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SILENT COWBOYS AND VERBOSE DETECTIVES:  
MASCULINITY AS RHETORIC IN  
WISTER, HAMMETT, AND CHANDLER

By

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English Literature

Silent Cowboys and Verbose Detectives: Masculinity as Rhetoric in Wister, Hammett, and Chandler

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In the early part of the twentieth century, popular fiction and film in the form of Westerns and the noir detective story cultivated brands of masculinity through archetypal male characters. This project aims to propose and investigate the existence of a countervailing tradition between the language-resistant cowboy figure and his more verbally-inclined successor, the detective fiction hero. Chapter One deconstructs the Virginian's silence in the original film version of Owen Wister's novel *The Virginian*, and demonstrates a male aversion to language as a tool for guarding masculinity against the modernization and feminization of the West. The onslaught of modernization that transformed the United States in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century created a need for a new kind of hero, one akin to the cowboy hero in character, bravery, and wit, yet seemingly birthed from urbanity as undeniably as the cowboy was birthed from the open range. Chapter Two illustrates the primarily linguistic work of Dashiell Hammett's Continental Op in *Red Harvest* and Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe in *Farewell, My Lovely* and elucidates that the detective's status as an urbanite necessitates a different method of performing his work: he negotiates his urban world with a linguistic prowess quite different from the cowboy's preference for action. Chapter Three, relying heavily on Chandler's *The Big Sleep*, demonstrates that, upon close examination, the detective's penchant for communication, akin to the cowboy's aversion to it, ultimately enables him to complete the task at hand while protecting his masculinity.

The cultural implications of this study suggest a socio-historical connection between a masculine code of silence cultivated in and perpetuated by American culture in popular fiction and film and a lack of verbal diplomacy in United States foreign policy. These strong parallels between America's reputation as a "silent superpower" and the enculturated notions of language-resistant masculinity originate in the American imagination and present a crucially important dialectic to examine at the intersection of culture and politics in the present-day United States.

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## Introduction

“Speak softly and carry a big stick.” -Theodore Roosevelt, 1906.

In April of 2003, Vice President Dick Cheney sat in a White House meeting and vetoed a proposal by the State Department to enter into diplomatic negotiations with North Korea concerning its nuclear weapons program. In response to the plan, Cheney allegedly said, “We don’t negotiate with evil; we defeat it” (Lobe, “Cowboy Diplomacy”). In the context of 21<sup>st</sup> century United States’ internal and external politics and cultural perceptions, the government’s favoring of action over diplomacy exists as a prevailing theme. President George W. Bush has made himself in-/famous for mangling the English language and favoring militaristic “cowboy” policies over international diplomacy more traditionally characterized by verbal negotiation. Over the course of his administration, the United States government, whether enthusiastically or begrudgingly, has redefined itself as the silent superpower of the international dialogue. The Bush administration’s lack of verbal diplomacy and vocalization reveals associations with a masculine code of silence cultivated and perpetuated by American culture in early twentieth century popular fiction and film and serves as a modern-day example of the code’s deeply-rooted underpinnings. This socio-historical connection stands as a crucially important dialectic to examine at the intersection of culture and politics in the present-day United States.

These strong parallels between the United States’ reputation as a “silent superpower” and the enculturated notions of language-resistant masculinity originate in the American imagination. One might argue that Bush himself seems to be living in the Neverland dreamscape of the American boy, playing Cowboys and Indians long after the

dinner bell has rung. To Bush's credit, he is certainly not trapped here alone. As Jane Tompkins points out in her book *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns*, "From roughly 1900 to 1975 a significant portion of the adolescent male population spent every Saturday afternoon at the movies. What they saw there were Westerns." She goes on to say, "John Wayne, the actor whose name is synonymous with Western films, became *the* symbol of American masculinity from World War II to Vietnam" (5). If Tompkins calculates numbers and impact accurately, a large percentage of Bush's main men (probably excluding the lone female major player Condoleezza Rice) spent their formative years watching, reading, and playing the Cowboy.

This project aims to propose and investigate the existence of a countervailing tradition between the language resistant cowboy figure and his more verbally-inclined successor, the detective fiction hero. The onslaught of modernization that transformed the United States in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century created a need for a new kind of hero, one akin to the cowboy hero in character, courage, and brains, yet seemingly birthed from urbanity as undeniably as the cowboy was birthed from the open range. The modern detective hero shares several critical traits with his archetypal predecessor, including comparable codes of honor and masculinity, appeal, and vocational competence. His status as an urbanite, however, necessitates different methods of performing his work and he negotiates his urban world with a linguistic prowess quite different from the cowboy's preference for action. Upon close examination, however, the detective's penchant for communication, akin to the cowboy's aversion to it, ultimately enables him to complete the task at hand while protecting his masculinity.

The first chapter of this project investigates male silence in the context of the film version of *The Virginian* and illustrates the cowboy figure's preference of doing over talking, a sentiment visible in the Bush administration's foreign policy. In a 2003 interview on Air Force One with Tom Brokaw, Bush said, "The Bush Doctrine is actually being defined by action, as opposed to by words" (Allen and Ratsenar 1). The President proves himself acutely aware of the reputation of his militaristic strategy, now widely known as "cowboy diplomacy," where bilateral talks are skirted, diplomatic efforts (like Rice's) are limited, and unilateral elbow grease reigns supreme.

Political leaders might more favorably emulate the cowboy figure's more articulate successor, the detective fiction hero. Like the archetypal cowboy figure, this breed of detective consistently demonstrates shrewdness, bravery, charm, and a loner status particularly evocative of cowboy solitude. As Megan Abbot writes in her book *The Street was Mine*, the detective's "refusal to attach himself to a woman, a family, a social network, a community, a country and its ideals—all these things cast this seemingly privileged (he is white; he is male) figure as a potential transgressor, a social renegade" (6). Like the cowboy hero, the detective is decidedly non-committal, balancing on the fringes of conventional society and the underground. He lives by his own, unique moral code, unarguably lenient but strictly observed. He can use a gun but usually does not.

Although these parallels illuminate the similarities between the detective and his cowboy predecessor, they also magnify his transgressions from them, most significantly his existence as a highly linguistic character who negotiates his urban environment and performs his work with language as his most reliable tool and in some cases, his most

powerful weapon. Quite opposite to the open range, the populated urban landscape of the detective's world necessitates extensive social interaction and further requires a linguistic prowess for the assurance of the detective's vocational success. Chapter Two of this project aims to substantiate this claim through a deconstruction of the highly linguistic work of Dashiell Hammett's Continental Op in *Red Harvest* and Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe in *Farewell, My Lovely*.

The Op and Marlowe fuel their labor with language and utilize their rhetorical talents as seamlessly as professional actors, talking themselves into and out of situations and usurping identities, all in a giant rhetorical effort to crack the case. Although a dexterity and penchant for language set the detective apart from the cowboy, the detective similarly uses language to guard his masculinity. Chapter Three aims to deconstruct Philip Marlowe's language in *Farewell, My Lovely* in order to reveal Chandler's nuanced rhetorical strategies: bequeathing his protagonist with speech that he utilizes as both a vocational tool and a shield of his masculinity. Marlowe's manipulation of language refracts meaning with sarcasm and reveals critical elements of his moral code. Chandler's early twentieth century Los Angeles, which Mike Davis, in his book *City of Quartz*, calls "the nightmare at the terminus of American history," (20) is saturated with materiality and driven by greed. Marlowe's contemporary lexicon also enables him to perform his work through effortless verbal negotiation of the material world. Like the cowboy, the detective is pragmatic, but, crucially, the success of his work in an urban environment necessitates his verbal abilities.

The Bush administration makes no secret of their devotion to the memory and leadership of Theodore Roosevelt, known for his cowboy persona. Defense Secretary



Donald Rumsfeld proudly displayed a plaque of Roosevelt's adage "Speak softly and carry a big stick" on his desk in his Pentagon office (Lobe, "History Debunks").

Incongruously, as Jim Lobe points out, critics often compare Bush and his policies to Roosevelt and his "big stick" diplomacy, although they are actually quite different. Lobe cites John Judis's book, *The Folly of Empire*, which illuminates the truth about Roosevelt's imperialist policies. Contrary to those of Bush, Roosevelt learned early on the failures of unilateralist approaches to foreign policy and changed his political tune to initiate the "League of Peace" the same year he won the Nobel Peace Prize. Lobe writes, "The Roosevelt of 1910 was a very different man from the youthful warrior whose aphorisms are beloved by the war hawks of today." This debunking reveals the power of myth over the American psyche in the specific case of the "hawks" of the Bush administration and their enculturated emulation of Teddy Roosevelt. More crucially, however, it suggests the profound effect of the cowboy persona and the brand of masculinity with which it steers American culture and politics.

## Chapter One: Male Resistance to Language in *The Virginian*

“The Western itself is the language of men, what they do vicariously, instead of speaking.” –Jane Tompkins, *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns*

The archetypal cowboy hero and the noir detective hero share similar characteristics responsible for their appeal and masculinity. Unique to the cowboy hero, however, is the open, vast solace of the West. The cowboy’s solo journey inherently entails a negotiation of wilderness and civilization. His preference of the vast, quiet landscape over bustling town life, however, reveals itself in a verbal restraint that mirrors the quietude of the Western setting. In her book *The Western Hero in Film and Television: Mass Media Mythology*, Rita Parks writes, “There is something mysterious and tragic about this man; there are hints of a tragic past and foreboding of an ominous future” (58). The cowboy’s silent nature perpetuates his own mystery and intrigue. Jane Tompkins’s theorizes, in her book *West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns*, that “talk dissipates presence, takes away the mystery of an ineffable self which silence preserves” (60). The cowboy wears silence as a symbolic shield, guarding the mystery that defines him.

The cowboy wears this shield of silence, as emblematic as the insignia of his hat or gun, so naturally that it could evade question. The cowboy’s silent nature, however, maintains far-reaching roots in gender theory as well as the historical and mythic creation of the West. In his essay “Origins of the Western,” Richard Etulain attributes the Western’s rise to the onslaught of modernity and America’s longing for simpler times. He writes, “A series of critical economic problems brought to mind a sobering truth: the West was filling up; its wide open spaces would soon be gone.... And thus the West as a

physical and spiritual frontier was an important symbol for Americans during the Progressive Era” (57-8). Tompkins credits Etulain with this insight, but agitates his theory’s set of assumptions by posing a strikingly different and provocative explanation: the Western rose in response to popular domestic literature and the growing presence of women in the public sphere. Female culture encompassed church, home, and family, and the Western answered with death, transience, and solitude (Tompkins 43-4). Norris Yates, in her book *Gender and Genre*, reiterates this notion in reference to the popularity of domestic literature: “...in its secular morality, antifeminist bent, and repression of feeling, the Western responded negatively to the Christian morality, female dominance, and emotionalism of the domestic novel” (Yates 4). Assuming Thompson and Yates theorize accurately, a literary battle of the sexes emerged with the Western’s retaliation, juxtaposing the verbose female character with the silent Western hero.

