of the prototype they ultimately tried to emulate in their own hard-boiled fiction.<sup>5</sup>

I will speak from many stories on the way the pulps seem to be working, but in order to provide an argument that deals with the complexities and depth of the text, the most space is spent on *Red Harvest*. *Red Harvest* serves as the prototype for a couple of reasons. Published in 1929, it was Hammett's first published novel, and it was comprised of re-edited versions of four novelettes that appeared in *Black Mask* from November 1927 to February 1928. Its main character is the Continental Op, who serves as the longest-running of Hammett's characters, and the story arc follows the hard-boiled pattern of dalliance with danger, descent, and unsatisfying closure, which is a hallmark of other seminal hard-boiled texts such as Hammett's own *The Maltese Falcon*, *The Dain Curse*, and *The Glass Key*, as well as James M. Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, and Raymond Chandler's entire oeuvre. The criticism of *Red Harvest* finds the Op as a figure who operates outside of

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<sup>5</sup> Both Ellery Queen and Raymond Chandler have acknowledged that Hammett played a role in defining the genre, and the critical tradition pretty clearly places Hammett as the representative for tough-guy fiction in the twenties (Nolan 4-5).

the corrupt urban setting but who becomes corrupted in the process. *Red Harvest* is seen as the natural extension of the Western story arc and what Richard Slotkin calls "regeneration through violence," with the detective never fully able to participate in the world he saves. This argument makes sense, but I hope to extend what the detective character does to a reading of the audience, and in doing so, show that the reader may feel positive, just when the detective has been corrupted, because the audience can look at "Poisonville" (as the locals pronounce Personville, the setting for *Red Harvest*) from the *outside*, while the Op has been forced *inside*.

It is the gray area of interpretation that I am concerned with here, and it is my desire to better understand the complexities of the interplay between society, language, and entertainment that has drawn me to this project. My desire to work with popular materials comes neither from a desire to elevate the literary status of these materials, nor from a disdain for more conventionally canonized works. Instead, I feel that it is within popular texts that one can begin to glimpse an interaction between audience (in this case a large and possibly more varied audience than for texts generally

regarded as "high-culture" or "literature")<sup>6</sup> and text. This is especially true, I believe, of popular works that had a mass-market. The pulps coincide with the height of the primacy of printed entertainment. Before the dime novel, predecessors of the pulps, came along in the mid-1800's, books were mostly reserved for those who were literate and/or wealthy, and after the 1920's films began to dominate the popular consciousness; however, for the years between the world wars, "the pulps were the best cheap source of thrills and heroics" (Goulart 28).

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<sup>6</sup> Though, of course, as Hammett has been canonized and written about extensively, it is hard to figure out where he fits in the high-culture/low-culture conversation.

## Ch2--The Power of Profession in the Pulps

In *Creating the Modern Man*, a study of popular magazines, Tom Pendergast argues that

while the evolution of gender roles in the modern era opened up numerous areas of possibility and encouraged some socially progressive developments, the growth of modern masculinity created roles for men that suited them to a consumer culture and left them with little input on how to deal with other areas of their life. (3)

This means that men, if we are to see them as learning a kind of masculine identity through popular magazines, learned how to interact as consumers:

[This] embrace of modern masculine imagery was largely a product of both purposeful and inadvertent choices made by numbers of participants in the American magazine market rather than the top-down imposition of values on a populace of unwitting dupes. (Pendergast 2)

Pendergast is saying here that the more respectable popular magazines of the time (*The Saturday Evening Post*, *Liberty*, *American Magazine*, and others) were able to offer an identity for men which was based upon consumption as a model for happiness, but that this desire to be a consumer was as much a choice as it was an imposition. The pulps, however, were providing men with something very different. As fantasies, the pulps "were concerned with helping men

cope with increased pressures, scale back their expectations, or at least provide momentary escape" (Kimmel 213).

Whereas the popular magazines taught readers to be good consumers, the pulps, which did not rely upon advertising revenue, sold a more specific sense of identity. Fox and Lears argue that popular culture promises consumers a "fulfilling participation in the life of the community" but only delivers "the empty prospect of participating in the marketplace of personal exchange" (xii). The popular culture invites individuals to "seek commodities as keys to personal welfare, and even to conceive of themselves as commodities" (Fox and Lears xii). Because the pulps did not have to deliver large audiences to national advertisers, they were able to provide the reader with something more than just an emphasis on his ability to participate in buying and selling. The pulps offer the reader the ability to create a self beyond just buying and selling, and appeal to those excluded, or who exclude themselves, from a culture of consumption.

One of the reasons it is so hard to pin down a pulp audience is that, unlike a popular magazine which could presumably represent mainstream America because of its

wide-circulation, the pulps appealed very narrowly to fetishistic tastes. Where a popular magazine can be seen as imposing taste through editorial selection, a pulp is chosen by the reader. This is a tricky point, of course, because the reader is ultimately always presented with only a limited number of choices. But, whereas a reader might expect to find the same three or four popular magazines at a well-stocked newsstand (all of which would cover the topics general enough to assure a wide readership, and thus to deliver readers to advertisers), the same newsstand could in any given month have had dozens of pulps available--westerns, romances, science-fiction stories, sports stories, detective stories, and numerous others--each attempting to appeal to its own narrow audience. Readers of Westerns would gravitate toward Western pulps, and even within this subset they would have choice. This creates individuality, or at least the illusion of individuality, because the reader, in making his selection, has created himself as the reader of a particular genre, and within that genre he has created himself as the reader of a particular magazine.

Once the reader opens the pulp, he is treated to more than a hundred pages in the genre he has chosen, and (because the reading of this kind of genre fiction is

always in some way an escapist enterprise) his fantasy world allows him to be something other than whatever he is in "real" life (unless, perhaps, he is a detective reading detective fiction--though this too might allow him to experience something other than reality). There are no pulps that deal exclusively with digging ditches or delivering milk. Instead, the pulps tap into the needs the reader has for adventure and romance that are almost always missing from ordinary life. If magazines that rely upon mass-circulation tell the reader he will be like the Joneses if he buys a new Chevy, then the pulps tell the reader that there are people out there that live more fully than the Joneses, and it is not because they have a couple of Chevys, it is because they work in exciting professions.

Cawelti and numerous others have shown the way that popular literature offers romance and adventure in various forms as the perennial appeal of popular literature. This has become one of the commonplace arguments of all popular criticism. Central to this appeal, however, and in the detective story especially, is not just that the stories are adventurous, but that they offer the possibility that this fantasy could be reality. Through the hero's

profession in particular, the reader can see a path to real-life adventure.

