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Raymond Chandler: Breaking the Norms of the Detective Genre

> My theory was that readers just thought that they cared about nothing but the action; that really although they didn't know it, they cared very little about the action. The thing they really cared about, and that I care about, was the creation of emotion through dialogue and description.[1]

Raymond Chandler is revered as one of the most influential crime writers in American literature. His novels about private eye Philip Marlowe, the idealistic and lonely defender of Los Angeles of the 1930s and 1940s, broke the norms of the conventional detective and mystery story. Previous detective stories were constructed to follow the classic pattern established by Edgar Allan Poe and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, with the application of a heroic puzzle-solving detective like Poe's C. Auguste Dupin[2] or Doyle's Sherlock Holmes.[3] Peter J. Rabinowitz, for instance, claims that "the detective story is a highly conventionalised genre, with specific rules which have been accepted by readers, critics and writers alike."[4] Chandler however, approached his stories on another level by creating a realistic portrait of a corrupted city with perverted ideals that subsequently influenced the way the entire genre was used. He introduced a style and themes that clearly violated the norms and conventions of the genre of detective fiction and also exposed less savoury aspects of society. These concerns take Chandler out of the precise confines of the cerebral puzzle of, for example the pedantic Hercule Poirot.[5] By sharply questioning people's normative perception of the society around them, Chandler violates the rules of the detective novel on a grand scale. The traditional detective story had up to

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[1] Raymond Chandler, as cited in Frank MacShane: *The Life of Raymond Chandler*. Boston: 1986, 51.
[2] See e. g. Edgar Allan Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*.
[3] See e. g. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Red Circle*.
[4] Peter J. Rabinowitz: "Rats Behind the Wainscoating: Politics, Convention and Chandler's *The Big Sleep*". J. K. van Dover (ed.): *The Critical Response to Raymond Chandler*. Westport: 1995, 224–245 (119).
[5] See e. g. Agatha Christie's *Appointment with Death*.

that point mainly dealt with one layer of society, the upper class, where the murders committed tended to be elaborately contrived. Chandler saw past the problems of limiting his writing to a certain social layer and "gave murder back to the kind of people that commit it for reasons, not just to provide a corpse; and with the means at hand, not hand wrought dueling pistols, curare and tropical fish."[6]

As this essay will show, Chandler set his stories in a realistic environment but simultaneously introduced a narrative reminiscent of Gothic storytelling, with its portrayal of knighthood and chivalry. Marlowe became a knight in a society where a code of honour did not apply, and Chandler's private eye is therefore not only an anachronism in the detective genre but also deviates from our expectations concerning the heroic. Chandler thus paradoxically violates both the norms of the detective genre and defamiliarizes our view of the society he is describing. To show the levels and sublevels where these violations occur and to show their effect, I will closely examine both Chandler's plot construction and characterisation by looking at his two first novels: *The Big Sleep* and *Farewell, My Lovely*.[7]

The initial critical reception of *The Big Sleep* was particularly concerned with Chandler's plot and structure. Expecting the classic "whodunnit" type of detective story, reviewers and fellow authors were caught off-guard and confused by Chandler's seemingly structureless plot and use of sudden turns of events. However, some critics managed to see Chandler's work for what it truly was: "[Chandler] deals with a [...] varied assortment of persons. He has a great sense of probability."[8] Others, like mystery writer J. D. Carr, never looked beyond the previously established norms and regarded Chandler's style as "muddy writing and bad construction."[9]

In *The Simple Art of Murder*, Chandler attacked the traditional detective story and its plot-oriented construction. Instead of trying to produce a flawless plot, Chandler favoured style and characterisation and wrote that "the coolheaded constructionist does not also come across with lively characters, sharp dialogue, a sense of pace."[10] He continued by clearly defining his own point of view in the matter: "The fellow who can write you a vivid

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[6] Raymond Chandler: *The Simple Art of Murder*. New York: 1988, 14.
[7] Raymond Chandler: *The Big Sleep*. London: 1970, hereafter referred to as TBS, and *Farewell, My Lovely. The Raymond Chandler Omnibus*. New York: 1980, hereafter referred to as FML.
[8] Somerset W. Maugham: *The Vagrant Mood*. London: 1952, 119.
[9] van Dover (ed.): *The Critical Response to Raymond Chandler*, 10.
[10] Chandler: *The Simple Art of Murder*, 13.