The roots of the cowboy’s reticent nature and its gendered underpinnings reveal themselves in an analysis of the harsh Western setting he inhabits and his human interactions. The desert is the archetypal Western landscape. Drenched in the unforgiving sun and wind and devoid of water, food, and shelter, the desert presents the ultimate environmental challenge. The Western landscape, in stark opposition to female characteristics, is barren and infertile. Yet, as Tompkins points out, “In the end, the land is everything to the hero; it is both the destination and the way. He courts it, struggles with it, and lies down with it at night” (81). The harsh landscape of the Western, Tompkins argues, accommodates the dominating, nomadic presence of the hero, who maintains both combative and symbiotic relationship with the land (82).

The natural landscape exists in opposition to town life and civilization, providing a habitat the Western hero prefers, a place where he can rest and roam comfortably in his solitude. The solitude of the wilderness befits the Western hero because the genre's conventions define him as a loner. Rita Parks writes, "The classic Westerner's attitude towards persons is a reluctant relationship; he seems uneasy in society—even primitive frontier society—and eager to return to the more congenial elements of nature and solitude" (56). The solitude of his natural habitat proves a perfect residence for his quiet nature.

The cowboy's comfort in such extreme conditions reveals certain character traits, namely an affinity for solitude and an aversity to verbal communication and the trappings of civilization. Jane Tompkins writes:

The hero imitates the desert's fierceness in his hard struggle to survive, its loneliness in his solitary existence, and its silence in his frugal way with language. Gnostic, carved out of life experience, compressed and delivered under pressure, the sayings of cowboy heroes, by their brevity, acknowledge...the importance of things that cannot be said. (84)

Tompkins forms poetic parallels in this analysis, suggesting connections between the desolate and primitive desert and the verbally barren Western hero. She goes on to categorize the desert landscape as "the place where language fails and rock assert themselves" (84). The massive vertical rock faces of Monument Valley, the favorite backdrop of John Ford's "West Texas," stand as monuments to Tompkins's symbolic interpretation of Western masculinity: they are unreachable, impenetrable, and mysterious.

The cowboy's costume also reveals characteristics of his masculinity and allows for the critic to draw bodily connections to his masculine persona. The traditional cowboy, replete with Stetson, chaps, holster, gun, boot, spurs, and horse, his lone companion (and more emblematic than any article of clothing or accessory), symbolizes unmistakable masculinity. When looking at a picture or painting of a cowboy, one understands his total self-sufficiency. Lee Clark Mitchell, in his book *Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film*, writes:

So self-contained is the later Western hero that he seems to exist beyond everyday commonplaces of talk and explanation, of persuasion, argument, indeed beyond conversation altogether. Valuing action over words, marking silence as the most vivid of actions, the cowboy hero throws us back onto the male physique, shifting attention from ear to eye in the drama of masculinity. (165)

Early photographs and paintings rooted the cowboy's persona in mute stature. Over the course of a century, the cowboy figure of the film world morphed into countless variations of the original, yet consistently worked to perpetuate his physical and emotional autonomy.

The cowboy figure's preference of action over words reveals a deeper rejection of institutionalized language and the systems that determine its importance and meaning. Max Westbrook, in his article "The Themes of Western Fiction," argues that the cowboy "tends...to prefer intuitive knowledge or empirical knowledge, both of which have the advantages of not being dependent on schools, of not requiring a logical formalization, and of constituting a more direct contact between the individual and the truth" (38). The

cowboy's inherent rejection of institutionalized education reveals direct connections with his distrust of language, represented by his silent nature and poor grammar. Those who speak properly and fluently are products of the educational institution. Westbrook adroitly captures this sentiment when he writes:

Since institutions are at best a kind of necessary evil and since institutions have a prior claim to language, the Western hero has no words for what is truly important. In addition, glibness, flattery, slogans, moral dicta, propaganda, deceptive legal phraseology, parlor-room patter, grammatical snobbery, and a dozen other institutionalized misuses of language have corrupted it and marked it as something to which the Western hero is fundamentally opposed. (38)

Westbrook's analysis of the tainted purity of language can serve as a platform for investigating the Western's hero's intrinsic opposition to it. According to Westbrook's claim, verbal expression "must be non-institutional" in order to harness meaning (38). To the Western hero, institutionalized language also entailed its feminization.

In insightful and confrontational second chapter of her book *West of Everything* entitled "Women and the Language of Men," Jane Tompkins deconstructs silence in the Western. In the land of the Western, she argues, opposites are unconditional. She states plainly that "Westerns distrust language....only actions count" (49). Language is a tool of the fortunate and sparse in Westerns because real men do and do not waste time talking about it. When characters do speak, however, they manipulate it so economically it sears like smoldering brand, "so pithy and dense it might as well be a solid thing" (49). Verbose people are weak, while the Western hero brandishes trenchant power in his few

choice words. “When heroes talk, it *is* action: their laconic put-downs cut people off at the knees” (51). The “bootlessness of words” (53) prevents their conveyance of the truth and so the Western hero generally refrains. Tompkins goes on to posit the Western as a linguistic microcosm of male behavior toward females in the domestic sphere and cites examples from *Red River*, *Shane*, and *The Virginian* of women de-legitimizing themselves by bursting into words, by literally breaking the silence. An application of Tompkins’s in-depth investigation of the dichotomy between female language and male silence to *The Virginian* reveals several substantiating examples.

Critics widely consider Owen Wister’s novel *The Virginian* the most important and far-reaching Western of all time, a result of its immortalization in film and its probable all-time high number of readers. Interestingly, in Wister’s book, the Virginian is fairly loquacious for a Western hero. Lee Clark Mitchell, in his essay “‘When You Call Me That...’: Tall Talk and Male Hegemony in *The Virginian*,” argues that the novel presents a hero who triumphs not through bullets but with words that convincingly riddle [Molly’s] eastern ideals” (67). The film, however, “celebrated the hero as a man of few words and typecast Gary Cooper as the ‘yup and nope’ actor” (67) whose portrayal of the Virginian resonated with audiences and strengthened the image of the mythic silent cowboy figure. Mitchell goes on to explain that “The film followed a formula by now well established in dramatizing the Virginian’s antipathy to Trampas, tightening the silent tension between them into the prototypical walk-down and shoot-out” (66).

The 1929 film *The Virginian* exemplifies the Western’s opposition to words. When courting Molly, the Virginian coerces her to sit and chat, saying, “I’d rather talk than dance.” The viewer gathers he would rather do anything than dance, for when he

attempts verbal expression, he visibly squirms in his seat and trips over his words in stark contrast to the eloquent Molly<sup>1</sup>. Conversation proves to be Molly's domain here, although the Virginian's suggestion to talk betrays a certain effort to reach out to her femininity. Another example of the Virginian's verbal discomfort surfaces when Molly reprimands him for shuffling the babies before their joint christening. She talks him into a corner while he walks in reverse, managing only to stammer, "Yes, ma'am, no, ma'am."

Although he gets off to a shaky start in his verbal courtship of Molly, he does exhibit symbolic effort by actually soliciting the town judge to formally introduce them (that is, commence verbal exchange) at Molly's request. Despite his initial inarticulateness, he apparently charms her and soon they are discussing Shakespeare. Molly lends a copy of *Romeo and Juliet* to the Virginian, which he subsequently and modestly devours, and quizzes him like one her schoolchildren. He admires Romeo, because "He wasn't no coward." The Virginian's Shakespearean proficiency resists accusations of femininity here, though, because, as Max Westbrook writes, "the brilliance of his analysis is made all right by the poverty of his grammar" (38). The balcony scene, however, the Virginian would cut from the play, disagreeing with Romeo's frivolous waste of time and energy on reciting poetry to Juliet. Instead, he says of Montague, "I'd a had a showdown with him, man to man." That is, the Virginian would have done what any real man in the West would—he would have *done* something. "Westerns are full of contrasts between people who spout words and people who act" (Tompkins 51).

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, in the notes of his book *Westerns: Making the Man in Fiction and Film*, Lee Clark Mitchell cites Richard Schickel who said that, at the beginning of his career, Gary Cooper was famous for "freezing on camera" when his lines betrayed intense emotion. "His whole system simply balked at directly expressing them," Schickel said. (Mitchell 301).



Westbrook reiterates this notion when he credits Hemingway with the concept that “the truly important things are beyond words” (Pilkington 38).

The Virginian personifies the Western hero’s taciturnity through this value of acting over speaking, showing over telling. When Molly asks him, “But what would you *do*?” the Virginian answers, “I’ll show you what I’d do,” and goes in for the kiss. As Tompkins deftly puts it: “The Western at heart is anti-language. Doing, not talking is what it values” (50). The Virginian, in his knowing silence, exhibits Tompkins’s notion of the Western’s distrust of words, “as if language were somehow tainted in its very being” (52). The grammatically incorrect Virginian’s gesture trumps any Shakespearean poetry, though, and Molly, the grammar teacher, falls into her Romeo’s arms (and in love) in a pivotal moment representative of the Western’s hierarchical placement of actions over words.

The film *The Virginian* exemplifies this hierarchy in the Virginian’s relationship and interactions with his former partner-in-crime and long-time friend Steve. When the Virginian catches Steve, who desperately desires more than his life as a struggling cowpuncher, red-handed branding a calf under Trampas’s cattle-thieving operation, he must choose between protecting his friend and upholding the law. Touching the brand in Steve’s saddle, still hot, he says, “Steve, there’s no use talking around things.” The Virginian knows what he saw, and, as Tompkins writes, “It is precisely *words* that cannot express the truth about things” (53). Steve’s attempt to explain only reveals his moral flaws. As Lee Clark Mitchell argues, “Talking too much or laughing too easily or expressing fear too readily are more than mere signs of bad form; they reveal a general inability to maintain composure under the pressure of vivid sensation” (166). The

Virginian, a symbol of ethical righteousness in this scene, halts his friend's alibi before he betrays more weakness, both preserving Steve's masculinity and further exemplifying the Western's distrust of language.

Ultimately, the Virginian sides with the law and agrees to the hanging of Steve and his cohorts. At the hanging, Steve leaves a note for the Virginian tucked away with the gun and holster he wills to him. It reads: "I couldn't have spoke to you without playing the baby. -Steve." Even at the moment of death, when words would have at least prolonged Steve's life, neither man speaks. Instead, they stand in silence, refusing to degrade themselves in language. In Westerns, the sensitive male character "enacts not so much the failed man (a role more properly defined by the villain) as an unworkable combination of masculinity and feminine excess" (Mitchell, *Making the Man*, 166). In the end, Steve would rather die than be this man.

The Virginian's five-year stalemate with Trampas proves another instance in which characters protect their masculinity with a code of silence. In the penultimate scene, the fateful showdown, neither man speaks a word. As each slowly paces the downtown, scouting the other, the viewer only hears the steady clack of their boots. A single word would shatter the silence like a drunk smashing a whiskey bottle. "Silence is a sign of mastery, and goes along with a gun in the hand. They would rather die than settle the argument by talking to each other" (Tompkins 64). When gunshots finally break the silence, Molly runs from her room to the street, crying out the film's last words: "Thank heavens it wasn't you. Oh, I love you so."