The distinction between the creation of the reader in the popular magazines (its emphasis on consumption) and the way the reader is envisioned in the pulps (with an emphasis on profession and self-improvement) begins to be clear when looking at the advertising for each. What advertising does find its way into the pulps tends to reinforce this idea of adventure and profession leading to the creation of the individual. Much of the advertising offers the reader ways to better himself (just as it does today in cheap publications like the *Enquirer* or comic books--the closest thing to a modern-day pulp counterpart).

A brief examination of one issue of the *Saturday Evening Post* and a contemporary *Dime Detective Magazine*, points out this difference. Table one compares advertising, showing that the *Post* has advertisements on almost half of its pages, while *Dime Detective* has ads on only one tenth of its total pages. The types of ads are also listed. Most of the ads from the *Post* are for consumable goods--most prevalent are ads related to cars (Champion Spark Plugs, Mobil Oil, U.S. Tires, etc.). In contrast, most of the ads from *Dime Detective* are for

employment (including get-rich-quick schemes and one to sell on-tap water-heaters), self-improvement (including a bizarre device to be placed over the nose<sup>7</sup>), and correspondence schools (promising adventure and high pay in a variety of professions). There is enough difference here to draw the conclusion that the advertisements in the pulps are appealing to a very different reader:

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<sup>7</sup> I assume the purpose of this product is to make larger or more prominent noses smaller. This sort of advertisement might be interesting in an examination of the desire to have typically Caucasian features and the relationship between ethnicity and the pulps.

Saturday Evening Post Vol. 205.1 July 2nd, 1932			Dime Detective Weekly Vol. 3.1 July 20th, 1932		
Type	Ad Description	Page	Type	Ad Description	Page
Consumer	Bon Ami	Frnt Cvr	Correspo	Aviation School	In Cvr
Consumer	Halitosis Prevention	1	Correspo	International Correspondenc	1
Consumer	Car Wax	2	Correspo	Radio School	3
Consumer	Campbell's Soup	23	Employe	Shirt Sales	4
Consumer	U.S. Tires	28, 29	Employe	Outdoor Jobs	4
Consumer	Bacon	25	Self-Imp	Drinking Cure	4
Consumer	Plymouth	31	Consumer	Lucky Lodestones	4
Consumer	Movie "Doomed Pavilion"	33	Consumer	Bargain Tires	4
Consumer	G.E. Hotpoint Iron	35	Employe	Water Heater Sales	5
Employer	GoodYear Tires	36-7	Consumer	Cash or Sympathy Life Insur	125
Consumer	U.S.Golf Balls	39	Employe	Get Rich Quick Chain Store	126
Consumer	Friendly Five Shoes	41	Employe	Shoe Sole Sales	127
Consumer	Champion Spark Plugs	43	Self-Imp	Self-Defense Manual	127
Employer	Mobil Oil	44-5	Consumer	Kidney Pills	127
Consumer	International Truck	50	Consumer	Stomach Pills	127
Consumer	Fitch's Dandruff Shampc	51	Employe	Government Jobs	128
Employer	Boy's Selling Magazines	52	Employe	On-Tap Water heater Sales	128
Employer	Girl's Selling Magazine	52	Correspo	Drawing School	128
Consumer	Raleigh Cigarettes	53	Correspo	Songwriting School	128
Employer	Men Selling Magazines	53	Self-Imp	Nose Improver	128
Consumer	Freeman Shoes	54	Consumer	Discount Jewelry	129
Consumer	Baseball Glove	54	Consumer	Mystery Books	In Bk Cvr
Consumer	Orange Crush	55	Self-Imp	Body Building Books	Bk Cover
Consumer	General Mills Wheat	57	Correspondence Schools Total		5
Consumer	Goodrich Tires	60-61	Employment Total		7
Consumer	Jantzen Swimwear	63	Self-Improvement Total		4
Consumer	Raleigh Cigarettes	67	Consumer Goods Total		7
Employer	Women Selling Magazines	67	Number of Pages with Ads		13 of 132
Consumer	Oiler Oil	69			
Consumer	Ethyl Gasoline	71			
Consumer	MetLife Retirement Insu	72			
Consumer	Aqua Velva	73			
Consumer	Kodak Film	BK Cvr			
Employment Total		4			
Consumer Goods Total		34			
Number of Pages with Ads		33 of 75			

Table 1  
Differences in Advertisements

The advertisements in the *Post* support Pendergast's assertions that the magazine works to create consumers. The advertisements in *Dime Detective* imply a reader who is, if not unemployed, at least unsatisfied with his profession, and even with his physicality.

The four small ads for employment in the *Post* (Figure

1), are all recruiting for magazine sales in one's spare time, and do not even offer the possibility for a full-time wage. The jobs presented are meant to give the worker spending money in order to allow participation in the consumer culture.

The catch phrases for the Boys and Girls ads here are especially interesting. The Boys ad reads, "Want Money? Want Fun?" It offers boys a chance for spending money so they can begin purchasing their own consumer goods. The ad for

**BOYS**  
—Want Money?  
—Want Fun?  
HUNDREDS of boys are earning spending money and having a lot of fun, in the Curtis Boys Club. Hugh Gallagher, 14, has written: "Received your letter an hour ago. Have already made \$1." Richard Phillips, 14, New York, made \$6 his very first day. You can do just as well as these boys — or better! Earn your own money!

**MEN**  
Earn Money During Spare Hours  
Every month George H. Rose makes extra money during spare hours representing *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Ladies' Home Journal* and *The Country Gentleman* in his community. Liberal commission allows a man both new and renewed with no experience. No experience necessary. No investment required. Just mail coupon below.

**GIRLS...**  
There's a Thrill In Earning!  
Money of your own!  
Fun, picture parties, picnics. All the fun and thrills of vacation days. Make summer just the start of your career!  
LET THE POST tell you how to get it. The Curtis Girls Club is now looking for new members. Write for a free booklet. It tells you how to earn money and have fun. It also tells you how to get a job. It's a booklet of experience for adventure and success. Write today!

**Every Woman Knows What Money Will Do!**  
... in keeping her at her best ...  
... in preserving health and happiness ...  
But every woman desires to know there's one way to have it! Money is the answer! Let the coupon below tell you how to get it. It's a booklet of experience for adventure and success. Write today!