and colourful prose simply will not be bothered with the coolie labour of breaking down unbreakable alibis."[11]

Chandler's essay generated enormous response in the detective and mystery writing community, resulting in heavy criticism of his violation of the mystery writers' "code of honour". J. D. Carr thought Chandler naive and disliked his attack on tradition in the name of realism,[12] and said that "if to some restraint, he [Chandler] could add the fatigue of construction and clues […] then one day he may write a good novel."[13] Isaac Andersson of *The New York Times Book Review* also continued to be troubled by Chandler's plotting, condemning his over-reliance on luck and coincidence.[14]

Chandler did not disagree with those who criticised his plotting, but his dislike of deductive detective stories made him disparage plots: "The plot thickens and the people become mere names."[15] Concentrating on style, pace and characters instead, his storytelling works rather on the psychological level, where the action and the progress of the novel are driven by the characters and not by the events. Frederic Jameson claims that the result of this formal change "is that the detective no longer inhabits the atmosphere of pure thought, of puzzle-solving and the resolution of a set of given elements."[16] It could be said that Chandler undermines the lifeless and mechanical "puzzle-story" approach to the detective novel, and replaces the former with a formula based on a lively style deeply rooted in reality.

Chandler's valorisation of realism made him regard the classic detective story as ambiguous, in terms of the message it conveyed. As Frank MacShane explains: "Chandler considered the traditional deductive novel basically dishonest because it relied on esoteric information or gave misleading information."[17] Instead, Chandler believed in reasonable honesty towards his audience.[18] Furthermore, he intended to avoid the traditional way of writing, where the author fell back on a complete reversal of events

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[11] Chandler: *The Simple Art of Murder*, 13.
[12] Philip Durham: *Down These Mean Streets a Man Must Go*. Durham, N. C.: 1963, 75.
[13] van Dover (ed.): *The Critical Response to Raymond Chandler*, 10.
[14] van Dover (ed.): *The Critical Response to Raymond Chandler*, 24.
[15] Chandler, as cited in MacShane: *The Life of Raymond Chandler*, 67.
[16] Frederic Jameson: "On Raymond Chandler". van Dover (ed.): T*he Critical Response to Raymond Chandler*. Westport: 1995, 65–87 (84).
[17] MacShane: *The Life of Raymond Chandler*, 61.
[18] Dorothy Gardiner, Katherine Sorley Walker (eds.): *Raymond Chandler Speaking*. London: 1973, 66.

when revealing the murderer. According to Chandler this phenomenon occurred "because the writer had realised that his original murderer had become too apparent."[19] To avoid this kind of contrived writing, Chandler provided his novels with relatively simple solutions: "The solution, once revealed, must seem to have been inevitable."[20] An appropriate example is Marlowe's conclusion in *Farewell, My Lovely*, which is based on sound reasoning and human motives, rather than the significance of seemingly unimportant clues distorted by false emphasis:

> It had to be that way. Just as when Marriott called me up and gave me a song and dance about a jewel ransom payoff it had to be because I had been to see Mrs. Florian asking about Velma. And when Marriott was killed, it had to be because he was the weak link in the chain. (FML, 310–311)

The resolution of the mystery does not give the reader a conclusion where all the loose ends have been tied up. There are still a few pieces of the puzzle missing as Marlowe's "it had to be" lines prove, giving the notion that the mystery is not entirely solved and undermining Marlowe's role as the authoritative voice in the text.