These examples elucidate the Western's suspicion of language and reference its underpinnings in the Western's fear of the feminization of the West. There are, however,

even more explicit examples of the combative relationship between feminine language and silent masculinity. The night of the christening, for example, the likable and chubby Honey complains that “Thing’s gettin’ fancy...christening babies, importing schoolmarms, pretty soon they’ll be putting soda in the liquor. That’s when I’ll be gettin’ out.” Steve agrees, “This country’s getting too civilized, too solemn.” If this refinement continues, Honey decides to move on from Wyoming, presumably farther West, still not emasculated by the female touch. Jane Kuenze reiterates Steve’s concern in her article “The Cowboy Businessman and ‘The Course of Empire’: Owen Wister’s *The Virginian*,” arguing that Molly represents “the person who embodies the culture and other edifying virtues of true womanhood that are progressively changing the West into something rather more like the world it tried to leave behind” (100-1).

In Wister’s novel, Molly also lends the Virginian a copy of George Elliot’s *The Mill on the Floss*, a book, he complains, “will keep up its talkin’. Don’t let you alone” (Wister 86). When Molly clarifies Elliot’s gender, the Virginian concludes, “Well, then, o’ course she talks too much” (87). Upon learning of Elliot’s womanhood, the Virginian reiterates the Western’s linkage of superfluous language with the female gender, here even suggesting an annoyed distaste for the female spoken word. Tompkins writes, “The Western’s hatred of language...has codified and sanctioned the way several generations of men have behaved verbally toward women in American society” (59). The Virginian, although obviously enamored of Molly, reveals cultural underpinnings of a resistance to the fluency that defines Molly’s work and female identity. “Women, like language, remind men of their own interiority; women’s talk evokes a whole network of familial and social relationships and their corollaries in the emotional circuitry” (Tompkins 66).

The Virginian chooses to indirectly insult Molly rather than compromise his code of masculinity.

Although the cowboy as a historical figure exists as an archetype, the individual cowboy character in novels and films will always evade complete conformity to a cookie-cutter model, as does the Virginian, for example, in his affinity for Shakespeare. This chapter attempts to unpack some of the foundational elements contributing to the construction of the reticent Western hero and its opposition to the feminization and institutionalization of the West. It is meant to serve as a preface for an exploration of the cowboy hero's urban successor, the detective hero. As Richard Slotkin writes in his book *Gunfighter Nation*, "the hard-boiled detective story began as an abstraction of essential elements of the Frontier Myth" (217). Although a figure not far removed from the cowboy in character, vocation, and moral code, the detective hero possesses a contradictory and self-defining affinity for language.

## Chapter Two: The Linguistic Work of the Continental Op and Philip Marlowe

This chapter provides an intensive analysis of the linguistic work that Dashiell Hammett's Continental Op and Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe perform as detectives. It aims to elucidate Hammett and Chandler as rhetorical masterminds who create protagonists who not only harness a linguistic prowess, but who manipulate language to solve their cases. The chapter relies heavily on literary theorist's Mikhail Bakhtin's important essay "Discourse in the Novel," in which he argues that the novel fundamentally rests on the multiplicity of language and the individualized speech types of characters.

In their article "Forms of Labor in Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest*," Carl Freedman and Christopher Kendrick raise the question, "What kind of work does a detective do when he detects?" (209) and argue that the narrative structure of *Red Harvest* "is based on several forms of labor" (210). They suggest detective work might be considered a "bohemian" kind of work, releasing the doer from the trappings of conventional capitalist work, allowing the "powers of the 'whole man'" to surface. They also argue that the Op's work is "primarily linguistic" (211). For Hammett and Chandler, discourse serves as both tool and weapon for their protagonists' work, as a means for discerning good people from bad, and as a foundation for forming critical relationships.

In "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin proposes that the novel exists as the interplay of unique speech types. The novel exists as genre in its incarnation of this diversity. He inventories a myriad of dialects and language variations from professional language to slang, noting that each sub-group of language encompasses its own vocabulary and set of assumptions. Bakhtin writes:

Every socially significant verbal performance has the ability...to infect with its own intention certain aspects of language that had been affected by its semantic and expressive impulse, imposing on them specific semantic nuances and specific axiological overtones; thus, it can create slogan-words, curse-words, praise-words, and so forth. (675)

The amalgamation of individualized words infused by unique social situations drives the novel. Bakhtin also argues that the author appropriates words already laden with their own meaning and assigns them new meanings within the context of the novel, representative of the author's unique purposes and situation. These words become "shot through with intentions and accents" (676), morphing into the nuanced personal property of the speaker. Genre fiction, in particular hard-boiled detective fiction, exemplifies, often hyperbolically, Bakhtin's argument that the novel tells its story through this miscellany of diverse and distinct speech types and individualization of word meanings.

Dashiell Hammett's *Red Harvest* is a manifestation of the interplay of several socially diversified language categories including "professional jargon," "language of authority," "language of generation," and "characteristic group behavior" (Bakhtin 674). Within these linguistic categories, Hammett appropriates words already laden with their presumed meanings for his own use. Within the context and multiple heteroglot languages of *Red Harvest*, words convey different meanings than they do when spoken outside the borders of Poisonville. Hammett attributes several speech types to his narrator, the Continental Op, a private detective, who manipulates them in negotiating the corrupt world of Poisonville and in extracting evidence from his inhabitants to solve the murder cases of Dinah Brand and Max Thaler.

Hammett exposes the reader to Poisonville, a fictional Butte, Montana, and its inhabitants through a combination of economical descriptions and the first-person narrator's social interactions. The first words of *Red Harvest* read: "I first heard Personville called Poisonville by a red-haired mucker named Hickey Dewey in the Big Ship in Butte. He also called his shirt a shoit. I didn't think anything of what he had done to his city's name. Later I heard men who could manage their r's give it the same pronunciation" (3). These opening lines brim with Bakhtin's notions of the diversity and appropriation of language. First, the narrator utilizes Dewey's accent for his own purposes, that is, to introduce Dewey's accent and to demonstrate that although Dewey has a decided neglect for his r's, Personville is indeed known as Poisonville. As Bakhtin writes, "the speaker populates [the word] with his own intentions, his own accent...adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention" (Bakhtin 677). In this exposition, the narrator doubly appropriates language, both coining "shoit" and borrowing Dewey's language for his own purposes—to humorously introduce Dewey's character and the city of Poisonville. Hammett's omission of quotations marks in citing Dewey's words allows him to incorporate Dewey's voice without the "formal markers" of which Bakhtin writes (679) into his own prose.

Hammett also attributes a unique accent and vocabulary to Dewey, a personal lexicon representative of his "generation" at his "social level" (Bakhtin 676). Bakhtin writes that "every age group has as a matter of fact its own language, its own vocabulary, its own accentual system" (676). From Dewey's introduction, the reader can deduce that he is probably fairly young and Irish (he has red hair and lives in a fictional Anaconda, MT, just outside of the largely Irish city of Butte) and lower class (he is a mucker, or

laborer). However, Hammett's preference of Dewey's own language over his own ("shoit" and "Poisonville") in this excerpt attributes a unique voice to his character. Hammett's simultaneous introduction of Dewey's character and language are critical because in revealing Dewey's unique character and voice, Hammett smoothly appropriates Dewey's language, where a less tactful use may have resulted in words that read "as if they put themselves in quotation marks against the will of the speaker" (Rivkin and Ryan, 677). Hammett's dual awareness of the diversity of language and individualization of word meaning and accent exemplify Bakhtinian thought and introduce the Continental Op as a detective whose investigations are primarily linguistic in nature.

At several points in *Red Harvest*, Hammett mimics different types of language and creates a narrator who proves very adept at adapting his speech to a particular situation or purpose. For example, at a key point in the novel, Hammett imitates a journalistic style for the benefit of explaining key plot points. After the Op finds the money-hungry, whiskey-swilling, starlet Dinah Brand dead next to him following a laudanum-clouded night he cannot remember, he adopts a fact-based journalistic style to recall the events. Hammett writes: "The night that Dinah had been killed, Helen Albury, peeping through her window, had seen things that were according to the Herald, extremely significant when considered in connection with the subsequent finding of Dinah's dead body" (189). Hammett's authorial goal here is to exonerate the narrator of guilt, to contribute an outside point of view, and to recap the alleged events surrounding Dinah's death. As a unique speech type, journalistic style is heteroglot, and as Bakhtin writes:



all language of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them and making each unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms of conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings, and values....there are not “neutral” words and forms – words and forms that can belong to “no one...” (676)

The fact-based and clear nature of journalistic language suits its purposes of objectively reporting an event. According to Bakhtin, it “conceptualizes” the world for its purposes. Hammett, in turn, employs journalistic language as a speech type to serve his authorial goals, in this case to clarify a series of events.

In various instances in *Red Harvest*, the narrator appropriates distinct voices of other characters and utilizes them in his own prose. In the crime scene following Dinah’s murder, Hammett writes of the narrator’s encounter with two detectives: “McGraw introduced us and asked them about the ice pick. They had not seen it, were positive it hadn’t been there. They wouldn’t have overlooked an article of its sort” (171). Hammett opts not to quote the detectives and instead inserts the phrases, unmistakably from the mouths of other characters, into the sentences of his own prose. In result, Hammett economically relays the subtleties of Shepp and Vanaman’s explanation without actual dialogue. Yet, the “semantic nuances” (Bakhtin 675) of the detectives’ story, that the bloodied weapon could not possibly have escaped him, remain detectable. True, Hammett’s Poisonville, particularly the realm of the detectives and gangsters, operates in a very limited sphere and, in effect, many stylistic similarities exist between the different dialectics. That the idiosyncrasies of the duality of voice reveal themselves here as

“other” is a Bakhtinian case of “the speech of another... introduced into the author’s discourse” (679). Hammett’s quick slip into the discourse of Shepp and Vanaman reads as a smooth exchange of two different speech types, or, the languages of the Op and of the detectives. The language of Shepp and Vanaman, which Hammett infuses into the narrator’s prose, exemplifies Bakhtin’s notion of “another’s utterance in a language that is itself ‘other’ to the author as well” (679).

Another instance where Hammett appropriates the voice of another character for inclusion in his narrator’s prose occurs when the Op sees Pete the Finn, head of the Poisonville bootleggers, and his posse physically removing several men from a pool hall. Hammett writes, “Pete, with McGraw’s help, apparently was making good his threat to give Whisper and Reno all the war they wanted” (185). Here, “all the war they wanted” stands out as Pete’s threat in his own language. However, as Bakhtin writes, Pete’s language appears “in concealed form, that is without any formal markers usually accompanying such speech” (679). Again, Hammett’s exclusion of quotation marks allows for the narrator’s borrowing of another’s language and contributes to the complexities of speech types at play in *Red Harvest*. In effect, two voices discourse in a single sentence of prose, another example of the Op’s primarily linguistic work as a detective.