**LEADER OF MONEY MAKERS**  
THE SATURDAY EVENING POST  
1111 Independence Avenue, Philadelphia, Pa.

Figure 1  
Sell the Post

On first glance, the correspondence schools might appear to be offering something very similar--they too are offering the promise of more income; however, a closer examination reveals that these ads work to make the reader feel that if he has a better profession, his life will be different. It is the profession that offers this

Figure 2  
BIG PAY Radio Jobs

difference, not the money. It is the responsibility and adventure of the job advertised, more than the money the job will give him, that will change the reader's life.

Figure 2 appeared in the August 1932 issue of *The Shadow* and tells the reader that he can have "bigger pay" if he trains by correspondence to work in radio. The appeal here is for the glamour of a radio job--

participation in the  
entertainment industry.

The smaller print makes it clear that the school actually teaches the pupil how to service and sell radios. It is not the servicing of radios, however, that is being sold here. Instead, the focus is on a "BIG PAY Radio Job!" which will make the reader, who already wishes for an escape from ordinariness (as evidenced by his

## WE'RE TALKING TO MEN WHO HAVE THE COURAGE TO FACE

MONEY comes hard these days. Promotions are few and far between. Other men have their eyes on your job. Most of them would be willing to take it for less pay than you're getting. Their propositions are tempting to employers forced to think of reduced overhead expenses. And these employers are studying more carefully the ability and training of the men on their payrolls.

You can't change these facts—they're fixed! But you can change yourself to meet these facts! And changing yourself is not an easy job. Acquiring the *training* you need is not easy. Mastering an International Correspondence Schools course is not easy. These courses are practical, simple and complete—but it takes diligent application of the old gray matter to secure the real benefit from them.

Thousands of men, in all lines of work, are proving they have the courage to face hard-boiled facts. They have weighed themselves in the balance of present conditions and found *training* lacking. They have turned to these Schools to help them. It takes courage to do this, because I.C.S. cannot help a man unless he is first determined to help himself. But if he has this determination, no institution in the world can be of such value to him.

If you have ambition—if you have determination—if you are the kind of man who faces hard-boiled facts and doesn't quit under fire, this coupon is an invitation to you. Mark and mail it today!

## INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

*"The Universal Course"*

BOX 4912-D, SCRANTON, PENNA.

★ Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subject *before* which I have marked X:

- ☐ Architectural Draftman
- ☐ Automobile Mechanic
- ☐ Carpenter and Builder
- ☐ Civil Engineer
- ☐ Electrician
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electrical Laying
- ☐ Estimating
- ☐ General Office Work
- ☐ Industrial Management
- ☐ Mechanical Engineering
- ☐ Plumbing
- ☐ Refrigeration
- ☐ Shipbuilding
- ☐ Structural Engineer
- ☐ Truck Driver
- ☐ Welding
- ☐ Yacht Building

### TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

- ☐ Mathematics
- ☐ Electricity
- ☐ Hydraulic
- ☐ Machine and Millwright Foreman
- ☐ Metalworking
- ☐ Ordnance
- ☐ Pipefitting
- ☐ Pottery
- ☐ Printing
- ☐ Shipbuilding
- ☐ Steam Engine Fitter
- ☐ Steam Fitting
- ☐ Steam Heating
- ☐ Steam Locomotive
- ☐ Steam Turbine
- ☐ Telegraph Engineering
- ☐ Welding
- ☐ Woodworking
- ☐ Yacht Building

- ☐ R.R. Locomotion
- ☐ Shipbuilding
- ☐ St. Louis and Southern Railway
- ☐ Telephone
- ☐ Typewriting
- ☐ Veterinary
- ☐ Writing
- ☐ Business Administration
- ☐ Business Manufacturing
- ☐ Business Law
- ☐ Business Marketing
- ☐ Business Planning
- ☐ Business Training
- ☐ Business Writing
- ☐ Business Law
- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Business Organization
- ☐ Business Planning
- ☐ Business Training
- ☐ Business Writing

- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Business Organization
- ☐ Business Planning
- ☐ Business Training
- ☐ Business Writing
- ☐ Business Law
- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Business Organization
- ☐ Business Planning
- ☐ Business Training
- ☐ Business Writing
- ☐ Business Law

- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Commercial Arithmetic
- ☐ Commercial English
- ☐ Commercial Geography
- ☐ Commercial History
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ Commercial Mathematics
- ☐ Commercial Science
- ☐ Commercial Training
- ☐ Commercial Writing
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ Commercial Management
- ☐ Commercial Organization
- ☐ Commercial Planning
- ☐ Commercial Training
- ☐ Commercial Writing

- ☐ Commercial Arithmetic
- ☐ Commercial English
- ☐ Commercial Geography
- ☐ Commercial History
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ Commercial Mathematics
- ☐ Commercial Science
- ☐ Commercial Training
- ☐ Commercial Writing
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ Commercial Management
- ☐ Commercial Organization
- ☐ Commercial Planning
- ☐ Commercial Training
- ☐ Commercial Writing

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

This coupon is valid in Canada, and also applies to the International Correspondence Schools Company, Limited, Montreal, Canada.

Figure 3  
International  
Correspondence Schools

reading of the pulp in the first place), a professional man--a man who can say "I've got a radio job. I'm interesting."

Figure 3, also from *The Shadow*, appeals in much the same way, telling the reader that if he wants to be the kind of man he wants to be, he needs to face "Hard-Boiled Facts!" and get

a professional occupation like "Architect" or "Bridge Engineer." Again the appeal is both more money and more glamour. The reward in this case, as in the first, is not merely participating in the consumer world, but instead it is moving beyond mere consumption as a way of finding self and meaning to finding meaning through profession.

The advertisers' desire to tap into the reader's need for glamour and adventure becomes even clearer, and almost ridiculous, in Figure 4 (from *Dime Detective Magazine*,

The image is a collage of several advertisements. At the top, a large headline reads "Get on AVIATION'S PAYROLL!". Below this, there's a picture of a biplane and a pilot. Text boxes include: "Let Me Show You How to EARN \$60 to \$100 a Week and UP in AVIATION!", "I Teach You QUICKLY--at Home in Your Spare Time", "There's No Time To Lose--Get My FREE Book NOW!", and "WALTER HINTON, President Aviation Institute of U.S.A., Inc.". There are also smaller boxes with "FREE" and "Mail for my big FREE BOOK on AVIATION NOW!".

Figure 4  
Get on Aviation's Payroll

July 1932), an advertisement for a study-at-home aviation school. This ad is selling the notion that working toward a correspondence degree in aviation will allow the reader to have an exciting job flying airplanes. The adventure of the job is at least as important, if not more important than the money that can be earned. It is as if reading about how to fly an airplane will allow the student to become Charles Lindbergh. "Aviation," "radio," and the other professions being advertised are adventurous and sexy.