The authoritative voice of traditional detective novels is what troubled Chandler the most. "Anything passed over lightly becomes suspicious, any character not mentioned as a suspect is a suspect."[21] These old-school detective novels adhere to strict norms where the narrator, often a first-person detective narrator or a Dr. Watson figure, provides the facts he deems appropriate while omitting, or barely mentioning, important clues, in order to fool the reader. "To get the complication you fake the clues, the timing, the play of coincidence […] to get the surprise murderer you fake the character, which hits me hardest of all because I have a sense of character."[22] Seeking to circumvent this dishonest norm, Chandler made Marlowe the channel between the reader and the writer, allowing the reader to see only what Marlowe sees.[23]

All of Chandler's Marlowe novels are written as first-person narratives, which makes it difficult for the author to leave out significant details while maintaining a credible front for the narrator. Marlowe notes everything that

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[19] Chandler: *The Simple Art of Murder*, 65.
[20] Chandler: *The Simple Art of Murder*, 65.
[21] Gardiner, Walker (eds.): *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, 69.
[22] Gardiner, Walker (eds.): *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, 48.
[23] As I will discuss further below, this narrative strategy resembles that used by Joseph Conrad's narrator Marlow in e. g. *Heart of Darkness*.

takes place around him without mentioning "unimportant facts present[ed] in such a way as to make them portentous."[24] The following description is a case in point:

> Geiger was wearing Chinese slippers with thick felt soles, and his legs were in black satin pyjamas and the upper part of him wore a Chinese embroidered coat, the front of which was mostly blood. His glass eye shone brightly up at me and was by far the most lifelike thing about him. At a glance none of the three shots I heard had missed. He was very dead. (TBS, 40)

This description of a murder victim, where no unimportant details – aspiring to be important – are mentioned, is typical for Chandler. Instead of letting his private eye do police or forensic work, actions that would bring Marlowe out of character, Chandler puts the emphasis on the dead body itself and not on how the victim was murdered. Cynicism is blended with emotion and Marlowe acquires the humanity which sets him apart from his analytic, and emotionally bereft predecessors.

Marlowe's persona is shaped to contradict and deconstruct the authority possessed by the analytic Sherlock Holmes type of detective. He does not need to impress the reader with a final piecing together of information which has previously been withheld. The only trace of the classic detective approach in Chandler's novels would be the conclusion where Marlowe reveals the outcome of the mystery. Up to that point Marlowe does not speculate and therefore he does not make the reader blindly trust his authority and his skills as a detective. Chandler's philosophy of keeping the solution simple further enhances Marlowe's character as an ordinary private eye and not an intellectual mastermind like Sherlock Holmes. "The mystery novel must have enough essential simplicity of structure to be explained when the time comes."[25]

Since Chandler believed in simple solutions, his plotting and overall structure appear to be seamless. But the kind of structure that Chandler applies, shows according to George N. Dove "that he was both an innovator and experimenter in the art of plot construction."[26] Dove makes his point by compiling seven rules for structuring a traditional detective story: the Problem, the First Analysis, the Complication, the Period of Confusion, the Dawning Light, the Solution and the Explanation. And indeed my exami-

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[24] Gardiner, Walker (eds.): *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, 66.
[25] Gardiner, Walker (eds.): *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, 65.
[26] George N. Dove as cited in van Dover (ed.): *The Critical Response to Raymond Chandler*, 102.

nation shows that the structure of *The Big Sleep* violates Dove's seven steps with its transgression and shifting between initial and secondary plot.

The Big Sleep begins with General Sternwood acquiring Marlowe's services to look into some blackmail notes, sent to him by a man named Geiger. Marlowe stakes out Geiger's house and upon entering, finds Geiger murdered on the floor and General Sternwood's daughter Carmen sitting naked on a chair. Carmen is brought home to her father's estate where Marlowe learns that Geiger's killer is none other than Sternwood's lovesick chauffeur Owen Taylor. Taylor shot Geiger, who was fronting a pornography lending library, when he found out that Geiger was photographing Carmen. Later Taylor supposedly commits suicide by driving off a pier. The initial plot is hereby more or less solved without Marlowe having to do any real detective work. But Chandler seems to use the initial plot to introduce the characters, and rather than revolving around Geiger's murder, the story evolves from it.

The initial plot involving the blackmail of the Sternwood family is solved relatively early in the novel and it leaves out every step except the Problem and the Solution since both blackmailers are murdered. Meanwhile, the secondary plot, involving the disappearance of Rusty Regan, has moved forward with the blackmail affair as an incidental connection to Rusty's disappearance. The introduction of a second plot converts and replaces the Complication and the Period of Confusion.