In the examples of Shepp and Vanaman and Pete the Finn, Hammett employs a duality of voice, a melding of the heteroglot languages of multiple characters. In another instance, Hammett combines two voices of a single character, the narrator, in a microcosmic example of Bakhtin’s multiplicity of speech types. Hammett writes, “I was making up one of my favorite complaints—that newspapers were good for nothing except

to hash things up so nobody could unhash them—when I heard a boy chanting my name” (187). Here, the Hammett begins and ends the sentence in the Op’s voice (“I was making up one of my complaints...when I heard a boy chanting my name” ). Inserted in the sentence is the Op’s complaint, a rather charged rant about newspapers. His complaint exists in a completely different voice, that of his personal thoughts. Hammett’s duplicity of voice serves both plot and character development in the revelation of the Op’s conscience in a Bakhtinian case of “double-voiced discourse” (681).

In Chapter 21, “The Seventeenth Murder,” Hammett assigns yet another speech type to his narrator when the Op reveals two laudanum-induced dreams of the night of Dinah Brand’s murder. Hammett writes these sections in a language significantly more descriptive and elaborate than the narrator’s otherwise economic language. For example, the first sentence of the dream reads, “I dreamed I was sitting on a bench, in Baltimore, facing the tumbling fountain in Harlem Park, beside a woman who wore a veil” (162). This vivid imagery strikingly contrasts with the narrator’s previous barebones voice to which the reader has grown accustomed. Here, Hammett has employed a fluid voice equipped for the retelling of such a resonant dream. This “inserted genre,” that of dream language, in “one of those fundamental compositional unities through which heteroglossia can enter the novel” (Bakhtin 674). In this section, the Op further demonstrates his linguistic capacity and tendency toward negotiating his own world with words.

### **The Op as a Chameleon-Linguist**

It is evident that Hammett employs several heteroglot languages for his authorial purposes in *Red Harvest*. In addition, he endows the Op with the ability to manipulate language for his investigational purposes. This utilitarian characteristic enables the narrator to verbally adapt to conversations upon joining them, a trait that works toward the narrator and author's respective goals, investigation and narration. In the genre of hard-boiled detective fiction, the reader must decode several heteroglot languages since the genre's conventions do not require dialogic explanation.

In the following excerpts, the reader must decode the language because, although it rises out of context, he or she has no access to its translation. When the Op converses with Reno Starkey, a seasoned criminal, his language is pure gangster-speak. As Freedman and Kendrick theorize, the work the Op performs is to "stir things up" (211), to agitate a situation and observe what rises to the surface. In the case of Starkey, the Op achieves this with seamless appropriation of the mobster's own rhetorical style. Peppered with slang, code, and improper grammar, Starkey's is a heteroglot language that necessitates deciphering. In the aftermath of Dinah and Whisper's murders, Reno says to the Op, "I'd have given the big umpchay twice that for the straight dope.... Well, that settles the Whisper end" (Hammett 194). Here, "the big umpchay" refers to Ted Wright (translating to "chump" in Pig Latin), who falsely claimed to have killed Whisper, "dope" means information, and "the Whisper end" is the case of Whisper's death. Reno's gangster-speak exists as a constant heteroglot language throughout the book, but the Op adapts his speech for his investigational purposes. When talking to Reno, the Op speaks Reno's language. He replies, "If his mob don't know where he is,... let's tell

them. They blasted his out of his can when Noonan copped him. Think they'd try it again if the news got around the McGraw had picked him up on the quiet?" (194).

Hammett borrows the word "blasted" to mean "removed by force," "can" to mean "jail," "copped" to mean "arrested," and "on the quiet" to mean "off the record." Further, the narrator uses improper grammar with "don't," a tactic that compels Reno to trust the Op and, in result, disclose more information. The Continental Op masters 'gangster-speak.' Freedman and Kendrick reiterate this, saying the Op achieves this by:

insinuating himself into the highest levels of the gangster polity as a potentially formidable friend or foe....he owes this stature not to his physical prowess but to the good impression he makes, mainly because his mastery of the gangster idiom—informal, laconic, understated, oblique, amoral, enriched by an occasional striking metaphor—is superior to that of any of the actual gangster. (215)

By speaking Reno's language, the Op fosters trust and comfort in the criminal. This method ultimately proves very fruitful, when Reno admits to the killings of both Dinah Brand and Whisper in his dying words. Bakhtin would attest that several of these words are "slot through with intentions and accents" and have "the 'taste' of a profession, a genre" (676). In this case, the narrator's 'intention' is to get as much information as possible from Reno. Bakhtin's 'accents' are in this case the adaptations the Op makes to his language, both slangy and grammatical. The 'profession' is detective work and the 'genre' is detective fiction.

The ineradicable evil of Poisonville seems to consume all of its inhabitants. There are instances, however, where Hammett introduces those innocent people who

manage to live decent lives within its borders. Only through the Op's dialogue with these people does the reader learn of their existence. Donald Willson's secretary, the pretty, young Lewis, is one of these decent Poisonville residents. Her language exudes both innocence and confidence, even as she tells the Op about the \$5,000 check written to Dinah Brand. "You called up—if it was you he told to come to his house—at about two o'clock.... Oh, yes! He went out for about twenty minutes, a little before three. And before he went out, he wrote a check" (Hammett 19). Upon entering this conversation with Lewis, the narrator adapts his speech, manipulating his words so that he speaks the same language as Lewis. In contrast to the language the narrator speaks with Reno Starkey, he omits slang and speaks a clear professional rhetoric with Lewis, telling her, "You'll help me most just now by telling me where you learned all this" (18). Again, the Op, a chameleon-linguist, adapts his language to benefit his investigation and to match his rhetorical context.

*Red Harvest* exemplifies Bakhtin's theories of the diversity of speech types and the appropriation of words and reassignment of meaning. Over the course of the novel, Hammett employs several distinct speech types, including those he attributes to his characters, such as Hickey Dewey's thick accent and Reno Starkey's gangster jargon, and the varied languages his narrator speaks throughout his investigation. Hammett's crafty interplay of speech types results in distinct character personalities and their voices, whether proper or slangy, reveal tendencies toward good or evil, for example in the cases of Lewis and Starkey, respectively. The Op stands as the sole character who changes his language, adapting it when entering different conversations and social situations. For Hammett's purposes, creating and utilizing distinct character speech types results in rich

and lively dialogue. For the Op, adapted dialogic language proves an indispensable tool in extracting information from key characters and, ultimately, in exonerating himself and cracking the murder cases of Dinah Brand and Max Thaler.

Dashiell Hammett's widely-read detective fiction writing became a precursor for that of Raymond Chandler. In his essay "The Simple Art of Murder," Chandler accredits Hammett with revolutionizing the detective genre. He writes, "Hammett gave murder back to the people who commit it for reasons, not just to provide a corpse" (*Later Novels* 989). According to Richard Slotkin, writer of *Gunfighter Nation*, Chandler "codified and elaborated on the achievements" of Hammett (219), both perpetuating and individualizing Hammett's tradition. Although Chandler's work reads purely American, he in fact was born and raised in England and received a proper upper-class upbringing before migrating to the United States.

In his book, *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, he considers at length the differences between American and Shakespearean English and the appropriateness and adeptness of 'American English' as the language of hard-boiled detective fiction. Of American English, Chandler writes, "It is more alive to clichés. Its impact is emotional and sensational rather than intellectual. It expresses things experienced rather than ideas" (80).

Chandler's own critique that American English possesses a certain elasticity recognizes the same nuances that he employs through the distinct speech types of his characters.

In *Farewell, My Lovely*, Chandler proves a successful critic of his own work, for through his characters, particularly through Philip Marlowe, he consistently favors witty, flavorful language and objective, tangible descriptions. While Chandler's language resists blatant emotional description, he underwrites his characters with discernable

feelings whose subtleties reveal themselves in their unique speech types. In his seminal article, "On Raymond Chandler," Fredric Jameson writes of Chandler's style:

Here clichés and stereotyped speech patterns are heated into life by the presence behind them of a certain form of emotion, that which you would feel in your dealings with strangers: a kind of outgoing belligerence, or hostility, or the amusement of the native, or bantering, helpful indifference: a communicativeness always nuanced or colored by an attitude. And whenever Chandler's dialogue...strays from this particular level to something more intimate and more expressive, it begins to falter; for his forte is the speech pattern of authenticity, or externality, and derives immediately from the inner organic logic of his material self.

(634-5)

Jameson speaks to the genuineness and realism Chandler betrays in his language. Perhaps seemingly contradictory, Jameson suggests, Chandler infuses his characters' 'clichés and stereotyped' language with the same emotion responsible for their verisimilitude. Chandler's work demonstrates a unique facility for imparting emotion into otherwise vacuous common colloquial speech types.

One can argue that American literature consists almost completely of genres appropriated from other cultures, but Chandler himself recognized hard-boiled detective fiction as America's solitary native writing style. He also foresaw the move to include the hard-boiled detective genre in the realm of literary criticism. He writes, "Some literary antiquarian of a rather special type may one day think it worthwhile... to determine just how and when and by what steps the popular mystery story shed its



refined manners and went native" (*Later Novels* 1016)<sup>2</sup>. Chandler's integral role in this shedding of linguistic refinement is particularly interesting because of his proper English upbringing. His writing therefore works to create a new genre of detective fiction from a parent whose origins maintain close cultural ties with his own background. Born an Englishman, Chandler's own lineage predetermines his status as a writer of another language— American English. Frederic Jameson calls Chandler's unique linguistic status "the lived situation of the writer of a borrowed language," arguing that this "is already emblematic of the situation of the modern writer in general, in that words have become objects for him" (625). According to Jameson, then, the bilingual Chandler is a natural at appropriating language.

As opposed to English detective fiction, R. Z. Sheppard notes in his essay, "Neither Tarnished nor Afraid<sup>3</sup>," "In place of intricate plotting, hidden clues and surprise solutions, American detective fiction relies on character and language. Both are aggressively egalitarian, rejecting fancy airs and flowery talk" (3). Chandler concurs, admitting, "The time comes when you have to choose between pace and depth of focus, between action and character, menace and wit. I now choose the second in each case" (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 222).

Chandler's position in the timeline of the evolution of film favored his reception. Jameson argues that films of the thirties birthed characters underwritten by dialogic classification and individualized speech type became an accepted pretext for

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<sup>2</sup> In her book *The Street was Mine*, Megan Abbott notes that not only is Chandler's language "native" in its uniquely urban-American lexicon, but that Chandler's reference to his writing as such reveals a "heart-of-darkness rhetoric" that suggests "a vague late-imperialist sentiment" and "the tough guy's connection to America's own racial history" (12).

<sup>3</sup> Sheppard's title, "Neither Tarnished nor Afraid," alludes to Chandler's description of his detective hero in his essay "The Simple of Art Murder" in which Chandler writes, "But down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid" (*Later Novels* 992).

characterization. Although this brand of movie experienced a short shelf-life, Chandler capitalized on its initial momentum. Jameson explains, "By the chance of a historical accident, Chandler was able to benefit from the survival of a purely linguistic, typological way of creating his characters after the system of types that had supported it was already in decay" (635). Chandler's stylistic choices undoubtedly manifest and resonate in his personal favorite novel *Farewell, My Lovely*. In particular, his creative, masterful, and often absurd use of simile, metaphor, and hyperbole drive the novel at a pace as quick as his devices are effective.