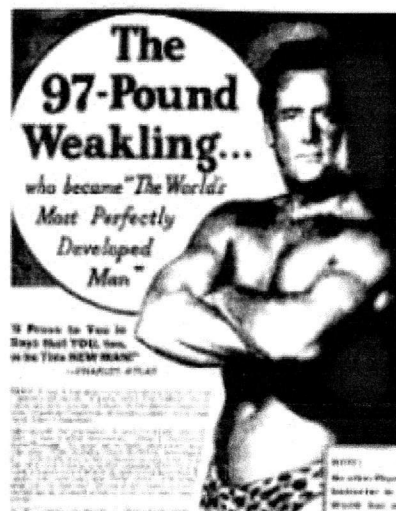


Figure 5  
Charles Atlas: The 97-Pound Weakling...

This desire for improvement is extended even to the physicality of the reader. Among the few advertisement present in the pulps are appeals to a need for physical strength. The pulps, along with early comic books, are where figures like Charles Atlas and his bodybuilding course were advertised (see Figure 5). They appeal to the reader's desire to look better, be more powerful, and be more respected. If the reader sends away for the Charles

Atlas bodybuilding system, he will be able to achieve an Atlas body.

The detective story itself makes the same appeals the pulp advertising makes. Profession and strength are being offered, and the growth in each of these aspects promises personal fulfillment and power rather than simply pleasure through consumption.

The American detective story tends to provide fantasy, but does so in a realistic milieu. It is a fantasy of power in a world without order, but the power is an ordinary kind of power, and the world is a recognizable one.

Through the pulps, a map was given to readers unable to attain the level of wealth and power in their "real" lives that was shown to them in the burgeoning cinema or the weekly slicks. The readers found in the detective story the key to accessing wealth, power, and adventure. They also found in the detective a new cowboy archetype--one that had a greater degree of realism because he was set within the urban landscape of reality rather than a frontier that existed only in myth. At the end of the Western, the West is sufficiently tamed that the reader could imagine an enjoyable existence within it (this probably accounts for the success which nineteenth-century

dime Westerns had in advertising the West), but in the detective story the city is just as corrupt as at the beginning, and the detective has made little or no impact on the world at large: "greed and the evil it causes are so pervasive and dangerous that none of the conventional symbols of good can be trusted" (Slotkin 223). The detective is, as Slotkin argues, "no less a recrudescence of the frontier hero than John Carter<sup>8</sup> and Lassiter<sup>9</sup>: an agent of regenerative violence through whom we imaginatively recover the ideological values, if not the material reality of the mythic frontier" (228). This connection between the Western hero and the detective has become a critical commonplace, as has the idea that the hero of the detective novel is excluded from the order he is trying to create just as the Western lawman is. This is, in fact, the recurring argument in the critical response to detective fiction; however, not enough has been said about the effect the detective story has on the reader. In the Western, the reader could at least see that the world could be restored to order. In the hard-boiled story, order is not even really attempted, and

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<sup>8</sup> Recurring character in Edgar Rice Burroughs' (*Tarzan*) science-fiction stories.

<sup>9</sup> Zane Grey's cowboy hero.

while the Western might have left the reader with a  
"regeneration through violence," the detective story  
leaves the reader with a mess. The appeal lies elsewhere.

### Ch3--The Hard-Boiled Detective Provides Access

The reader is able to put on the shoes (or rather the "gumshoes") of the detective because in the hard-boiled detective story, the detective offers the expected powerful hero figure, but does so in a package that is accessible to readers in a way that many previous heroes were not. The detective is not Charles Atlas, but instead is more like the reader who might send away for the Atlas catalog. The detective is not overly smart, or at least his intelligence has not required formal education. He is not necessarily good-looking.

Hammett brought to the American public a figure that was intensely realistic. The experiences of Hammett's characters came from his own experience as a Pinkerton detective. Detection for Hammett was not just something that could be written about, it was something he had lived. As William F. Nolan argues, he

was able to bring the gritty argot of the streets into print, to portray authentically the thugs, hobos, molls, stoolies, gunmen, and cops, political bosses and crooked clients, allowing them to talk and behave on paper as they had talked and behaved in [his] manhunting years. (5)

It is partly this ability to portray a world with which the reader is both familiar and unfamiliar in an authentic

way that allows the stories to resonate, feeling gritty and real.

Cynthia S. Hamilton claims that because of his experience as a true-life private-eye, Hammett felt an ambiguity about the fixedness of persona and that this lack of fixedness extended to a feeling that his fiction could never fully explain or describe reality:

The gulf between appearance and reality, social pretence and social fact, formulation and experience, haunted his life and haunts his fiction. It accounts for his sense of the endemic corruption of American society, for his interest in the role of writer as fictionmaker, and for his empathetic appreciation of expectations held in defiance of a cosmos ruled by chance. (128)

The effect on the reader, though, even if Hammett himself did not feel he had succeeded at reality, is that the Op seems to be an average and real character. This feeling of reality is fostered by the fact that Hammett does not allow his hero any semblance of romance--he is not handsome, a genius, overly talented. Instead, he is ordinary, and his ordinariness is enhanced only by his professional skill.

Hammett's long-running character, the Continental Op, epitomizes this average physicality. The physical look of the Op, Hammett's detective character who appears in *Red*

*Harvest*, *The Dain*

*Curse*, and many short

stories, is that of a

fat, middle-aged,

ordinary man of

average height. He

presents himself in

the first person, but

never gives the reader

his name, and, aside

from the self-effacing

descriptors already

given, never

completely describes

himself. In *The Image*

of Man, George Mosse

argues that in popular

images of the time,



Figure 6  
Jack "Puts One Over" on His  
Boyfriend

men were sold a stereotypical, perfect male image and that "all men were supposed to conform to an ideal masculinity" (6).

The popular magazines offered up George Atlas types and expected the audience to conform, while the pulp expects the "97-pound weakling" to be its reader, and so offers the path to an Atlas body. In figure 6 (from *Dime Detective Magazine*, November 1932) the brief comic vignette tells of two weak guys who see that their buddy Bill has sent away for the "George Jewett" bodybuilding course. They each in turn send away for the course in order to be like Bill and to be a hit with Helen. The reader here is the weakling looking for some path to strength, and the fiction that surrounds the ads vicariously offers him that strength. For this to work, though, the fiction must show that a "97-pound weakling" has Atlas potential. In the way the detective is configured, Hammett does just that.