The two plots run parallel for a while, with solutions revealed successively and creating further subplots, for instance Marlowe's duel with Eddie Mars. The solution to each problem leaves questions unanswered and something that Dove calls "a residue of mystery; a story-line that diverges from the main plot, runs parallel to it, and after the solution of the original problem [the initial plot], carries forward the element on its own."[27] Thus the residue of mystery surrounding Rusty's disappearance creates a new plot when the Solution has been provided to the blackmail case.

I agree with Dove when he states that there is an obvious danger inherent in the structure of *The Big Sleep*, where Marlowe at one point "is investigating five mysteries: blackmail, two disappearances and even two murders. Apparently feeling that this may be too much for the reader, Chandler lets the two murders be solved quickly."[28] Unity is nevertheless preserved as Chandler repeatedly reintroduces characters that are involved in both stories.

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[27] Dove as cited in van Dover (ed.): *The Critical Response to Raymond Chandler*, 103.
[28] Dove as cited in van Dover (ed.): *The Critical Response to Raymond Chandler*, 105.

Although *The Big Sleep* does not come across as a split novel in spite of all its different plots, Chandler still felt that it was "just another detective yarn more interested in people than in plot."[29] In his second novel, *Farewell, My Lovely,* Chandler abandoned the residue of mystery plot used in *The Big Sleep* and switched to a parallel-merging plot. Just as in *The Big Sleep*, Chandler introduces two different plots early on in the novel: the ex-convict Moose Maloy searching for his lost love Velma, and the theft of a jade necklace. The two apparently unrelated plots develop independently until the end, when they are merged and resolved together. This makes *Farewell, My Lovely* more conventional than *The Big Sleep* as there are no spin-off plots, and the Solution and Explanation of the two original mysteries are not given until the end.

While the plot and structure in Chandler's second novel is simpler than in his first, as J. K. van Dover writes, it is in truth more elaborately structured: "Chandler has punctuated the narrative with a very neat spacing in his chapters."[30] Even though this may be the case, I still agree with van Dover that Chandler most likely did not mechanically lay out a mathematical sequence prior to composing the novel, but rather that his instinct for proportion and narrative made him place crucial points in the narrative at regular intervals: "The architecture of Chandler's fiction depends upon the placement of actions and crises; not of clues and red-herrings."[31]

Frank MacShane's opinion of the plot in *Farewell, My Lovely* differs substantially from van Dover's. MacShane compares the novel to a "Restoration comedy in which the plot is not so important as the picture of life portrayed through its characters."[32] The similarity to comedy is most likely due to the numerous occurrences of coincidence and dependence on luck, throughout the novel. According to George N. Dove, "one of the temptations a mystery-writer must resist is that of letting sheer coincidence carry too much of the burden in the development of his story."[33] Dove believes that *Farewell, My Lovely* succeeds in avoiding the plot twists based on coincidence featured in *The Big Sleep*, because it has plausible explanations and methods of investigation. This opinion is certainly debatable since *Farewell, My Lovely* contains a lot of action based on sheer coincidence. Marlowe is for instance knocked unconscious (FML, 239) just as he is in

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[29] Chandler as cited in MacShane: *The Life of Raymond Chandler*, 72.
[30] van Dover (ed.): *The Critical Response to Raymond Chandler*, 206.
[31] van Dover (ed.): *The Critical Response to Raymond Chandler*, 207.
[32] MacShane: *The Life of Raymond Chandler*, 91.
[33] Dove as cited in van Dover (ed.): *The Critical Response to Raymond Chandler*, 106.

The Big Sleep, (TBS, 183) and then transported to a new setting where the plot takes another turn of events.