The most highly acclaimed and investigated aspect of Raymond Chandler's work is undoubtedly his creative, often outrageous, even absurd manipulation of the English language. His quippy one-liners, hilarious hyperboles, and fresh metaphors and similes accelerate *Farewell, My Lovely* to a briskly readable pace. Cynthia Hamilton writes, "The cadence and pace of his prose mimic those of speech. His use of short, stripped-down sentences maintains the clipped, rushed tempo of an exciting incident being retold" (165). Chandler was evidently in disagreement with some of his critics. He retorts, "American style has no cadence. Without cadence a style has no harmonics. It is like a flute playing solo, an incomplete thing, very dexterous or very stupid as the case may be, but still an incomplete thing" (*Later Novels* 1014). He further condemns the American style when he writes, "Its slang, at its best superb, is invented by writers and palmed off on simple hoodlums and ballplayers and often has a phony sound, even when fresh" (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 81). Still, although a born Englishman, Chandler undeniably roots his writing in American English. His proper English upbringing further suggests his innate 'multilingual' talent. As Hamilton writes, "one can appreciate his

enduring contribution to the hard-boiled formula: a colloquial style which combines stark witticism and irony with the subtle shadings of emotion, a hero who balances tough cynicism with romantic idealism" (155-156).

Chandler extensively critiqued his own writing and that of hard-boiled detective writers in general in *Raymond Chandler Speaking* and in sections of *Later Novels*. Of detective fiction he notes, "It must have color, lift, and a reasonable amount of dash. It takes an awful lot of technical adroitness to compensate for dull style" (*Later Novels* 1006). In his highly original linguistic endeavors, Chandler, along with his predecessor Dashiell Hammett, created, as Abbott writes, a "tough guy [who] saturated the literary market...resulting in a paradigmatic American type with a palpable gritty appeal and an encompassing influence on the American lexicon with a fresh and inescapably 'modern'-sounding hardboiled slang" (3). Chandler's arsenal of linguistic ammunition includes hyperbole, simile, and language appropriation.

Perhaps the most noteworthy examples of Chandler's linguistic craftsmanship can be found in his masterful hyperboles. In *Farewell, My Lovely*, the feat of ascending the seemingly interminable steps of Lindsay Marriott, male confidant to Mrs. Grayle (the disguised and missing Velma Valento), merits one. In *Farewell*, Chandler writes, "I walked back through the arch and started up the steps. It was a nice walk if you liked grunting" (169). Pages later, Chandler harks back to this hyperbole when they are descending the serpentine street from Marriott's house. Marlowe thinks, "I could understand now why Marriott had told me to walk up the steps. I could have driven about in those curving, twisting streets for hours without making more yardage than an angleworm in a bait can" (176). Chandler trusts the reader to follow his extended

hyperbole, effectually establishing a kinship between himself and the reader. Now the reader is "in" with Marlowe. They share an inside joke.

Another example of Chandler's hyperbolic writing appears when Marlowe is mustering the strength to finally leave Dr. Sonerberg's. As he struggles to fight his drug-induced state, Chandler writes, "I walked back to the bed. It was a lovely bed. It was made of roseleaves. It was the most beautiful bed in the world. They had got it from Carole Lombard. It was too soft for her. It was worth the rest of my life to lie down in it for two minutes" (*Farewell* 243). In this passage, Chandler hyperbolizes the "narrow iron hospital bed" (243) to magnify Marlowe's exhaustion. This technique works effectively because of the dreamlike cadence of Marlowe's speech and the outrageous allusion to the screen legend, evoking a voice from Marlowe the reader has not yet heard, alerting him or her of his altered state.

Some of Chandler's most effective delineations are those of his grotesque characters. His vivid descriptions of the repulsive Mrs. Florian resonate in their originality and absurdity. When describing the laughing woman in what is traditionally considered a state of happiness, he writes, "She opened her mouth wide and laughed her head off without making any more sound than you would make cracking a breadstick" (*Farewell* 209). This superficially absurd, hyperbolic metaphor forces the reader to actually consider the sound of a breaking breadstick. Upon linking Mrs. Florian's cackle to this sound, a striking image of the deranged woman presents itself. Chandler achieves this masterfully without any real description of the laugh itself. In another portrayal of Mrs. Florian, Chandler combines hyperbole and simile. When describing Mrs. Florian to Nulty, Marlowe says, "She's a charming middle-aged lady with a face like a bucket of

mud and if she has washed her hair since Coolidge's second term, I'll eat my spare tire, rim and all" (163). Again, comparing Mrs. Florian's face to a bucket of mud and suggesting she has not washed her hair in years is absurd, but actually calls the reader to make the visual connection. She is universally repulsive.

Chandler's similes are equally as effective. A particularly resonant one appears in his initial description of the house the mysterious psychic Jules Amthor. On the ride there, perched like an "eagle's nest" upon a dark hill, Chandler writes, "On the other side of the road was a raw clay bank at the edge of which a few unbeatable wild flowers hung on like naughty children that won't go to bed" (*Farewell* 228). Chandler's choice of simile in this sentence reads as eerily as Amthor's house feels. Somehow the image of children clinging to the bank, resisting bedtime for some unknown reason, brings chills to one's spine. Chandler's disturbing children inform the reader why no one could sleep soundly where "nobody would be able to hear any screams" (228).

Many critics consider Chandler's literary devices, particularly hyperbole, his signature style, separating him from others at the forefront of the genre. Cynthia Hamilton writes in her book *Western and Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction in America*, "It is Chandler's poetic descriptions, wisecracks and use of hyperbole which are the hallmarks of his style and which best convey his particular blend of humor, cynicism and sentimentality" (168). In addition to Chandler's hyperbolic writing as a reflection of his personality, it more critically serves as the foundation for his character development. A trademark Chandler technique is his suspension of Marlowe's feelings about the people he encounters. Instead, he assigns the narrator a uniquely objective voice, one which circumvents subjectivity yet still conveys his feelings toward the character. As Hamilton

writes, "Occasionally, during moments of tension, Chandler breaks actions into their component movements to heighten expectation" (165). Hamilton adds that this delineation is "purely mechanical" (166). Contrary to the superficial public interest and acclaim of Chandler as producer of action-packed detective stories, Chandler himself acknowledged his work primarily that of linguistic craftsmanship. "Really," Chandler wrote in a 1948 letter to Fredrick Lewis Allen, "although they didn't know it, the thing they cared about, and that I cared about, was the creation of emotion through dialogue and description" (*Later Novels* 1034).

Chandler's treatment of Moose Malloy in *Farewell* exemplifies this objectivity and distillation of action. The reader receives the following introduction: "He was a big man but not more than six feet five inches tall and not wider than a beer truck. He was about ten feet away from me. His arms hung loose at his sides and a forgotten cigar smoked behind his enormous fingers" (143). Moose's delineation suggests Marlowe's consequent intimidation, but the narrator, too proud to admit this emotion, employs objective language, albeit hyperbolic, to introduce Moose. Although Marlowe hyperbolizes Moose's gargantuan size, he does not reveal any personal reaction. The reader receives only the facts, yet still receives enough information to sympathize with any fear Marlowe may feel.

Another example of this trademark tactic appears in Chandler's delineation of Moose Malloy's gargantuan hand. "A hand I could have sat in came out of the dimness and took hold of my shoulder and squashed it to a pulp. Then the hand moved me through the doors and casually lifted me up a step." (144). Chandler both hyperbolizes and personifies Moose's hand here, effectively creating an absurd cartoon-like image and

reducing, even dehumanizing, Moose to his enormous hand. The result, however, proves comical and effective in establishing Moose as a menacing presence. That Chandler refrains from initially assigning the hand a possessor serves to create an image of an anonymous, hostile, victimizing limb. Chandler also maintains a strictly objective description of the hand, effectually exonerating Marlowe of judgment and passing it on to the reader who, understandably, fears Moose's hand through no incriminatingly subjective suggestion that he or she should. As Chandler says of the detective narrator, "He tells the facts, but not the reaction in his mind to those facts" (*Later Novels* 1009). Here, Chandler demonstrates an acute awareness and premeditation of his objective approach.

Chandler's most famous work, *The Big Sleep*, brims with examples of his signature style of writing emotion through physical description. When Vivian Sternwood, the seductive elder daughter of Marlowe's client, General Sternwood, becomes enraged at Marlowe, Chandler writes, "She swung her legs to the floor and stood up with her eyes sparking fire and her nostrils wide. Her mouth was open and her bright teeth glared at me. Her knuckles were white" (19). Chandler again proves a master of betraying emotion through economical and often hyperbolic physical descriptions. Carmen's flared nostrils and white knuckles undeniably convey her fury in a concise and immediate fashion while Chandler's hyperbolic use of fire amuses and resonates with the reader. When Marlowe watches Captain Cronjager's reaction upon seeing Geiger's extremely incriminating encoded notebook, "A couple of red spots the size of half dollars showed on his cheekbones" (112). Chandler delivers another concise,

hyperbolic physical description which immediately reveals that Cronjager is hiding something.

### **Linguistic Prowess = Good Detective**

As the *Farewell, My Lovely* progresses, the reader learns that another rhetorical master inhabits the place of the novel— Marlowe's protégé, Anne Riordan. Marlowe and Ann are both single, live alone, wander in pursuit of adventure, have a "strain of bloodhound" (184) in them, and are fairly young and attractive. Perhaps their most important shared characteristic, however, is that they are quick-witted linguists. Chandler's initial physical delineation of Anne suggests both naiveté and maturity. Marlowe "put the light on her face. It was a small neat vibrant face with large eyes." Anne's large eyes are inquisitive, seemingly innocent. In the next line, however, Chandler adds, she had "A face with bone under the skin, drawn like a Cremona violin. A very nice face" (185). The 'bone under the skin' of Anne's face contrasts the initial childlike image with one of depth of experience, a characteristic the reader already associates with Marlowe.

At this point, the reader already understands that Anne is not completely naive. After finding Marlowe unconscious following the foiled Marriott rendezvous in which Marlowe hoped to intercept an exchange of blackmail, Anne delivers quick-witted lines that nearly match Marlowe in humor and effect. "I once knew a guy who smoked jujus," she said. "Three high balls and three sticks of tea and it took a pipe to get him off the chandelier" (184). Anne's use of hyperbole reminds Marlowe of himself. He thinks, "I



liked the cool quiet of her voice. I liked her nerve" (185). Chandler assigns linguistic adroitness a powerful meaning in *Farewell*. It is the sign of a good detective.

Chandler later attributes a detective voice to Anne when Marlowe recounts to her the drug-induced, delirious night at Dr. Sonderberg's. After listening to Marlowe's account, she says, "You sit there and tell me that...the man had you beaten up by a couple of crooked policemen and thrown in a two-day liquor cure to teach you to mind your own business? Why the thing stands out so far you could break off a yard of it and still have enough left for a baseball bat" (251). She quickly paraphrases Marlowe's story, adds humor, and doubts his apparent tall-tale. Anne again proves fluent in detective-speak and also reveals her inherent distrust of an alibi, doubly confirming herself an adept detective.