What the Op offers is a model who does not fit the stereotype of perfection. He is not given too much specificity. And, as the stories he appears in are told in first person, he serves as an open door for the reader to slip into--the reader becomes the Op, because he wants to experience what the Op experiences. In doing so, he feels the Op's power, but he may also feel complicit in the Op's actions.

The Op himself rejects the idea of a stable identity. This ability to become something other than a fixed self is shown from the very beginning of *Red Harvest*. In the novel, the Op has been called to Personville initially by Donald Willsson. We, and presumably the Op, never learn the exact reason why he has been called to Personville, however, because Donald Willsson is murdered within the first few pages of the novel.

As the Op is trying to figure out what is happening in this town, he meets up with Bill Quint, one of many local hoods, who asks him his identity. At this moment he creates an identity he feels will allow him to get the information he wants:

I dug out my card case and ran through the collection of credentials I had picked up here and there by one means or another. The red card was the one I wanted. It identified me as Henry F. Neill, A.B. Seaman, member in good standing of the Industrial Workers of the World. There wasn't a word of truth in it. (7)

It is as if identity for the Op is simply a cloak that he can put on or take off at will. This identity is not immediately accepted by Quint, who looks at the Op "not trustfully" (7). The Op continues to de-center his identity with Quint. He explains to Quint that he has other identities: "'I got another that proves I'm a timber beast,' I said, 'If you want me to be a miner I'll get one

for that tomorrow'" (8). This ability to change identity fits into the world of Personville with its lack of defined societal structures, but it is the idea that one can change self though such simple means that offers the reader a view of identity as performative.

The Op's identity is so much a performance, in fact, that as he becomes more enmeshed in the corruption of Personville, in order to deal with the evil that pervades the town, he begins to be in danger of losing control of the performance:

Poisonville was beginning to boil out under the lid, and I felt so much like a native that even the memory of my very un-nice part in the boiling didn't keep me from getting twelve solid end-to-end hours of sleep. (115)

Performative, but realistic, Hammett's detective never forgets to tell the reader that he has ordinary bodily needs. Almost every story includes at least one mention of the detective's lack of sleep or his need to put together breakfast. This insistence upon the most mundane needs (though perhaps merely a result of the fact that pulp writers were paid by number of words) works to let the reader know that the detective is no super-hero. Whereas Superman has to avoid Kryptonite or he'll keel over, the detective needs rest, relaxation, booze, and Fatima cigarettes: "I went back to my hotel and got into a

tub of cold water. It braced me a lot, and I needed bracing. At forty I could get along on gin as a substitute for sleep, but not comfortably" (*Red Harvest* 91).

These physical needs allow readers to relate to the Op on a physical level. Further, readers can relate to him on an intellectual level: "I'm not what you'd call a brilliant thinker" he tells the reader in another story, "such results as I get are usually the fruits of patience, industry, and unimaginative plugging, helped out now and then, maybe, by a little luck" ("Zigzags of Treachery" 109). The Op claims a lack of intelligence and he also claims that to do his job well "emotions are nuisances during business hours" ("Zigzags of Treachery" 116). This absence of emotion rounds out the detective's makeup, and is just the last in a series of absent characteristics that allow the Op to work as a blank slate on which the reader can inscribe himself.

While the Op lacks well-defined features, Sam Spade, Hammett's other somewhat long-running detective character (who appeared in many fewer stories than the Op, but more than Nick and Nora Charles of *The Thin Man*, a long series in film, but not in print), is given more definition. In *The Maltese Falcon* (which originally appeared as a five-

part serial in *Black Mask* from September 1929 to January 1930), he is described in the opening lines as "a blond satan" (295). A few pages later he is said to grin "wolfishly, showing the edges of teeth far back in his jaw" (300); and finally: "The smooth thickness of his arms, legs, and body, the sag of his big rounded shoulders, made his body like a bear's: his chest was hairless. His skin was childishly soft and pink" (301). Spade embodies devil, animal, and child, yet in so doing is none of these.

That Hammett's detective's physicality is so hard to pin down tends to allow him to better appropriate whatever physical or psychological performance he wants. It is through these performances as a professional detective that he, and by extension the reader, transcends the limitations of a fixed self.

This professionalism (and here I am referring to the fact that the detective's abilities have their basis in skill and performance rather than biology or talent) provides the reader with a masculine performance model. It is through this masculinity that the detective finds security and power; however, this masculinity also serves to divorce the detective from a gender balance that would ultimately allow him to be a part of society.

In many ways, this is an extension of the problem faced by the Western hero, whose hyper-masculinity allows him to move through the lawlessness of the frontier but excludes him from settling down. The detective creates himself with all the affectations of hyper-masculinity (or the absence of femininity), allowing him access to a world of violence but locking the door for him on a "normal" life. This may complicate the access and power the reader feels when he participates in the detective's hyper-masculinity, because while the reader gains vicarious power, that power does not come without its price.

Modernism itself (and here the term applies to this fiction if only because it comes out during the modernist period, and, while the style cannot always be called art, the texts do have an emphasis on style) has been described as a "masculinist movement" (Dekoven 176). Marianne Dekoven shows that though

contrary instances of male modernist feminine identification, and support of the New Woman, are not difficult to find[,] . . . instances of modernist advocacy of firm, hard, dry, terse, classical masculinity, over the messy, soft, vague, flowery, effusive, adjectival femininity of the late Victorians, abound, and instances of male modernist antifeminism and misogyny are legion. (Dekoven 176-7)

The hard-boiled detective story fits within this definition both thematically and stylistically.

What makes this masculinity, and the effect it has on the reader, different from the Western's is that the world in which the detective moves is probably seen as a realistic world to the reader, while the Western was always set in a romantic and mythic world (though, of course, many late settlers of the West were tricked by dime novels into thinking they would be able to experience a romantic West).

The detective is moving through an urban world filled with the underside of the progress that the city had to offer. William Marling argues that the movement into a technological age demanded a new character: "The nation was ripe for new narratives, ones that could fold alienation into a narrative of progress without being pious or dull, with all the suspense and thrills that had become customary and a moral lesson about change at the end" (Marling 10). The hardboiled story fulfills these needs--it is a new narrative and it folds alienation in without piety or boredom; however, the fact that the detective is so fluid in his movement perhaps points to another need fulfilled--the reader's need for access to a world of power.