The use of this method is most certainly a countermeasure against traditional plotting. Coincidence, and the presence of fate in Chandler's novels are turned into an anomaly that further violates the genre, but which also corresponds with Chandler's overall philosophy that "the mystery novel must have a sound story value apart from the mystery element."[34] In order to attain "sound story value," Chandler decided not to downplay coincidence simply for the sake of structure, and he was not afraid of letting "fate stage-manag[e] the whole thing." (TBS, 177)

Letting coincidence and fate further violate the traditional plot structure, Chandler extends his transgressions to society in general where murder had "been going on too long for it to be news."[35] As a consequence, Chandler critiques societal norms as well as genre expectations by making murder a regular feature in society, and showing that elegant murders did not exist. The victims in his novels are all murdered in a realistic fashion; either shot to death or killed by some random weapon in the heat of the moment. By stripping murder down to its irrational essentials, Chandler blended his own cynicism with the cynicism of current society, where a man's death "should be the coin of what we call civilization."[36]

Rabinowitz demonstrates how Chandler attacks societal norms through his violation of the detective novel formula. He isolates three cardinal rules of the detective story which Chandler totally ignores, thus disrupting the expected and accepted. The first rule is that "there must be but one culprit, second, the detective must always triumph by restoring order in the end."[37] Rabinowitz's third cardinal rule is that the crime must turn out to be a result of an aberration in society, operating and succeeding only because it exists as a hidden abnormality; thus the criminal should "always be uncovered through simple rational procedures."[38] According to Rabinowitz, *The Big Sleep* violates all three of these cardinal rules:

> There are many criminals, some of them introduced as such from the beginning; despite both logical explanation and physical carnage, the detective cannot elimi-

[34] Gardiner, Walker (eds.): *Raymond Chandler Speaking*, 64.
[35] Chandler: *The Simple Art of Murder*, 2.
[36] Chandler: *The Simple Art of Murder*, 17.
[37] Rabinowitz: "Rats Behind the Wainscoating", 119.
[38] Rabinowitz: "Rats Behind the Wainscoating", 119.

> nate them; and most important, their crimes cannot be explained away as individual nonsocial quirks or abnormalities.[39]

The most unsettling aspect of the portrayal of contemporary L.A. society where Marlowe operates, is that Chandler's novel does not end with the restoration of some kind of temporary order, but with loose ends, social chaos and individual despair. Marlowe is not able to restore order like a Sherlock Holmes or a Hercule Poirot, who succeed in restoring the status quo in an organised society where the crime and the criminal are registered as abnormalities. Marlowe's quest ends with a status quo of the opposite kind; crimes and criminals exist as they always have and always will, turning Marlowe, the supposed detective, into a failure. Like Joseph Conrad's Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, Chandler's detective is an idealist whose adventure seems to bring him in contact with some sort of truth. However, his truth turns out to be one of horror and emptiness, which he is unable to exorcise. Ultimately both Marlow(e)s realise that the only way of dealing with the horror is to bury it with a lie, "a lie that leaves the hero perhaps wiser, […] and a lie that leaves the evil fundamentally untouched."[40] Even though Marlowe learns that Carmen Sternwood is Rusty's killer, he still can do nothing about the likes of Eddie Mars, the true menace. In the end, the only result of Marlowe's investigation is an increased body count.

Chandler's violation of Rabinowitz's three cardinal genre rules shows that society is not a place where evil can be defeated by logic alone. Evil is simply too well organised and too ubiquitous for a conventional detective to successfully uproot. Marlowe's failure to defeat the evil in society is a way of admitting that there is no place for idealists in the real world. All that Marlowe has left in this society is what makes him function: his own code of honour. Thus the ideal of honour makes Chandler pattern his detective in accordance with the heroic.

Frank MacShane places Marlowe's character as a descendant of the kind of hero that is common in American literature, and who "seems to represent a faith in the incorruptibility of at least part of the population."[41] As Marlowe's antecedents he mentions Cooper's Natty Bumppo and Twain's Huckleberry Finn. A similar comparison is made by Leslie Fiedler according to whom Marlowe represents "the cowboy adapted to life on the city

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[39] Rabinowitz: "Rats Behind the Wainscoating", 123.
[40] Rabinowitz: "Rats Behind the Wainscoating", 127.
[41] MacShane: *The Life of Raymond Chandler*, 69.