Anne Roirdan linguistically foils Nulty, the corrupt, racist, and jaded detective, who proves incapable of creating funny or original dialogue. Nulty's trademark saying is, "Remind me to laugh on my day off" (167). He recycles one-liners, later repeating the same line and a third time merely mustering, "I'm laughing" (213). Within the borders of Chandler's Bay City, this linguistic ineptitude proves analogous to a bad detective. On the contrary, Marlowe and Anne consistently deliver fresh, witty, and often absurd quips. Marlowe does not even deny vulgar middle-aged female suspects the pleasure of his witticisms. When investigating Mrs. Morrison about the gin-swilling Mrs. Florian, Marlowe says, "You're slipping.... You'll be playing shortstop in a Class C league next year" (264). Words prove to be Marlowe's most dependable weapon.

In *The Big Sleep*, Marlowe again reaches into his verbal holster to rectify a rather precarious situation. When he visits the dead blackmailer Geiger's house for the second

time (the first time he found the barely conscious Carmen Sternwood there after a nude photo shoot, clad only in “a pair of long jade earrings” (33)), this time he is accompanied by Carol Lundgren, Geiger’s former homosexual lover. The surly and inarticulate Lundgren barely musters more than a couple “Go ----- yourself”s (99, 101, 102) in retaliation to Marlowe’s initial verbal effrontery. After physically disabling Lundgren with a headlock and a pair of handcuffs, Marlowe reliably turns to words to hammer home his threat:

Keep quiet or you’ll get the same and more of it. Just lie quiet and hold your breath. Hold it until you can’t hold it any longer and then tell yourself that you have to breathe, that you’re black in the face, that your eyeballs are popping out, and that you’re going to breathe right now, but that you’re sitting in a clean little gas chamber up in San Quentin and when you take that breath you’re fighting with all your soul not to take..., it won’t be air you’ll get, it will be cyanide fumes. And that’s what they call humane execution in our state now. (101)

The verbally challenged Lundgren responds with merely another “Go ----- yourself,” and “a soft stricken sigh” (101). After trying to run from Geiger’s house, Lundgren “wanted to fight. He shot at me like a plane from a catapult, reaching for my knees in a diving tackle” (100). Although Marlowe succumbs to physical fighting, he does so only momentarily and to immobilize his opponent into a position conducive to his verbal onslaught. Marlowe wins this battle on all fronts, but he clinches it in his preferred verbal style. When Bernie Ohls, a policeman both friendly to and wary of Marlowe’s private investigations in the Sternwood case, arrives at Geiger’s house to pick Marlowe

up, he says “I thought you acted a little cagey on that one.” Marlowe replies, “Cagey is no word for it,” simultaneously displaying his prowess for nuanced language and suggesting the incident proved far too dangerous to be considered self-serving or shrewd.

As with Anne in *Farewell*, Chandler also employs linguistic prowess as a foundation for Marlowe’s relationship with a female character in *The Big Sleep*. The day after Marlowe discovers Carmen Sternwood drugged and nude at Geiger house, presumably following the nude photo shoot motivated by blackmail, he meets with Vivian who admits that she was out that night, too, “down at Las Olindas, playing roulette at Eddie Mars’ Cypress Club” (58-9). When Marlowe says, “So you like roulette. You would,” she retorts coolly, “Yes, I like roulette. All the Sternwoods like losing games, like roulette and marrying men that walk out on them and riding steeplechases at fifty-eight years old and being rolled on by a jumper and crippled for life. The Sternwoods have money. All it has brought them is a rain check” (59). Vivian exhibits her skills as a smooth, quick rhetorician, similar to *Farewell’s* Anne Roirdan. Marlowe’s attraction to Vivian is initially physical (“She was worth a stare. She was trouble” (17)) but her sassy rant affords her transcendence of Marlowe’s objectification, who now finds her doubly attractive.

Chandler’s arming of his strong female characters with verbal capabilities works against theories of vocalization as a sign of feminine weakness in early Westerns, as proposed by Jane Tompkins, Norris Yates, and Lee Clark Mitchell. Whereas verbose female characters in Westerns represent stereotyped feminized weakness, Chandler’s Anne Roirdan and Vivian Sternwood debunk and redefine female verboseness as a symbol of strength and source of attraction. Chandler utilizes verboseness as a criterion

for strength, in both male and female characters. In Chandler and Hammett, verbal wit and fluency elevate female characters to the intellectual level of the male detective figure, in contrast to its suggestion of female weakness in the Western genre. In the detective genre, the articulate character wields words as source of power in contrast to the reticent cowboy whose actions, not words, imply intuition and strength.

Like Hammett's Op, Philip Marlowe also exemplifies Bakhtin's theory of the novel as the incarnation of the interplay of several socially diverse speech types. Within Chandler's Bay City, in the multiple heteroglot languages of *Farewell, My Lovely*, words communicate different and nuanced meanings than from when spoken outside the borders of San Francisco. Chandler reiterates Bakhtin when he considers "American" English in *Raymond Chandler Speaking*. He writes, "It is a fluid language, like Shakespearian English, and easily takes in new words, new meanings for old words, and borrows at will and at ease from the usages of other languages, for example, the German free compounding of words and the use of noun or adjective as verb" (80). Chandler speckles *Farewell* with a confetti of words both borrowed and mutated. One example is his appropriation of the word "juju" to mean a marijuana cigarette. Juju traditionally refers to an "object used as a fetish or charm" or to the "supernatural power ascribed to such an object" (www.dictionary.com). There is evidence that the word may have experienced some use for 'joint' during the 1940s (the 420 Dictionary).<sup>4</sup> Chandler's choice to appropriate 'juju' for marijuana cigarette, however, is suggestive because of its linguistic ties to the supernatural and in light of the jujus' possessor, the mystical psychic Jules

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<sup>4</sup> The 420 Dictionary is an online dictionary defining "over 3,300 words and phrases" for marijuana defines a juju as "a joint of good weed."

Amthor. The semantic and alliterative ties between Jules and jujus imply that Chandler's appropriation of jujus is quite deliberate.

Chandler's language appropriation in *Farewell*, particularly in the dialogue of Moose Malloy, also reflects the political climate of 1940s Los Angeles. Upon entering *Florian's*, the now African American bar where his old flame Velma once worked, Moose's language and behavior echo racial sentiments of the time. Chandler writes, "'How long's this coop been a dinge joint?' the big man demanded gruffly" (160). Although Chandler locates Moose as a marginalized character partly because of his Irish heritage, Moose himself racializes the African Americans in *Florian's*, projecting his own marginalization on them. Although "coop" traditionally means a small, enclosed place, it is also a slang term for prison, and Chandler's use of it here suggests a possible racist sentiment that Moose harbors toward African Americans. Chandler also uses "dinge" to mean a segregated place frequented by African Americans. His appropriation of this word for this purpose is provocative in light of the word's traditional meaning of grime or squalor. "Dinge" was often used in noun form as a derogatory term for an African American, although, according to "The Internet Guide to Jazz Age Slang," it was no longer in use at *Farewell's* 1940 publication. Chandler appropriates dinge, changes its usage, and employs it as an adjective to describe *Florian's*. Chandler's appropriation mirrors Bakhtin's theory. Bakhtin writes, "the speaker populates [the word] with his own intentions, his own accent..., adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention" (677). In Chandler's own words, juju and dinge exemplify American English as "fluid" (*Raymond Chandler Speaking* 80). Chandler capitalizes on this fluidity by borrowing words and changing their usage while maintaining their cultural connotations.

Chandler's *Farewell* exemplifies Bakhtin's theory of the novel as the manifestation of linguistic diversity. He also endows his narrator with the ability to adapt his speech to extract critical information from secondary characters. In his first telephone conversation with Lindsay Marriott, an upper-class blackmailer, Marlowe refrains from his usual gruff detective-speak. Instead, he adapts to the conversation by elevating his language to Marriott's upper class tongue:

"What is the nature of the employment, Mr. Marriot?"

"I should prefer not to discuss that over the phone."

"Can't you give me some idea? Montemar Vista is quite a distance."

"I shall be glad to pay your expenses, if we don't agree. Are you particular about the nature of the employment?"

"Not as long as it's legitimate."

The voice grew icicles. "I should not have called you if it were not."

A Harvard boy. Nice use of the subjunctive.... I put honey in my voice

and said: "Many thanks for calling me, Mr. Marriott. I'll be there." (166)

Here Marlowe, a chameleon-linguist, adapts his language to the speech type of Marriott in order to establish the parameters of their working relationship. By adopting Marriott's own speech type, Marlowe seamlessly switches from his heteroglot language (detective-speak) to Marriott's unique speech type to ensure that the work is 'legitimate.' Marlowe's mention of the subjunctive tense, in addition to his apparent effortless in linguistic adaptation, reflects his knowledge of grammar and an educational background. The reader realizes that he does not speak like Marriott not because he cannot, but because he chooses otherwise. He admits this voice is not natural when he says, "I put honey in my

voice." At this point, the reader can begin to ponder Marlowe's reasons for his speech type, in addition to its origins.

In addition to exploiting language to solve his crime, the detective also utilizes language to create a comfort zone for himself among the chaos of urbanity. As Freedman and Kendrick write, "Although the detective's dialogic world is only "incidental to his stated goal of solving crimes," the place created within its rhetoric is "the detective's proper homeland" (215). According to them, not only is linguistic action a form of work for the detective, it is also a form of place-building. Functioning within this rhetorical space enables his "tapping various energies harbored within dialogue... and involves not the decoding... of facts...but, rather, an encoding process that activates the surplus energy inherent in his world" (217). Marlowe participates in this 'tapping' in his investigation of Joe Brody in *The Big Sleep* (Chandler 93-95), a very verbal battle in which Brody thinks he is molding his alibi around Marlowe's question, while Marlowe is actively comprehending the night of Geiger's murder through adaptive, improvised rebukes and questions, like game of ping-pong where Marlowe waits to slam the ball past Brody's answer, always one second ahead. Marlowe, a natural with a home-court advantage, once again proves his linguistic performance too stellar for defeat. In instances such as this, the detective is at home when operating through his linguistic capacity. He carves a comfortable, linguistic working space for himself out the disorder and corruption of Chandler's Los Angeles.

### Chapter Three: Language as a Shield of Masculinity

The physical place of Philip Marlowe's world is Los Angeles, which Chandler represents as a dark, seedy world populated by criminals and otherwise good-natured but very impressionable people who fall victim to the tempting vices the city sells. Of the noir setting, Rzepka writes, "In the American hard-boiled genre...innocence not only cannot be regained—it is never there to begin with" (699). Therefore, not only does Los Angeles benefit mobsters like Eddie Mars and A. G. Geiger, it breeds them. According to Rzepka's claim, Marlowe's status as a Los Angeles resident prevents his innocence and predetermines some level of guilt. It seems Chandler had this in mind, however. Rzepka writes:

After the War, the booming oil and moving picture industries of California provided the perfect incubator for a new kind of urban cowboy embodying the chivalric ideals of the classic western knight-errant. Here, where Manifest Destiny finally ran out of real estate, a new, class-defined frontier was drawn, on the far side of which stood America's version of the decayed but insidious aristocrats that had originally populated the Gothic thrillers of late Enlightenment and post-Revolutionary Europe. (700-01)

Chandler's perverted version of Rzepka's aristocrats of the genre is the Sternwoods of *The Big Sleep*. Rzepka's commentary on Los Angeles as Manifest Destiny's finish line posits Marlowe as a cowboy figure without a range, stuck in his environment and with no choice but to perform his work within its walls. In his chapter, "From the Open Range to the Mean Streets," Richard Slotkin points out that although detective's quest mirrors that



of the cowboy, “the ‘mythic space’ of the detective story differs in being identified with the ‘real’ scene of urban crime” (217).