In Hammett's "The Tenth Claw," which appeared originally in *Black Mask* (January 1, 1924), the very first

lines of the story show the reader that the Op's employer is part of the wealthy elite. As the Op is at the door, a servant greets him. "'Mr. Leopold Gantvoort is not home,' the servant who opened the door said, 'but his son, Mr. Charles, is--if you wish to see him'"(3). These opening lines demonstrate the gatekeepers that the elite are able to employ, allowing access to only the right people; however, within this same interchange, the Op is able to break through this gate, partly because he has been hired. Beyond this, he sets the rules for the gatekeeper, placing himself on a level with his employer: "No I had an appointment with Mr. Leopold Gantvoort for nine or a little after. It's just nine now. No doubt he'll be back soon. I'll wait" (3). In taking control of this interchange--even though he too is an employee of Gantvoort, or will be an employee--the detective is able to establish himself on an equal footing with the master of the house, if only in relation to this other servant.

This same gatekeeping and the Op's ability to break through it can be seen in *Red Harvest*, when the Op goes to visit the novel's arch-villain, Elihu Willsson. After the murder of Donald Willsson, the Op is invited to come up to Elihu Willsson's house. The Willssons serve as the first family of Poisonville, and Elihu is shown to be pulling

the strings of all the city's corruption, though the novel opens at a moment when the corruption and lawlessness has gotten beyond their control. The pivotal scene in *Red Harvest* comes when the Op finally gets his meeting with Elihu Willsson, and is able to get Willsson to hire him to do whatever he needs to do to clean up the town. From this moment on, the Op presumably works for the side of justice, but it is a personal kind of justice. It is the Op's justice, and not even Elihu Willsson can stop him from carrying through with whatever the Op plans. Though he is hired and paid by Willsson, he places himself on the same or higher footing with his employer and does not exempt Willsson entirely from his justice.

Elihu Willsson is described as bed-bound, but his power is felt throughout the town, and he hires the Op because he "want[s] a man to clean up this pig-sty of a Poisonville for me, to smoke out the rats, little and big" (42). But though it is Willsson who has the money and is presumably the employer of the Op, the Op is able to turn the tables in the interview and recreate his position in relation to Willsson: "I'd have to have a free hand--no favors to anybody--run the job as I pleased. And I'd have to have a ten-thousand dollar retainer" (44). This agreement extends the Op's power over Willsson himself.

When Willsson reconsiders the deal the next day and asks the Op to just leave with the money, the Op refuses, making the money merely a means to his own end, which has become the clean-up of Poisonville.

Vicarious access to power and wealth is one of the major ways that this fiction can appeal to a reader; however, it must be noted that in these stories, money itself is corrupting. The Op mentions at one point that in the slang of the time "dirty is Pacific Coast argot for prosperous" ("Zigzags of Treachery" 110). This little exchange shows that there is some resistance in the culture to an idea of identity and virtue being tied up in wealth.

By the time Hammett writes *The Maltese Falcon*, the detective's ability to exist on an equal footing with his clients is clear in the way that his clients no longer expect him to come to their residences, and instead come to him. This is true of all the Sam Spade stories, and it is also true that Spade moves the detective away from his role as wage laborer (even if he is a professional) to that of entrepreneur. While the Op works for the Continental Detective Agency, Spade runs his own detective firm (or at least it is his own after his partner, Miles

Archer, is killed within the first few pages of *The Maltese Falcon*).

The breakdown of the class system is not complete, however, as Spade still sells himself and his ideals (such as they are) for money. When asked by Brigid (Spade's client, the prototypical femme fatale) why he was willing to overlook her lying about her name earlier in the book, Spade replies, "You paid us more than if you'd been telling the truth . . . and enough more to make it right" (315). Just as Elihu Willsson's money buys the Op's involvement in cleaning up the town in whatever way he wants and also buys him a get-out-of-jail-free card (though he is perhaps most deserving of the gallows), Brigid's money buys Spade's turning a blind eye to her untruths.

Rules are made to be broken when personal ideas of justice are at stake or when it is in the Op's best interests. The Op is willing to place himself outside even the community of his agency, if he feels it will make his job easier. As the Op says in *Red Harvest*: "It's right enough for the agency to have rules and regulations, but when you're on a job you've got to do it the best way you can" (117). In addressing this to the reader, the Op is perhaps inviting the reader to be complicit in this

deception, or perhaps he is merely trying to make excuses for an action he is uncomfortable with.

Most important to the reader's vicarious access to wealth and power, and to the appeal of the detective as a fantasy figure, is that the skills of the detective--those attributes which allow him access within the fictitious world--are skills that have been acquired and that come from common sense. The detective is a tough guy with tough skills. He can use a weapon, but is not usually the greatest shot (or even if he is, he is unwilling to chalk his skill up to any inborn talent, preferring to describe it as a product of practice or an overrated skill that is easily acquired). He is adept at concealment, disguises, and pursuit. These skills, however, are shown to be learned and easily learned. He does not possess any sort of true moral superiority (except in contrast to the villains). He is average. This averageness, the way in which his actions are plausible and believable, and the way in which his skills are learned rather than resulting from some superiority of mind or body, all combine to offer readers a hero whose adventures could be their own, but for the readers' own lack of adventurousness.

Many of the detective's skills are highly specific, and one way the pulp detective magazine allowed the reader

to better understand the detective was by revealing the tricks of the trade, educating the reader in the fine art of detection. In the September 1932 issue of *The Shadow Detective Monthly*, a popular pulp that featured the exploits of The Shadow (a super-hero detective), there is a brief description of the actual technique of tooth-printing. This description serves to instruct the reader on the investigative technique for establishing identity via the unalterable tooth prints we all have. The writing of this piece establishes first a common ground with the reader: "Identification by the use of finger prints is of common knowledge" (109). By the end it shows that tooth-printing is beyond the common knowledge of fingerprints and is therefore now privileged knowledge shared by the reader. This results in an assurance that "there will be no 'unknowns' in our death records" (109). As the writer allows the reader to be a part of the "our," the reader becomes a vicarious crime-solver. The reader becomes the detective, or at least the detective's knowledgeable friend.

In the August 1932 issue of *The Shadow*, readers are similarly taught that police have been utilizing radios. CB radios are presented to the readers as "our most modern invention" (122). The section of the magazine that this

appears in is a recurring department titled "The Shadow Club." Again, readers are invited to participate in the latest law enforcement trends, as the explanation goes through the minutia of radio placement and drawbacks:

In cars equipped for fighting the gangsters, as in heavier pursuit cars, the sets are installed where they are out of all danger, and do not interfere with the firing activities. That invariably relegates the set to a strong box beneath the floor of the car, for the cruisers are large, fast, but heavily constructed cars, bullet-proof all around. The cars carry a number of men, and enough ammunition, gas and tear bombs, to stand off an army of thugs for a long time. (123)

It is this level of detail that allows a reader to become intimate with the technology of law enforcement.