streets."[42] I agree that he is in his own way a frontier hero just like Natty Bumppo, with the city as his frontier, but whereas Cooper's Deerslayer works inside a society with strictly designated norms of good and evil, the difference in Marlowe's world is less distinct. The subtle distinction between savagery and civilisation makes it impossible for Marlowe to play the role of a true hero. In Marlowe's society heroes are not allowed to exist and cannot exist because they would violate the code of honour expected of them. When Marlowe sets out on his crusade to make the world a better place, with his own rules and norms, his crusade turns into a quest best likened to the legendary search for the Holy Grail; an impossible quest, doomed to failure before it even began. As a consequence Marlowe is, as R. W. Flint points out, "forever rolling the stone uphill."[43] The connection to the Greek myth of the stone-rolling Sisyphus and the connection to knightly themes like the Holy Grail, reflect both Marlowe's pointless struggle, as well as Chandler's paradoxical placement of a main character, with a mythic and legendary aura, in a realistic environment.

Chandler's introduction of mythic and legendary elements into his novels, is acknowledged by Philip Durham who argues that "the knightly attitude, indigenous in the hard-boiled hero, had become a characteristic of Chandler's protagonist."[44] Marlowe moves through Los Angeles constantly searching for ladies to rescue, helping the common man or handing the unscrupulous a shot of old-fashioned justice. The first chapter of *The Big Sleep* sets the stage and tone for Marlowe as potential heroic knight:

> Over the entrance doors, […] there was a broad stained-glass panel showing a knight in dark armour rescuing a lady who was tied to a tree and didn't have any clothes on but some very long convenient hair. The knight […] was fiddling with the knots on the ropes that tied the lady to the tree and not getting anywhere. I stood there and thought that if I lived in the house, I would sooner or later have to climb up there and help him. He didn't seem to be really trying. (TBS, 9)

Chandler's parallels not only to chivalry but also to the otherworldly Gothic novel can be traced in Marlowe's appearance, as well as in the supporting cast. Charles J. Rzepka finds a number of clear features that point to the Gothic lineage of *The Big Sleep.* Rzepka's first example is General Sternwood whom he describes as an "aged cavalry officer, the dying patri-

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[42] Leslie A. Fiedler: *Love and Death in the American Novel*. New York: 1960, 476.
[43] R. W. Flint: "A Cato of the Cruelties". van Dover (ed.): *The Critical Response to Raymond Chandler*, 328–330 (8).
[44] Durham: *Down These Mean Streets*, 82–83.

arch of a now-vanished chivalric order."[45] Sternwood plays the role of the old monarch in desperate need of a knight to keep order amongst his ranks, in this case his two daughters Carmen and Vivien.

The General's "kingdom" is rotten to the core and Sternwood is, as Ernest Fontana puts it, "a sick, dying lord, who cannot provide Marlowe relevant mastership, but only illusion."[46] Marlowe, being loyal to his new master, finds himself trapped in a situation where he must act in order to sustain old Sternwood's illusion. The General would not survive the truth about Carmen being Rusty Regan's killer, and Marlowe successfully keeps the truth out of the public eye, thus violating his own code of honour in favour of loyalty. The fact that Marlowe's chivalry and sense of duty extends, and surpasses his own set of rules and norms is according to Rzepka "the first rule of Marlowe's knightly profession."[47] This rule, which Rzepka refers to as "comitatus" is "the rule to protect his liege lord's interest at all times."[48] Marlowe even explains this to Sternwood: "I do my best to protect you and I may break a few rules, but I break them in your favour. The client comes first unless he is crooked." (TBS, 204) Though Sternwood may not be crooked, he admits that "neither of my daughters has any more moral sense than a cat. Neither have I. No Sternwood ever had." (TBS, 18)

Marlowe's loyalty towards his clients, because they are his clients, and his strong belief in "comitatus" is why Rzepka claims that Marlowe "most resembles the 'true' knight."[49] Rzepka's arguments are based on Beverly Kennedy's distinction between three different types of knighthood, embodying three different ideals: the violent knight, with undying loyalty towards his liege lord; the courtly knight, who respects fair play and is skilled in the acts of diplomacy and love; and finally the knight who combines loyalty to his master with devotion to God. This third type of knight, which Kennedy calls Sir Lancelot, embodies according to Rzepka the characteristics that most adequately fit Marlowe, because he does not succumb to either the temptations of the Sternwood sisters, as would be likely to happen with a courtly knight, or to the use of unnecessary violence, as would often be the case with the violent knight.