Fredric Jameson, in his essay “On Raymond Chandler,” comments at length on the layout of Los Angeles as anomalistic, its sprawling development rendering it a modern day anti-city. In contrast to the age-old urban apartment, vertically built, Jameson writes, “If the symbol of social coherence and comprehensibility was furnished by the nineteenth-century apartment house,...then Los Angeles is the opposite, a spreading out horizontally, a flowing apart of the elements of the social structure” (629). The blueprint of Chandler’s world, therefore, and this ‘flowing apart...of the social structure’ echoes the decay and unraveling of morals and community in his writing. According to Megan Abbott, writer of *The Street was Mine*, the detective hero is privileged due to his masculinity and whiteness (6). According to Jameson, however, the unraveled structure of Los Angeles results in a loss of “any privileged experience in which the whole of the social structure can be grasped” and that “a figure must be invented who can be superimposed on the society as whole, whose routine and life-pattern serve somehow to tie its separate and isolated parts together” (629). Chandler, then, invented a figure necessitated by a preexisting environment.

The rampant invention and production of material goods that fueled the culture and economy of 1930s Los Angeles and the United States created, in the fictional world, the need for a detective who could negotiate the material world with ease. “In the era of stable products, to which Chandler’s books belong, there is no longer any feeling of the creative energy embodied in a product: the latter are simply there, in a permanent industrial background which has come to resemble that of nature itself” (Jameson 640).

In the crooked world the detective negotiates, corruption issues from the generation of objects and it becomes his work to record it. Corruption is ubiquitous, and the detective must inventory it. In the thirties, people begin to accumulate items and Chandler makes sure both his and his detective's vocabulary command the unabridged lexicon of the material world.

Chandler reveals his and Marlowe's command of this object-based lexicon most demonstratively in his delineations of dress and setting. For example, upon discovering the nude Carmen at Geiger's house, Marlowe inventories the crime scene's materiality: "On a sort of low dais at one end of the room there was a high-backed teakwood chair in which Miss Carmen Sternwood was sitting on a fringed orange shawl" (35). Marlowe's registers key components of the scene's objects, including Carmen herself, who seems to have become part of the background of which Jameson speaks. He explains that Chandler's proficient, detailed accounts of the material world demonstrate "how completely he knows his way around the world of machines and machine products" (640) and give credence to his knowledge of the machinated infrastructure of his environment. Therefore, the material essence of Chandler's world and the extensive and nuanced vocabulary it necessitates serve as a pretext for his and Marlowe's linguistic performances. In his work then, Chandler not only inventories slang but the also the fragments that comprise physical and ideological space.

In "The Simple Art of Murder," Raymond Chandler writes of the 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. He talks as a man of his age talks - that is with rude wit, a lively sense of the grotesque, a disgust for sham, and a contempt for pettiness. (*Later Novels* 992)

It is this depiction of the detective that Chandler sought to create and maintain in his seminal contributions to literary noir. His long-lived detective, Philip Marlowe, both valorized and marginalized by the inhabitants of his world, unflinchingly embodies these traits through several novels.

In his delineation of his detective character, Chandler's first detail concerns the detective's economic status, its positional prominence suggestive of its significance in Marlowe's anatomical makeup. In *The Big Sleep*, Chandler craftily reveals Marlowe's financial situation when Marlowe peruses the storefront of A.G. Geiger, General Sternwood's blackmailer, cluttered with "a lot of oriental junk." Marlowe says, "I didn't know whether it was any good, not being a collector of antiques, except unpaid bills" (22). Marlowe's surmised middle-class status reinforces his respectability as an honorable man who is constantly surrounded by amoral blackmailers and tempted by the extremely rich. In their first formal meeting in Marlowe's office, Vivian tells him, "You don't put on much of a front." He replies, "You can't make much money at this trade if you're honest. If you have a front, you're making money—or expect to" (56). Here, Marlowe economically reveals his incarnation of two critical character traits of the

detective described by Chandler in “The Simple Art of Murder”: his working-class status and his honesty.

For Marlowe, language acts as an extension and manifestation of his persona as a tough guy with a conscience. *The Street was Mine* author Megan Abbott considers the tough guy persona at length, arguing that Marlowe actually defies class categorization. She writes, “While his purported classlessness—not to mention his self-reliance is...a more dreamed for ideal than a defining characteristic, the tough guy’s discomfort with traditional roles or bourgeois values is fundamental to his self-concept” (3). The ‘self-reliance’ Abbott notes correlates with Chandler’s description of the detective character as ‘a lonely man,’ at once comfortable with anyone and no one. Abbott's thinking touches on the combative principles at the core of detective character.

The success of the hard-boiled detective novel undoubtedly owes itself to such enjoyable aspects as Hammett's dialogue or Chandler's hyperbolic metaphors. Eventually, however, the reader must wonder, What is the underlying reason for the detective's incessant sarcasm? John Hilgart considers this question in his essay "Philip Marlow and his Labor of Words.” He writes, “the creative voice serves as compensatory autonomy, as the self-regulated human productivity of a man who resents his marginal position in society and the obligation literally to sell himself short in order to make a living. The voice is Marlow's other form of labor” (369). Marlow, underpaid and underappreciated, fills the void left by his marginalized position with an alternative kind of work, an autodidactic detective poetic that reads like sarcasm but that is perhaps underwritten with deeper implications. This poetic is birthed of the wise-guy's quick wit and cynicism, which he creates and employs as a "form of resistance to power and

privilege" (Hilgart 369). Marlowe expresses this sentiment in *Farewell* when Officer Randall asks him to step off the case. Marlowe, of course, refuses and retorts, "What to you want me to do—retire and live on my fat?" (*Farewell* 181). He coats his resistance to his boss's request in humor, employing his voice as the 'compensatory autonomy' of which Hilgart writes. Marlowe again reveals his delicate financial status, suggesting an actual need to stay on the case, but does so by refracting it with sarcasm in order to guard his masculinity.

Marlowe's sarcasm, then, is a kind of lens through which he negotiates his world, a lens that refracts his reality, obscuring the corruption that perverts it and rendering it manageable. Hilgart ponders this refraction. Of Marlowe's voice, he writes:

...it functions to control the boundaries between self and other, between his own convoluted ethics and the corruption in which his job immerses him. Marlowe's voice is a measure of his difference, and just as he is worried that he will accept money from the wrong person under the wrong circumstances, he is panicked-when his voice seems merely to reflect rather than to refract the outside world. So, it is convenient shorthand to call Marlowe an artist, but Marlowe's creativity is more precisely a self-defining performance – an avocation by which he seeks to fortify himself against the compromises of his paid vocation. (370)

According to Hilgart, Marlowe's artisanship is more importantly the means by which he creates and maintains his identity. Accordingly, Marlowe's creative use of language serves to carry the story, entertain the reader, and work towards his own self-identification.

An example of Marlowe refracting his world in order to cope with it occurs during his personal pep-talk after being drugged at Dr. Sonderberg's. Marlowe reminds himself:

You're a tough guy. Six feet of iron man. One hundred and ninety pounds stripped and with your face washed. Hard muscles and no glass jaw....  
 You've been sapped down twice, had your throat choked and been beaten half silly on the jaw with a gun barrel. You've been shot full of hop and kept under until you're as crazy as two waltzing mice. And what does that amount to? Routine. Now let's see you do something really tough, like putting your pants on. (*Farewell* 242)

Chandler loads this passage with revelatory information. From his internal dialogue, the reader can deduce both Marlowe's self-confidence and fear. Chandler's description of Marlowe's resilience seems nearly superhuman. Marlowe then affirms that his life continually calls for such strength. Upon the initial read, the reader expects 'something really tough' to be another gargantuan feat of some sort. Instead, Marlowe merely needs to put on his pants. This quick reversal is not only amusing, but it demonstrates Marlowe's refraction of his world through the use of humor. Hilgart suggests, "Let us then posit Marlowe provisionally as artist-figure playing with language and constructing formal wholes, for whom vicarious creative activity serves as a means of self-definition" (370). Marlowe negotiates his pain with his most reliable weapons – wit and verbal articulation.

Another critic, John Paul Athanasourelis, writes at length about Chandler as a writer who ardently resists distilling characters to embody the delimiting moral codes

personified and mythologized by the film industry. Chandler's resistance to this moral reductionism reflects his own perspective on the complexities of human nature which he uses as a foundation for character development. In his essay "Film Adaptation and the Censors: 1940s Hollywood and Raymond Chandler," Athanasourelis writes:

Chandler resisted the idea that any one set of moral rules could apply to all people; his position, both in his fiction and in commentary, was that differing, even conflicting systems of ethics could and must coexist and that tolerance was the responsibility of each individual. He resisted compartmentalizing people into convenient categories. (327)

Marlowe, therefore, is a character who does not represent pure good or ethical uprightness in America, but rather embodies modernity's nuanced moral and ethical complexities.

Chandler provides the reader with several substantiating instances supportive of the claims of Hilgart and Athanasourelis. For instance, after Anne finds Marlowe unconscious and drives him back downtown, Marlowe deliberates between a quick snifter at the bar in front of him and going straight to the station. "It seemed smarter to walk into the West Los Angeles police station the way I did twenty minutes later, as cold as a frog and as green as the back of a new dollar bill" (*Farewell* 187). Chandler loads this sentence with effective literary devices. First, he discloses Marlowe's momentary internal conflict and general weakness for alcohol. Second, he uses the past tense in a unique way to relay the events of the future of this particular moment. The reader can deduce that Marlowe did in fact enter the bar, since he did not start walking to the police station until 'twenty minutes later.' Third, he reveals, in comic hyperbolic metaphor, just

how terrible Marlowe felt after the incident, further reflecting just how badly he needed a drink. Marlowe's stopping for a drink although he can barely walk reveals his tough-guy nature, which Chandler further emphasizes by exposing his pain lastly and coating it with humor. In this sense, Marlowe refracts his world with language, unable to resist viewing it through his own sarcastic lens, a defense mechanism he uses to remain detached from his increasingly dangerous occupation.

Another example of Marlowe refracting his world with internal dialogue occurs when he overhears a muffled telephone conversation from behind an "almost closed door" at Dr. Sonderberg's. Marlowe has just mustered the strength to escape and recalls, "This was the time to leave, to go far away. So I pushed the door open and stepped quietly in" (*Farewell* 246). Here Chandler creates the expectation that Marlowe will seize this opportunity to escape and then reverses it. Marlowe cannot resist the temptation of adventure, although he knows he should leave while he can. He resists the reader's expectations and reverses them while acknowledging his combative principles.