Both of these examples show an insistence upon technology, which is another leveling tool. Technology itself creates power for individuals with little skill or knowledge--technology provides power for the real detectives, and the readers, through knowledge of this technology, become powerful as well. It is the technological tool that allows the detectives to triumph, meaning that anyone with the tools might have the same success.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> An interesting note here, which relates back to the discussion of class, is that *The Shadow* further attempts to make a connection to the reader by announcing on its table of contents page that "This magazine is produced entirely by union labor." While this

This teaching of the audience extends from the "true" portions of the pulps into the text of the detective story itself. Hammett's short story "Zigzags of Treachery" (*Black Mask*, March 1, 1924) works almost as a primer for detective work. The Op must follow a suspect, and in explaining his actions, rather than giving the reader the psychological reactions to the job that might be expected from a first-person narration, he gives the reader a lesson in detection:

There are four rules for shadowing: Keep behind your subject as much as possible; never try to hide from him; act in a natural manner no matter what happens and never meet his eye. Obey them, and, except in unusual circumstances, shadowing is the easiest thing a sleuth has to do. (102)

This short lesson serves both to explain the actions the Op will follow and to provide the reader with insider status. It is as if the Op could just as easily call upon the reader to help in the detective work as he could call upon his fellow operatives.

That the reader is getting the true rules is evident a few pages later when the Op spots another detective who

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may have been part of a contractual obligation imposed by the union on the pulp, it clearly shows that the magazine or the union felt that the inscription would carry some currency with readers (causing union supporters to buy the magazine because it made its union fidelity clear).

he assumes is working a different angle: "There was no doubting his amateur status . . . I sized up the amateur while he strained his neck peeping at Ledwich" (106). The reader already knows that these actions are amateurish because he has been treated to a lesson in how to shadow professionally. The reader's privileged status makes him an equal to the Op, allowing him to judge the amateur alongside the Op.

The skills of detection are shown to have little basis in talent. In "One Hour" (*Black Mask*, April 1, 1924), the Op tells the reader that "a gun isn't a thing of miracles. It's a mechanical contraption that is capable of just so much and no more" (256). The same could be said of the gun's user. He is only capable of so much, and the fact that he has a gun is not assurance of success. In "Zigzags," the Op is forced into a gunfight and, in what appears to be the exercise of natural gunplay talent, shoots his opponent's gun right out of his hand:

Looks like a great stunt, this shooting a gun out of a man's hand, but it's a thing that happens now and then. A man who is a fair shot (and that is exactly what I am--no more, no less) naturally and automatically shoots pretty close to the spot upon which his eyes are focused. When a man goes for his gun in front of you, you shoot at *him*--not at any particular part of him. There isn't time for that--you shoot at *him*. However, you are more than likely to be looking at his gun, and in that case it

isn't altogether surprising if your bullet should hit his gun--as mine had done. But it looks impressive. (117)

While this exchange may just reflect the Op's self-effacement, it has the effect of making even this aspect of being a detective seem like it is something the reader might be able to do.

A scene like this is interesting because, while the Op's first-person narration already tends to put the reader in the Op's shoes, this switch to second-person point of view furthers the relationship between reader and Op. The Op, quite literally, addresses his reader directly, and more than that, brings his reader into the detective club. That these lessons ring true comes from the fact that Hammett himself probably had to learn these lessons at one point in order to be an operative. Just as the advertisements in the pulps offer correspondence schools, the stories themselves become almost a correspondence school for detectives.

The Op also lets his reader know what the law is in certain situations, such as in "One Hour" when he is in a standoff with several thugs: "You can't shoot a man just because he refuses to obey an order--even if he is a criminal" (256-7). His lessons are furthered (and perhaps the reader does get some sense of his psychology) when the

Op lets his reader in on the conditional action he is contemplating: "If they would have turned around for me, I could have lined them up against the wall, and being behind them, have held them in safe while I used the telephone" ("One Hour" 257). The effect of these conditional actions is to allow the reader to feel that if he were in this situation, he would know how to act.

At the close of "Zigzags" the Op's lessons extend beyond "how to catch criminals" to "how to behave in a professional way." As the Op walks past the man he has caught and who will likely receive the death penalty for his crimes, he tells the reader that he

walked slowly down the stairs . . . slowly, because it isn't a nice thing to look at a man you've deliberately sent to his death. Not even if it's the surest way of saving an innocent life, and if the man who dies is a Jake Ledwich--altogether treacherous. (128)

The Op teaches his reader not just to be a detective, but to also have a sense of detective decorum. While I have noted earlier that Chandler claims that Hammett took the detective story out of the "Emily Post" world of the British tradition, Hammett still seemed to want to show his reader that his detective characters had some sort of personal rules of decorum--even if they sometimes overlook those rules in the execution of tough cases.

## Ch4--Conclusion

### **Resolution/Inaction**

If the detective story provides the reader with a Rosetta stone for wealth and power, it also makes clear that wealth and power do not come without a price. The detective himself only grudgingly continues to exist in this world of corruption. His experience allows the reader a chance to look at the world of power and wealth from a vantage of superiority. The power structure is reaffirmed because the reader is happy he doesn't have to be a part of the corrupt world--happy he can close the book on the violence and return to the safety of his unexciting life, knowing all the while that he can re-experience the vicarious violence found in these texts.

Even the Op himself is compromised:

Although the reader may feel there is some justification for his actions, the Op is made to appear as guilty and morally reprehensible as the rest of the gangsters in the novel. Thus the assignment of guilt and innocence--the most fundamental part of most detective fiction--is secondary to a more complex, ambiguous consideration of the character of the detective. (Gregory 37)

If the Op is compromised in this way, and if the reader has been able to successfully identify with the Op, then

the result is that the reader will also feel complicit in this corruption.

When the Op captures Thaler, one of the many thugs in *Red Harvest*, he calls Police Chief Noonan, who replies, "'Mother of God!' . . . 'Don't kill him till I get there'" (108). This comment is reported without any reflection by the Op and is typical of the way in which the city officials have been so corrupted by the violence that exists all around them that they begin to think every interaction will end in death. The Op's lack of comment shows his own descent into an acceptance of that corruption, an acceptance that the sheer barrage of violence desensitizes the reader into accepting as well.

This complicity is likely always present in any fiction that has as its basis the circumvention of rules for what appear to be good motives in order to deal with injustice. The contemporary history of Eliot Ness and his *Untouchables* is that of a lawman having to work at the edges of legality in order to deal with illegality. This is a world Hammett recreated in his fiction:

On the social and political level, Hammett's pessimism, which regards capitalistic democracy and corrupt wealth and power as ubiquitous and permanent, freezes the city . . . this side of redemption.