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[45] Charles J. Rzepka: "'I'm in the Business Too': Gothic Chivalry, Private Eyes, and Proxy Sex and Violence in Chandler's *The Big Sleep*". *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, Vol. 46, number 3, Fall 2000. 695–724 (698).
[46] Ernest Fontana: "Chivalry and Modernity in Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*". van Dover (ed.): *The Critical Response to Raymond Chandler*, 159–165 (163).
[47] Rzepka: "'I'm in the Business Too'", 703.
[48] Rzepka: "'I'm in the Business Too'", 703.
[49] Rzepka: "'I'm in the Business Too'", 704.

Marlowe as the "true" and loyal knight is contrasted to Eddie Mars and the evil "knights" attached to him. Rzepka isolates two principal vassals working under Mars, the pornographer Arthur Gwynn Geiger and the violent Lash Canino. Geiger, wearing Chinese slippers and a Chinese embroidered coat (TBS, 40) suggests to Rzepka "his Oriental or, in Gothic terms, 'Saracenic' tendencies, a constant temptation to crusader-gone-wrong such as the renegade Templar, Brian de Bois-Guilbert [*Ivanhoe*] or the brothers Sans Foy, Sans Joy, and Sans Loy [*The Fairie Queene*]."[50] The homosexual Geiger, although a betrayer of knightly ideals and virtues, is not a worthy adversary to Marlowe. Geiger's timely murder saves Marlowe from confronting this unworthy opponent. To maintain the illusion of knighthood, Marlowe must face someone more violent, cruel and "manly" and not a "pansy" with a woman's name.

Mars's other knight, Lash Canino, is a perfect adversary for Marlowe to do battle with; he is the ruthless, cold-blooded, hard-boiled stereotype; his last name indicating "canine" or "dog". Rzepka is probably correct in interpreting Canino as one of the dogs of war of the Roman god Mars. The duel between Marlowe and Mars's killer "dog" takes place in a sphere, seemingly outside of time: "a private world for Canino and me." (TBS, 191) But what has been built up as the ultimate fight between the valiant knight and the evil henchman ends in a complete anticlimax when Marlowe "violates the rule of gentlemanly combat."[51]

Marlowe hides behind a car and lets Canino fire six shots: "if it was a revolver he had, it might be empty. […] He had fired six times, but he might have reloaded inside the house. I hoped he had. I didn't want him with an empty gun. But it might be an automatic." (TBS, 194) Marlowe wants to remain true to his ideals and fight an honest battle, but he is torn between his code of honour and his survival instincts. The latter ultimately prove to be the stronger as Marlowe realises that there is no place for a true knight in his world: "Perhaps it would have been nice to allow him another shot or two, just like a gentleman of the old school. But his gun was still up and I couldn't wait any longer. Not long enough to be a gentleman of the old school. I shot him four times." (TBS, 194)

Both Geiger and Canino, the two dogs of war, suffer premature demise, but their master, Eddie Mars survives. As stated earlier, Mars is the true menace; the equivalent of the dragon in old fairy tales, which the knight, Marlowe, has to combat to restore order in the kingdom, here the "king-

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[50] Rzepka: "'I'm in the Business Too'", 710.
[51] Fontana: "Chivalry and Modernity", 164.

dom" of General Sternwood. Since Mars's "kingdom" more or less remains intact and Mars himself is still free to operate his various rackets, Marlowe has failed to rid his world of the plague that is Mars. The truth, that the likes of Mars now rule the world, imprisons Marlowe rather than enlightens him and he finds himself an accomplice to Mars's world.

