

Introduction to Crime Fiction

Prof. Andrew Goldstone

(andrew.goldstone@rutgers.edu)

TA: Anthony Tello (anthony.tello@rutgers.edu)

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review

- ▶ the opening: style and stylization
 - ▶ in the character
 - ▶ in the prose
 - ▶ in the...plot?
- ▶ down these mean streets a man must go
- ▶ gender: all thumbs

what is it about women?

She was an ash blonde with greenish eyes, beaded lashes, hair waved smoothly back from ears in which large jet buttons glittered. Her fingernails were silvered. In spite of her get-up she looked as if she would have a hall bedroom accent. (23)

She had a beautiful body, small, lithe, compact, firm, rounded. (35–36)

“She has a beautiful little body, hasn’t she?”

“Uh-huh.”

She leaned a little towards me. “You ought to see mine,” she said gravely. (61)

A pretty, spoiled and not very bright little girl who had gone very, very wrong, and nobody was doing anything about it. To hell with the rich. They made me sick. (64)

I slid off the desk and stepped up close to her and gave her a smack on the side of the face. (66)

The misogyny of these books has become a critical commonplace. Largely ignoring the material social and economic context of this misogyny, these critics have invoked the figure of the New Woman as a particular threat to masculinity.... In my view, however, the bourgeois New Woman has less to do with hard-boiled misogyny than the transformation of working-class communities as a result of the de-skilling of craft work, the entry of young, single women into once all-male jobs, and the rise of consumer culture.

Erin A. Smith, *Hard-Boiled: Working-class Readers and Pulp Magazines* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000), 157–58.

you know, chivalry

In everything that can be called art there is a quality of redemption...

Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor—by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it....I do not care much about his private life; he is neither a eunuch nor a satyr; I think he might seduce a duchess and I am quite sure he would not spoil a virgin.

“Simple Art,” 59.

Discussion

- ▶ Does Marlowe fit Chandler’s model of the “man of honor”? Think about **how** characterization happens and whether its effects are indeed redemptive.

Chandler's background: Dulwich College and *Black Mask*

1888	b. Chicago
1895–1905	lives in England, goes to Dulwich College (fancy)
1912	returns to US, becomes accountant in LA
1920–32	works for Dabney Oil Syndicate, becomes VP, fired
1933	“Blackmailers Don’t Shoot,” <i>Black Mask</i> 16, no. 10
1934–37	more pulp publications
1939	<i>The Big Sleep</i> (New York: Knopf)
1940	<i>Farewell, My Lovely</i> (Knopf)
1942	<i>The High Window</i> (Knopf)
1943	<i>The Lady in the Lake</i> (Knopf)
1944	<i>Double Indemnity</i> (dir. Wilder, screenplay)
1944	“Simple Art of Murder,” <i>Atlantic Monthly</i>
1946	<i>The Big Sleep</i> (dir. Hawks)
1959	d.

Chandler goes back to school

Wandering up and down the Pacific Coast in an automobile, I began to read pulp magazines, because they were cheap enough to throw away and because I never had at any time any taste for the kind of thing which is known as women's magazines. This was in the great days of the *Black Mask* (if I may call them great days) and it struck me that some of the writing was pretty forceful and honest, even though it had its crude aspect. I decided that this might be a good way to try to learn to write fiction and get paid a small amount of money at the same time.

Letter to Hamish Hamilton [his British publisher], November 10, 1950, in *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, ed. Dorothy Gardiner and Kathrine Sorley Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 26, [ACLS Humanities EBook](#).

I learned to write a novelette on one of yours....I made an extremely detailed synopsis of your story and from that rewrote it and then compared what I had with yours, and then went back and rewrote it some more, and so on.

Letter to Erle Stanley Gardner [the best-selling mystery writer], May 5, 1939, in *ibid.*, 73.

foreigners

foreigners

Personally I like the English style better.

“Simple Art,” 56.

I had to learn American just like a foreign language. To use it I had to study it and analyze it. As a result, when I use slang, colloquialisms, snide talk or any kind of off-beat language I do it deliberately. The literary use of slang is a study in itself. I've found that there are only two kinds that are any good: slang that has established itself in the language, and slang that you make up yourself. Everything else is apt to be passé before it gets into print.

Letter to Alex Barris, March 18, 1949, in *Letters*, 80.

language!

He said: “Go — yourself.” (97, 98, 99, 101, 102)

“Don’t kid me, son. The fag gave you one.... Think I can’t figure people like him and you out?” (100)

We seemed to hang there in the misty moonlight, two grotesque creatures whose feet scraped on the road and whose breath panted with effort. (101)

habeas corpus

- ▶ Consider the presentation of Geiger's and Taylor's bodies (chaps. 7 and 9).
 - ▶ What's the tone?
 - ▶ Where are the clues?

next

- ▶ Read at least through chap. 25.