. . . . .

The Op's work . . . is to deconstruct,  
decompose, deplot and defictionalize . . .  
"reality" and to construct or reconstruct out  
of it a true fiction, i.e. an account of what  
"really" happened. (S. Marcus in Willet 44-46)

While the Hammett hero does de-center the world he works  
in, he does not really reconstruct it. Instead, he leaves  
it de-centered. Edward M. Wheat argues:

In hard-boiled detective fiction the detective is  
presented with a version of the truth, a narrative,  
which he then deconstructs . . . Society is not  
reordered; it remains corrupt; but at least there is  
a momentary stay in the confusion. (246)

At the end of *Red Harvest*, the Op implies that order  
might have been restored: "Personville, under martial law,  
was developing into a sweet-smelling thornless bed of  
roses" (216). This momentary stay, however, is itself  
only an appearance. Personville is only pretending to be  
ordered, and only so long as it remains under martial law.  
The city is either thoroughly corrupt, or it is kept in  
check by a fascist regime. Though he is adept at creating  
his own version of reality, at the end the Op is unable to  
even sell the fiction of his resolution to his boss, as  
seen in the novel's final lines: "I might just as well  
have saved the labor and sweat I had put into trying to  
make my reports harmless. They didn't fool the Old Man.  
He gave me merry hell" (216).

This ending is very similar to that of the short story "Nightmare Town," which Hammett published in *Argosy All-Story* (December 27, 1924). "Nightmare Town" follows roughly the same trajectory as *Red Harvest*, with the hero slowly getting caught up in the pervasive evil of a Western town. The hero, Steve Threefall, is not a detective, but like Hammett's detectives he is drawn to violence and drawn into corruption. Whereas there is a sort of conditional resolution in *Red Harvest*, "Nightmare Town" does not even offer this. The hero leaves the mining town Izzard, just as he has set off the powder keg of violence, and the town literally burns behind him as he speeds out of the town in a borrowed car: "He turned his head and looked back. Where they had left Izzard, a monstrous bonfire was burning painting the sky with jeweled radiance" (41). The only resolution is that Threefall is able in the final line to fall asleep.

The reader likewise finishes these stories with the city he has exited still smoldering with corruption. He is able to leave that corruption behind, because he has experienced it only vicariously; however, the effect of the hero's indifference toward the continuing violence and/or corruption, along with the reader's own feeling of relief that he does not have to participate fully in the

power structures that are so corrupt and/or violent, has the effect of reconciling the reader to the reigning power structures. He is happy to be outside of the corruption, and having identified with the detective hero, does not see much point in resistance to corruption in the first place.

The pulps did not offer the reader a satisfying conception of himself as a consumer, as the mass-circulation magazines did, but neither did they ultimately offer him a way to circumvent consumer culture. If anything, they offered only the ability to criticize. If the reader takes anything away from these texts, it is only the verbal violence that is able to characterize the world through pessimism and/or sarcasm. Chandler writes of the hard-boiled pulp writers that

their characters lived in a world gone wrong, a world in which, long before the atom bomb, civilization had created the machinery for its own destruction, and was learning to use it with all the moronic delight of a gangster trying out his first machine gun. (Chandler *Later Novels & Other Writings* 1016)

These stories offer a world that is almost post-modern in its hopelessness. The reader finds hope only possible outside of the fiction--and thus in the "real" world.

***Excluded Still***

This reading of male readers' vicarious access to wealth and power generally avoids and sidesteps whether women, either as characters or as readers, are given the same access. If the detective offers the male reader a key to transcending class through a certain type of gender performance, then the corollary character for women readers (the femme fatale), who is in many ways attempting the same hard-boiled gender performance, shows a female reader that to be a woman and to try to transcend gender constructs is to do so at the expense of even the moral compass the male detective seems able to retain.

The inability to escape this problem lies to some extent in the fact that performative power for female characters relies upon physicality to a much greater degree than it does for the detective. In *Red Harvest*, the Op goes to see Myrtle Jennison, a woman who was once said to be beautiful, but who is now dying in the hospital of Bright's disease. When the Op asks her to sign an affidavit, she "sniggered and suddenly threw the bedclothes down to her knees, showing me a horrible swollen body in a coarse white nightgown. 'How do you like me? See, I'm done'" (93). The Op, ignoring this question, coolly accepts the paper, while Jennison shows

that because her physicality has been diminished, she sees herself as valueless: "I pulled the bedclothes up over her again and said: 'Thanks for this, Miss Jennison.' 'That's all right. It's nothing to me any more. Only'-- her puffy chin quivered--'It's hell to die ugly as this'" (93).

The femme fatale character in *Red Harvest*, Dinah Brand, when being questioned, begins the interview by using her sexuality in an attempt to unnerve the Op: "She counted the knuckles of my left hand with a warm forefinger and explained: 'I want you to not do anything more about what I told you last night'" (103). By the end of the interview, when she is going to be arrested, she defends herself with what is described as a "very respectable wallop--man-size" (105). By the end of the scene, after a brief bit of gunplay, one of the thugs, Dan Rolff, stands with a gun pointed at the Op's "chubby middle." The Op begins a bidding war to get Brand to cooperate with him in stopping Rolff from killing him: "She laughed and said: 'Talk money, darling'" (106-7).

Brand is here bargaining with the Op for his life. She is willing to sell her moral sense, or (and this seems more appropriate in the terms of the novel) she merely has no moral imperative that supercedes money. Though the Op

may be doing something somewhat similar by taking Elihu Willsson's money in order to wage his own personal war on Poisonville, the novel clearly shows that Dinah Brand's sense of a personal morality is abominably corrupt, while the Op's is merely outside of conventions.

While Elihu Willsson and the Op both make it out of the novel relatively unscathed, Brand is found dead by the Op, who wakes up from a hangover lying next to her with a bloody ice pick in his hand. Hammett uses this incident merely as a way of making the Op question whether he has become corrupted by the town, but once the Op realizes that he is not the murderer, there is little sense that this murder has any more importance than the dozens of other murders.

It is certainly possible that female readers would neither look to nor identify with the female characters, instead seeking out the detective story for much the same reasons that male readers would. If they did desire to find female empowerment, however, they would not be offered the same degree of access or power as a reader identifying with the detective, or at least they would not be able to find success in that power. In the hard-boiled detective story, what makes men powerful (no matter how

problematic that power may be) can only corrupt and  
destroy women.

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