As noted above, Marlowe refracts his world by resisting answering the reader's expectations. Chandler accomplishes this resistance by endowing Marlowe with an extremely sarcastic voice, one which can toy with the reader without betraying his or her trust. When Marlowe sits drinking gin with Mrs. Florian, he says to himself, "A lovely old woman. I liked being with her. I liked getting her drunk for my own sordid purposes. I was a swell guy. I enjoyed being me. You find almost anything under your hands in my business, but I was beginning to be a little sick at my stomach" (*Farewell* 161). Marlowe's sarcasm here is also an acknowledgement of his extracting pleasure from a decidedly seedy situation. He discloses his recognition of guilt as a process: he



'liked getting her drunk,' he 'enjoyed being me,' and the situation nauseates him. His admittance of disgust at his own actions is doubly meaningful after he makes a joke of it. Through joking about his encounter with Mrs. Florian, he juxtaposes his true feelings of guilt with self-mockery. In effect, Marlowe refracts his world, bending his relationship to reality. He achieves this refraction by utilizing his voice to maintain a distance between himself and his world, between "his own convoluted ethics and the corruption in which his job immerses him" (Hilgart 370).

Marlowe's speech and actions reflect a self-recognition of his ethical shortcomings. His dialogical relationship to Anne Roirdan exemplifies this acknowledgement. As Marlowe lights his pipe while sitting with Anne, she "watched with approval. Pipe smokers were solid men. She was going to be disappointed in me" (193). With a quick reversal, Chandler reveals Marlowe's less-than-wholesome nature and his self-recognition of it. The reader surmises the Marlowe wants to be a 'solid' man for Anne, that he desires her approval. By reversing Anne's and the reader's expectations, that Marlowe considers himself an upright man, he admits that he thinks the opposite to be true. However, Marlowe does not admit this without sarcastic overtones. His refusal to take himself seriously acts as a defense mechanism that ironically works to maintain his tough-guy persona.

Like Marlowe, Anne also possesses a self-deprecating humor. When telling Marlowe about her cop father she says, "Oh I know I'm just a damned inquisitive wench. But there's a strain of bloodhound in me" (*Farewell* 184). Here, Anne downplays her detective abilities because of her womanhood. As opposed to Marlowe, although her she devalues herself, she does not reveal any trait of which she is ashamed. However, both

Anne and Marlowe manipulate language to belittle themselves. If Anne refrained from sarcasm, she would have to admit that society is not ready to take her seriously as a detective. In retaliation, she resists taking herself seriously. Like Marlowe, Anne also employs a creative use of language as a defense mechanism.

Chandler's own reaction to his acclaim suggests that he shares this self-deprecating attitude with Marlowe and Anne. In her essay "Raymond Chandler and the Business of Literature," Johanna Smith writes, "he was often made uncomfortable when literary critics" praised his work. Chandler referred to these critics as "'priming second-guessers who call themselves critics'" and he "seems to have worried that critical approval might impugn his own manhood" (593). Chandler, then, refracts his praise and resists taking it seriously. Like Anne Roirdan, he effectively diminishes his own acclaim and belittles himself. By calling the critics "priming second-guessers," he too refracts his reality with self-mockery. The languages of Marlowe and Anne as characters, Chandler as author, and Chandler as critic bear similarities.

In his article "The Crime of the Sign, Dashiell Hammett's Detective Fiction," Carl Malmgren comments on Chandler's disconcertion with the extreme corruption of Hammett's world. Malmgren describes Hammett's world as one "in which all values seem undermined, a world apparently without center or anchor" (375). Chandler, discontented by the incontrovertible darkness of Hammett's world, "regrounded the world of detective fiction: in his fiction, the detective is heroized, converted into a latter-day knight (Marlowe=Mallory)" (375). Malmgren goes on to cite Chandler, from "The Simple Art of Murder:" Marlowe is "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 in any world” (*Simple Art* 992). Malmgren evokes Marlowe’s personal code of honor here, for he lives according to the system governing his world, not necessarily that of the society in which he lives.

In his negotiations of a corrupt world, Marlowe both must continually join and consciously remove himself from it. According to Charles Rzepka, in his article “‘I’m in The Business too:’ Gothic Chivalry, Private Eyes, and Proxy Sex and Violence in Chandler’s *The Big Sleep*,” Marlowe proves himself a “‘true’ knight... in his attempts to negotiate the conflicts between his duty to Sternwood, the temptations of the Sternwood sisters, and the demands of justice in the abstract” (703). Marlowe’s most seductive temptation in *The Big Sleep* is Vivian Regan, the elder daughter of General Sternwood married to the missing Rusty Regan. Upon seeing Vivian for the first time, Marlowe thinks, “She was worth a stare. She was trouble. She was stretched out on a modernistic chaise-lounge with her slippers off, so I stared at her legs in the sheerest silk stocking. They seemed to be arranged to stare at” (17). Marlowe here shows that he’s far from asexual, but his initial fixation on Vivian’s calves and “ankles long and slim and with enough melodic line for a tone poem” (17) serves to reveal his weakness for beautiful women and magnify his allegiance to a personal code of honor as the novel progresses and temptations increase.

Sexual temptation continues in the same encounter. After taking another look at Carmen’s nude photographs, Vivian says, “She has a beautiful little body, hasn’t she?” Marlowe responds, “Uh-huh,” to which Vivian replies, “You ought to see mine.” Even though her husband Rusty has presumably disappeared with Eddie Mars’s beautiful wife Mona, Vivian is, after all, a married woman. Marlowe cannot resist continuing her game,

however, and retorts, somewhat sarcastically, “Can that be arranged?” (61). That Vivian and Marlowe never consummate their fermenting sexual desire demonstrates Marlowe’s loyalty to his personal code of honor. However, Marlowe does respond to Vivian’s flirtations and his participation in her game suggests that his ethical standard cannot be completely pure and that it must allow for certain, perhaps necessary, transgressions from a stricter moral code.

Marlowe continues to uphold his code of honor when he discovers Carmen posing naked and nearly unconscious, smelling of ether, in Geiger’s house:

She was wearing a pair of long jade earrings.... She wasn’t wearing anything else. She had a beautiful body, small, lithe, compact, firm, rounded.... I looked over her without either embarrassment or ruttishness. As a naked girl she was not there in the room at all. She was just a dope. To me she was always just a dope. (35-36)

Although Marlowe refuses to empathize with Carmen, in his eyes a careless, disrespectful fool, he also resists entertaining notions of taking advantage of her attractive physique. While driving Carmen home, she spends the ride “snoring and breathing ether in my face.” The respectful Marlowe “couldn’t keep her head off my shoulder. It was all I could do to keep it out of my lap” (39). Not only does Marlowe resist female temptation here, he reveals his criteria for an attractive women. Carmen lacks intelligence and self-respect and, therefore, “As a naked girl she was not there in the room at all.” Marlowe understands, however, that loyalty to his own moral code still does not exonerate him. He admits, in the novel’s penultimate paragraph, “I was part of the nastiness now” (230),

revealing a conscious recognition of his guilt by association in sharing the Sternwoods' seedy secrets of murder and blackmail.

In *Gunfighter Nation*, Richard Slotkin theorizes the connections between the Virginian and the detective hero. He writes;

The detective hero...is a figure not unlike the Virginian. He is an uncommon common man...which in this world means a man who knows the world of crime as if from the inside but who also has a chivalric sense of 'honor' or justice, which identifies him with aristocratic values and with the values of an earlier, cleaner America. (218)

Slotkin's language echoes that of Chandler's own in "The Simple Art of Murder," in which he refers to the detective figure as "a common man and yet an unusual man" (992). Although Marlowe resists temptation in *The Big Sleep* through adherence to his personal code of honor, his moral wiring prohibits him from condoning his involvement with the Sternwood family, Rzepka's "decayed but insidious aristocrats" (701). Slotkin speaks to the inherent combative relationship between his necessary involvement in the world of crime and his commitment to uphold his personal moral code—a dilemma which both complicates and defines the detective and his quest.

## CONCLUSION

My project focuses on the reticent cowboy figure in the film version of Wister's *The Virginian* and the extremely verbose detective heroes in Hammett's *Red Harvest* and Chandlers' *Farewell, My Lovely* and *The Big Sleep*. This paper works to demonstrate the primarily linguistic work of the Continental Op and Philip Marlowe as a vocational tool, a reflection of their threatened moral codes in the face of corruption, and as method of refracting Philip Marlowe's view of the world. It also, however, aims to elucidate two very different codes of masculinity represented in these literary characters, one defined by resistance to language, as in the case of the *Virginian*, and one defined by rhetorical manipulation, as in the case of the Continental Op and Philip Marlowe. Through close examination of the rhetorical existence of these fictional figures, one can begin to explore more deeply and make larger cultural claims about 'silence v. speaking' as a model for the preservation of masculinity in American society.

The study of the evolution of the Western culture hero proves valuable because it reveals progressive transgressions from heteronormative behavior, specifically from an established male aversion to language in the Western genre. In this study, the transgression manifests itself in the evolution of the language-resistant *Virginian* to the more linguistically inclined Continental Op and Philip Marlowe. The cowboy and detective figure employ silence and language, respectively, to guard their masculinity. The detective figure, however, interprets a grasp of language as critical criterion for elevating women to his intellectual level, as evident in Marlowe's relationships with Anne Riordan and Vivian Sternwood. For him, female vocalization, provided it

emanates intelligence, is a sign of strength, not weakness, as it is interpreted by the Western tradition.

Consideration of the unique position of Condoleezza Rice in the cabinet reveals some parallels with the Western's interpretation of female communicativeness. According to a Bush adviser, "The President is more willing to listen to arguments in favor of utilizing diplomacy as a tool to fight radical Islam when it comes from her, because he trusts her totally" (Allen and Ratsenar 5). According to this statement, Bush seems to be inching towards a system of diplomacy more reminiscent of the detective figure's view of female verbal intervention rather than that of the cowboy he so idolizes. Allen and Ratsenar confirm, however, that "she has yet to pull off any major diplomatic breakthrough that could burnish the Bush legacy" (5). After all, Bush continues to make statements like, "Members of Congress need to stop making political statements and start providing vital funds for our troops. They need to get that bill to my desk so I can sign it into law," reiterating the mantra of the action-driven Bush Doctrine (Lobe, "Showdown Looms"). Even Rice, although finally achieving some progress in reversing nearly two terms of cowboy diplomacy through arranging bilateral meetings with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in March and April of 2007, "understands that she has a very short leash." Although Syria and Iran will be present at the meetings, Cheney, who was traveling internationally at the time of Rice's announcement, clarified upon return that these meetings will not include similar bilateral talks with Syria and Iran (Lobe, "End Part II?"). One might envision a cartoon in which Cheney reaches across the meeting and strangles Rice, the lone female in the room, wearing a name tag that reads "Diplomacy."

Although this project aims to investigate the cowboy's resistance to language and to deconstruct the detective figure's linguistic performance, it points to alternative exploratory avenues which merit further study, in particular, that of uncovering more of the literary and filmic underpinnings of linguistic behavior in American culture.



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