This world has made Marlowe compromise his own ideals and proved that "knights had no meaning in this game. It wasn't a game for knights." (TBS, 153) Philip Durham finds this statement highly ironic and claims that "from the beginning of the novel until its conclusion it was a story being played by a knight."[52] In fact, no matter what he decides, Marlowe cannot deny his role as the upholder of knightly virtues and chivalry, in a world where the order is "corrupt and dying, and the surviving liege lords are busy protecting their fiefdoms and invading each others' territories in the power vacuum that has ensued."[53] The ugliness in society forces Marlowe to become the knight defending instead of defeating the dragon.[54]

A quest where Marlowe does not fail is according to Sharon Devaney-Lovinguth the "freeing of men and women from the concepts of 'knightliness' and 'ladyness', from the inadequate and invalid stereotypes assigned by gender."[55] That Marlowe fails on his knightly mission is unimportant to Devaney-Lovinguth, who argues that Marlowe has rejected, inverted and remade chivalric "knightliness" altogether. She argues that Chandler "sets up stereotypes of gender and sexual identity only to unsettle them."[56] This unsettling, or rather violation of gender roles, is most evident in Chandler's portrayal of women.

Chandler's female characters are often presented as being both beautiful and dangerous. This has drawn a lot of criticism; for instance Edward Thorpe claims that Chandler's women are "gold-diggers, social climbers, nymphomaniacs, psychopaths, monstrous matriarchs, slatternly degenerates."[57] What these descriptions tend to ignore is that Chandler's women come from every level of society, just like their male counterparts. In *Farewell, My Lovely* there are women with quite disparate social backgrounds; the alcoholic widow Mrs Florian, the opportunist Mrs Grayle and

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[52] Durham: *Down These Mean Streets*, 91.
[53] Rzepka: "'I'm in the Business Too'", 713.
[54] Rabinowitz: "Rats Behind the Wainscoating", 132.
[55] Sharon Devaney-Lovinguth: *Modernism and Gender in the Novels of Raymond Chandler*. Alabama: 1993, 6.
[56] Devaney-Lovinguth: *Modernism and Gender in the Novels of Raymond Chandler*, 8.
[57] Edward Thorpe: *Chandlertown: The Los Angeles of Philip Marlowe*. New York: 1983, 68.

the independent cop's daughter Anne Riordan, who is in fact the closest thing to a knightly lady, or a counterpart to Marlowe. She is tough, smart and has an attitude: "Who the devil cares what I do or when or how." (FML, 253)

Toughness is a trait that most of Chandler's female characters share. Marlowe admits that he likes "smooth shiny girls, hardboiled and loaded with sin." (FML, 258) The adjective "hardboiled" is a term that critics use to label tough, silent and independent types like Marlowe, a manly term associated with a male world. By using the term to describe a woman, Chandler also reverses society's gender expectations; passive females become active like males, and vice versa.

The women in Chandler's novels do not exist just for the sake of existing, of aimlessly and mindlessly walking around like empty shells. They all have a role to fill and it is not the role assigned by society but the role assigned by Chandler. As MacShane claims, "Chandler is enough of a feminist to allow some of his women to be crooks."[58] Feminist or not, Chandler is at least fair in his distribution of roles; if there can be "a killer by remote control" (TBS, 187) like Eddie Mars, there can also be a murderous, epileptic Carmen Sternwood.

Shifting the norms of the genre and the reader's preconceived ideas is the essence of Raymond Chandler. Whether he violates the norm through his approach to the genre or through his characters, he deconstructs the ideals and stereotypes assigned by society. Chandler uses the basic formula of the traditional mystery and detective novel, but instead of following its rules, he rearranges them to fit a world where characters like Sherlock Holmes cannot exist. By introducing characters based on mythological and Gothic generic models and placing them in a realistic environment, he creates a paradox. Chandler's characters defamiliarize us from the generic conventions of the detective novel, since the world of Chandler's characters is a cynical place with no room for heroes. Marlowe, Chandler's virtuous and chivalrous "would-be-hero", finds himself violating his own knightly codex on his impossible quest for a better world. Thus, Chandler renews the detective genre by violating the rules of the knightly hero and disrupting social stereotypes.

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[58] MacShane: *The Life of Raymond Chandler*, 54.